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Chair

Mrs. Karen Vecchio

Standing Committee on the Status of Women

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• (0850)

[English]

The Chair (Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC)): Good morning and welcome to meeting 142 of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women.

Today's meeting is in public as we continue our study on the treatment of women within the Department of National Defence.

For this, I am pleased to welcome, as an individual, Paula MacDonald. Paula will be presenting for seven minutes, and then we will start with questions.

Paula, I'm going to turn the floor over to you. You have seven minutes to present.

Ms. Paula MacDonald (As an Individual): Good morning, honourable members and chairperson.

I am pleased and hopeful to be given this opportunity to speak to you about my experiences with the Department of Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces as a woman who directly served her country between October 2014 to January 2016.

My military career was short, unfulfilling and painful. I voluntarily released from the service because my chain of command refused to reasonably address the behaviours of superiors who discriminated against my abilities and sexually harassed and objectified me. I was subjected to increasing levels of violence from service members who behaved inappropriately, and I left to protect my physical safety.

The Chair: Paula, could you slow down just a tad, and we'll go a little bit longer then.

Ms. Paula MacDonald: Sure.

My case is currently proceeding to a hearing before the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal.

I experienced gender-based discrimination and sexual harassment during my service as a reservist with 35 Field Ambulance, and during basic training at the Canadian Forces Leadership and Recruit School in Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu, Quebec. I reported the sexual and gender-based discrimination to the designated authorities in the chain of command. Unit-led investigations allowed individuals who behaved inappropriately to me to directly create military-led resolutions. The chain of command where the abuse took place maintained administrative authority over resolution methods, allowing the members who were directly involved in alleged human rights

violations to decide how these matters would be addressed. Internal policies and procedures to protect against conflicts of interest were not enforced during military resolution processes.

The designated authorities in both local chains of command failed to address the harassment and discrimination I experienced. I was never interviewed by designated authorities regarding the incidents that occurred at the Canadian Forces Leadership and Recruit School. I attended this school around the same time CBC reported the deaths of seven young men by suicide and an outbreak of strep throat.

During the time I attended, many women voluntarily released from the Canadian Armed Forces. Their decisions were heavily influenced by training approaches used by military leadership. I can speak to the living conditions at the Mega at the Canadian Forces Leadership and Recruit School from a gendered and health and safety perspective.

Checks and balances to ensure military leadership abided by internal Canadian Armed Forces policies and procedures were not in place during four Canadian Armed Forces-led investigations that directly impacted my life. When I objected to sexual harassment, Canadian Armed Forces leadership determined I had poor leadership skills, subjecting me to more discrimination. The assessment skills of leaders who came to the determination speak volumes about the work that is needed to correct the outcomes of the hostile sexualized culture.

The Chair: Paula, could you slow down a tad again? They're having a bit of a problem in interpretation.

Ms. Paula MacDonald: Okay.

The Canadian Armed Forces leadership failed to correctly apply the Canadian definition of sexual harassment, and even the internal Canadian Armed Forces definition of harassment within two of their investigations. These matters have yet to be addressed by our government and were amplified by internal methods developed by Canadian Armed Forces leadership.

I have been actively seeking resolution for these abuses produced by members of the Canadian Armed Forces for the last four and a half years and counting. Policies and procedures must be developed so that incidents of gender-based violence can be resolved quickly, efficiently, and with the victim's interests in mind.

The Chair: Just take your time, Paula. We'll stop the clock.

Ms. Paula MacDonald: I believe these changes must be facilitated by the larger Canadian government, because internal DND systems, developed by the CAF leadership, favour superiors who behave abusively over victims of this abuse through unit-led investigations.

Four years have passed since the Marie Deschamps report was made public. A strong, sound strategy for facilitating administrative changes that would end the problems I encountered with unit-led investigations is present within this report, yet unadopted by our government.

Internal data management systems must be examined and redesigned to ensure that Canadian Armed Forces personnel are abiding by obligations stated in Canadian legislation that pertain to organizational management. More external oversight is required. Too much responsibility and ownership are placed on victims of discrimination to successfully resolve harmful sexual behaviour and gender-based discrimination in the CAF. Too much authority is given to perpetrators and leaders who fail to act when action is required.

When Canadian Armed Forces leadership failed to address the harassment, I had to release from the service to protect myself. I was subjected to increasing aggression and violent behaviours from non-commissioned members engrossed in the hostile culture. I find this response from individuals tasked with protecting our country unacceptable, and I hope you do too.

I believe external oversight is required and DND should consider moving administrative authorities to address sexual misconduct from the chain of command when situations require these measures to produce reliable results. Failures by the government to develop and execute policies and procedures that effectively protect the rights of minority groups within our government create inequalities within our society. Groups like women are not afforded equal protection or full participation because of these failures within our administration and management systems.

Canada is a nation that has excellent laws that promise protection and equal participation for all of its citizens. Women experiencing gender-based violence in the Canadian Armed Forces do not have equal access to public resources used to facilitate justice. Rather, administrative systems favour individuals in power positions who abuse their positional authority. Victims pay the financial, emotional and physical costs created by oversights in the administration of justice.

I wish to enable you to facilitate effective measures that will address the outcomes of the hostile sexualized culture within the forces. To assist you with this objective, I must help you with your understanding of the inner workings of the military administration and training systems from the perspective of an individual who came forward with harassment allegations.

It is my belief that failures within the CAF management served to facilitate sexual harassment and exploitation of subordinates. I feel that service members deserve to enjoy the same standard of living they fight for other Canadians to enjoy. To achieve this state of being, we must alter the management mechanisms that govern their daily life.

I will draw from my lived experience with military administration systems to help you grow in your understanding of how things really function in the Canadian Armed Forces with respect to the treatment of women in DND.

I look forward to answering your questions.

• (0855)

The Chair: Paula, thank you very much for your testimony.

We will be doing our first round of questioning, with seven minutes each.

I'll turn the floor over to Sonia Sidhu. Sonia, you have seven minutes.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu (Brampton South, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Paula, for giving your testimony.

I'm from Brampton. We have two Legion branches in Brampton: Royal Canadian Legion Branch 609 and Royal Canadian Legion Branch 15.

Within DND, women hold 40% of positions; within the Canadian Armed Forces, they hold just 15.7%. Do you think these kinds of incidents contribute to women's under-representation in the Canadian Armed Forces?

Ms. Paula MacDonald: I do. I think it's also built into their training system, into how they go about training and trying to teach people how to be a soldier. I feel it creates an unhealthy, unsafe environment for women who are trying to enter the forces. Having more women in these positions would be helpful.

Some of the women who make it into the forces also end up participating in the hostile sexualized culture that's there. It has to be looked at all around, from a human rights perspective, how they're designing their training and facilitating their management, in order to make it a place that reflects Canadian values.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: Have you noticed any improvement since 2015?

Ms. Paula MacDonald: I think some improvements have been occurring since 2015, although I feel it should and could be moving a lot faster than what's happening. I think it is a crisis situation within the Canadian Armed Forces.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: How could the federal government help to create a safer and more inclusive workplace free from violence?

Ms. Paula MacDonald: I think the points in the Marie Deschamps report, where the administrative powers have to be removed from the chain of command, would definitely help in investigating incidents, and more oversight has to be given to military members so they're abiding by internal policies and procedures.

My case speaks to the leadership not abiding by their own internal policies and procedures, making the situation worse. Some sort of balance has to be put in place to ensure they're following through with what they say they're doing.

I don't think it's there, and I don't think it will be there until the administrative system changes how the reporting is done so there isn't a direct conflict of interest in terms of having good order and discipline, or the idea that there's good order and discipline, in the chain of command. You can't have a direct reporting relationship between the person who's deciding and the person who's collecting all the information. It has to be separated.

• (0900)

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: Thank you.

I'm also a member of the Standing Committee on Health. Our members are working on a study of the LGBTQ2 community. Do you find these people still face a level of discrimination within the CAF?

Ms. Paula MacDonald: When I was in the Canadian Armed Forces, anyone who had characteristics that were considered feminine faced discrimination, to the point where.... For example, my course instructors wanted me to shave my head, to behave like a man. They had different things posted within the training environment saying, "If you can't take out harassment, you're a weak woman."

They're trying to build the idea that for you to be strong, you have to have all these characteristics based on a masculine identity, as opposed to being able to view strength as coming from a feminine identity.

Anyone who has feminine characteristics, in my opinion, would have a hard time in the Canadian Armed Forces.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: Thank you.

Do you think that giving a strong role to women in the CAF would change the culture?

Ms. Paula MacDonald: Yes, and I think that has to come from the top down. If you have strong women who enter the Canadian Armed Forces from the bottom up, they're most likely going to experience what I experienced. They just won't be able to succeed in that environment.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: Thank you.

The Chair: Rachael Harder, you have the floor for seven minutes.

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Thank you.

Ms. MacDonald, thank you so much for being with us today, and for being willing to share your story. Certainly you are an example to many in your fortitude and resilience.

One of the things I'm curious about is this. In your testimony, I would identify that you're talking about both policy and practice. Do you believe that it is policy that needs to change, or practice, or is it both?

Ms. Paula MacDonald: It's both.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Could you explain that further?

Ms. Paula MacDonald: I believe it's the management structure that has to change. There has to be more oversight put in, and we have to look at how policy is being facilitated in the Canadian Armed Forces. There were different kinds of issues when I went into the Canadian Armed Forces. Some of the issues had to do with human resource management policies and selection and recruiting

policies, where the front-line recruiters in the management system all the way up to the colonels, in terms of the section of personnel selection, were not abiding by evidence-based practices to recruit and select personnel. They had out-of-date practices that were not in tune with getting the right people into the right positions.

An example would be that they were using the same types of selection and skill criteria for a social work officer that they would use for an engineering officer. That is just different. It's a different type of criteria, a different type of skill set, and they didn't really understand that. There were issues in terms of the overall knowledge and skill set of the individuals who were placed in leadership positions in the Canadian Armed Forces. That boils down to how we are educating our military members in terms of their curriculum in the school system that we're putting them through, and then there were issues in terms of the reporting and management structure that was put in place.

Whenever I experienced sexual harassment, I reported it to my chain of command. My chain of command didn't do anything about it. There was a 17-year-old girl who was working in the armoury with me, and that to me looked like a child protection issue, because she was under age. She was asking for help, and there was a lot of lewd behaviour of an escalating gender-based violence method. So I went to the people who were in the appropriate positions and I reported the violence. They didn't do anything.

Then I consulted with community-based members, and I ended up talking to the Saint John city police. The Saint John city police informed the chain of command or they informed the military police. Then the members of my chain of command, who didn't act beforehand, retaliated against me. They had to do an investigation and they had to do something about it within their internal management system. They retaliated against me and tried to have me declared mentally unfit for service and stop my application for direct entry social work officer from going through.

After that happened, I contacted the ombudsman. The ombudsman told me that I had to file a complaint. I filed a complaint back with my chain of command, which was filing the complaint directly with the individuals who tried to have me declared medically unfit for service. Then I also filed a complaint with the Canadian Human Rights Commission.

The Canadian Human Rights Commission can't come in and help you unless you've exhausted all internal military grievance procedures. What I found was that the military would behave grossly and completely inappropriately and then they would just create a new harassment resolution method to try to make amends for what they did before.

That was a continuous cycle that went on for three investigations for the harassment that happened at the armoury in Saint John, New Brunswick, and one investigation that I wasn't allowed to participate or speak in for the things that were going on at the Canadian Forces Leadership and Recruit School. Then the commission stepped in. It's going before the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal.

But there are issues with the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal, as well. I'm not legally protected. It's legal processes that are being used, and I have to try to represent myself. I'm not a lawyer. I'm a social worker, so it's hard for me to know how to go through all those processes and procedures and figure out how to do that.

● (0905)

The Canadian Armed Forces are represented by the Attorney General's office. They have publicly funded legal representation. The Canadian Human Rights Commission is there to represent the interests of Canada. That is not well-defined in terms of whether or not the victim will be protected in terms of what happened with them. I have to figure out how to protect myself in that situation.

I can't get any reimbursement for legal costs. I have to fund that all on my own, whereas the perpetrators have unlimited funding for their legal expenses paid for by the country. I find that to be unfair.

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Okay, it will come back around, and I'll ask some other questions.

The Chair: Irene, I'll pass the floor to you for seven minutes.

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Paula.

This is very disturbing. What you are telling us goes beyond anything that any of us, I think, could ever imagine.

I wonder about your experience. You said there was a sign or placard that said, "If you can't take our harassment, you are a weak woman."

Ms. Paula MacDonald: Yes.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Was that common?

Ms. Paula MacDonald: It was strategically placed. They had it placed on the back of a section senior's clipboard. The senior would hold the clipboard up, and it would then be presented to all of the other individuals who were subordinate. It was like, "I have a clipboard. I'm the section senior, and I hold this up", and then you see this sign that's telling you, "If you can't take our harassment, you're a weak woman."

They also had slurs. They had things regarding the LBGTQ community on the poster, anti-LBGTQ. I have a copy of it. I can send you that if you want it. I took a picture of it, and I can send it to you if you'd like to see it for yourself.

● (0910)

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Thank you. I think the more evidence we have, the better prepared we are to write a report.

It sounds like a hazing.

Ms. Paula MacDonald: Yes.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Was there a feeling that the military or those who had power over you didn't want women and didn't want LBGTQ individuals? Was it that they simply wanted them gone and would do whatever it took to get rid of them?

Ms. Paula MacDonald: For me, it was a feeling that they wanted to sexually exploit me, so I had to deal with a lot of sexual harassment and a lot of things along those lines.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: In terms of victim support, the Auditor General wrote a report about the situation in the military, and he was very critical. He said that the Canadian Armed Forces should make victim support a top priority. I take it that you didn't have any sense of there being support.

Ms. Paula MacDonald: When I was in basic training, I called the Canadian Armed Forces sexual response centre to ask them to help me. All they did at that time was the same thing that the ombudsman would do, which was to direct me back to the mechanisms within the Canadian Armed Forces that would deal with the abuse, so they directed me back to the individuals who were sexually harassing me to resolve the issues. There is no way you can resolve the issues with someone who is trying to do that to you.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: You were on a treadmill. You kept going around and around.

Ms. Paula MacDonald: It was a circle. You're always being sent back to the person who is trying to...to incidents where you're dealing with exploitation and harassment.

It's still that way. I've asked them, and I've been following along with the changes to see how it's been evolving. The sexual response centre still refers the information to the chain of command. The individuals who were involved in direct positions that created incidents that I think are considered human rights violations.... They did a cabinet shuffle and moved them into positions that were to deal with Operation Honour.

In my case, I believe retaliatory measures were taken and they didn't follow internal policies and procedures in terms of paying me. That would have been done through the colonel in the personnel selection office. Four and a half years ago, he moved into the coordinator of human rights position. He's still responding to my harassment allegations, and he's still responding to the work he did in his previous management portfolio.

It's still an endless loop whereby you're dealing with the individuals who behaved inappropriately and used Canadian resources for their own pleasure in terms of how they were behaving. What else is sexual harassment? You're still dealing with that. People who didn't do their jobs the first time around are being sent in to do this job again, and it's not working.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Thank you.

You talked about the personal attack, and you said that when they couldn't deal with you, you were declared medically unfit.

Ms. Paula MacDonald: This was the first time. I was an eternal optimist. I figured that if the Marie Deschamps report says it is a hostile sexualized culture, surely they're going to do something and follow through on what's being said, and they're going to stop this from happening, because this is Canada.

Then, when I was in basic training, they hired a female sergeant to yell and scream at the women. That happened to me, so I said to my chain of command, you can't hire a female sergeant to scream and yell at all the women and make the women's lives miserable, because that's gender-based harassment. You are targeting women by doing this.

Then she physically postured while I was eating dinner as if she was going to hit me, so I couldn't stay there because violence was escalating. I was also experiencing sexual harassment from the warrant officers; they were being really sexually inappropriate, sexually objectifying me. She was going to send me to them for discipline. I can't go there. I didn't sign up for the military to be sexually exploited. I signed up to serve my country as a social work officer. I couldn't stay there.

I had to move for my own protection.

• (0915)

The Chair: That's excellent. Thank you very much.

We're now going to move to Rachel Bendayan for the final seven minutes.

Rachel, you have the floor.

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

On behalf of everybody here, thank you very much for your service, for joining the military in the first place and for spending the morning with us to help us study this important issue.

I was a litigation lawyer before I was elected, and I am particularly interested in the quasi-judicial experience you had. If it's okay with you, I would ask a few questions about that experience.

I think you mentioned that you began four and a half years ago.

Ms. Paula MacDonald: I started the process four and a half years ago, and it's still going on.

Ms. Rachel Bendayan: Was that in mid-2014 or so?

Ms. Paula MacDonald: It was mid-2015; sorry about that.

Ms. Rachel Bendayan: Okay.

You also mentioned there being several different processes that were started. Some were completed and then others began. Maybe you could just walk us through the procedure.

Ms. Paula MacDonald: When I first experienced harassment or, let's say, the military trying to have me declared mentally incompetent for complaining about its hostile sexualized behaviour, I filed a human rights complaint and went through the internal military procedures. That would be like filing a grievance. You have to write these documents in the specific way that they want them written, and challenge what happened to you.

I did that, and I also filed two complaints with the Canadian Human Rights Commission. One was based on gender discrimination. They were telling me that they wouldn't allow me to go through for testing to be a social work officer because they were saying that I wouldn't be able to pass it anyway. They were basically assuming that I'm dumb and can't do math, and I can.

Then I filed to try to protect myself, trying to encourage them to follow the law, assuming that there would be some sort of consequence for them if they retaliated against me. It didn't work.

Ms. Rachel Bendayan: You mentioned previously that in order to file to be heard at the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal, you have to exhaust the measures or the procedures available.

Ms. Paula MacDonald: Yes. They assigned me an assisting officer, who then helped me to write the documents in the way they wanted them written, but they wouldn't allow me to put in the documents the issue of the commanding officer being abusive towards me. They were all health care professionals. Health care professionals should be aware that not wanting to be sexually harassed doesn't mean that you're not mentally fit. They were just doing that to intimidate and bully me.

Ms. Rachel Bendayan: You mentioned previously, as well, that you were often referred back to the harassers in order to either resolve the dispute or have your case dealt with. Would you suggest that there be a separate procedure in place with an independent party that would be responsible for hearing cases of harassment against women specifically?

Ms. Paula MacDonald: Yes, or LGBTQ members or anyone who's different....

• (0920)

Ms. Rachel Bendayan: That's in cases of discrimination.

Ms. Paula MacDonald: Yes, because of the discrimination, they need to be protected from the group mentality in the Canadian Armed Forces.

To answer your question, after they did the first failed investigation, they did another harassment investigation. They made a determination of 18 situations that were considered harassment. They then tried very hard to find an internal investigator to come to do it, and couldn't find anyone within the military. They then decided that the incidents I had experienced and that they had determined were harassment were no longer harassment, and so they closed the harassment investigation. Then they opened up an administrative investigation and determined that incidents of sexual harassment I said had occurred did occur. Then, in that situation, they weren't using their correct internal Canadian Armed Forces definition of harassment, and they also weren't using the correct legal definition of the Canadian definition of sexual harassment, in terms of a poisonous environment or a poisoned work environment.

That's three investigations they did into what happened at 35 Field Ambulance, and they were not able to do it correctly. The reason they weren't able to do it correctly, I think, is that they didn't want to. The people there have master's degrees from the University of Toronto. They are highly educated people, so I don't understand why they wouldn't be able to reason their way through that.

The next investigation was of the Canadian Forces Leadership and Recruit School. Within that, there were the same types of behaviours happening, with course instructors overtly sexualizing women and talking about them as if they were sexual objects in their day-to-day activities. They were giving nicknames to parts of the equipment to be a soldier's sexualized name. There are all kinds of sexual innuendos going on all the time. It's not done professionally; it's like this high level of verbal sexualization that's going on.

Whenever they conducted their investigation into the Canadian Forces Leadership and Recruit School, they didn't include anybody in their investigations who may have been able to speak to what was actually going on.

There's also a report out in which the Canadian Armed Forces investigated what was going on regarding the seven deaths, the seven suicides, of the young men. They concluded there was nothing systemic happening. I think they concluded that because they left out anyone who wouldn't have anything to lose by saying this happened. What I mean by that is I wasn't interviewed. I don't believe any of the other women who went through it at the same time as I did, who voluntarily released.... A lot of the women who were experiencing the sexual harassment in the training, some of them told me they experienced suicidal ideation and then they got out of the military because of their health. I had to get out based off of my health as well. I developed post-traumatic stress disorder from the training.

They just didn't include people in order to reach the results they wanted to come out of that. So I think it's really important that we move the investigative and the resolution mechanisms into a separate group that would be able to address the things that are happening and come up with solutions in a timely manner. For me, four and a half years is too long to be dealing with what's going on. The way the human rights process works in the Canadian Armed Forces shows there's a lack of access to justice. The amount of time I've spent dealing with the Canadian human rights processes is an immense investment.

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you very much.

We're now going to move on to our five-minute round. We'll start with Phil McColeman.

Phil, you have the floor for five.

• (0925)

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brantford—Brant, CPC): Thank you for being here today. If you are willing to continue, I really want you to get at what your clear recommendations would be for the restructuring. You just started at it in the last part your last testimony. You referred quite often during your testimony to management systems. Many of us know management systems from a corporate level in the world outside of politics.

Ms. Paula MacDonald: Right.

Mr. Phil McColeman: It worked in different corporate environments where, obviously, there are different cultures of corporate structures and management systems in these companies that are driven by both genders or all genders of people. They're not necessarily driven by a male-dominated structure.

You seem to have a lot of knowledge about that, based on what you were saying in your original testimony. What would be the kinds of things you would do?

Ms. Paula MacDonald: I would start with what the Marie Deschamps report said because she had really excellent recommendations as to how to restructure. Those recommendations are there.

The idea of where the sexual misconduct centre reports to.... Did the report say that it would be with the reports to the Minister of Defence?

A voice: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

Ms. Paula MacDonald: So they would have to have a reporting structure in that area, where they're reporting directly to the Minister of Defence, as opposed to the chain of command in order to ensure that the harassment policies and procedures are being followed through. I would look at how they are doing their training and their socialization of new soldiers who are coming in so they're not going to have the next generation of soldiers affected by the hostile, sexualized culture. I think they're victims of what happened as well. The people there are victims. Anyone who went through that type of socialization process was negatively impacted and harmed, so we need to look at that as well.

Mr. Phil McColeman: You obviously have sought counsel through this whole process, I would assume.

Ms. Paula MacDonald: Yes.

Mr. Phil McColeman: Do you have a legal team working with you?

Ms. Paula MacDonald: No, I can't afford one. I'm a regular Canadian from Souris, Prince Edward Island, and I don't have the funds to be able—

Mr. Phil McColeman: Okay.

Ms. Paula MacDonald: —to afford a legal team.

Mr. Phil McColeman: The purpose of my asking that is to ask you to explain whether you know of other situations such as yours that set a precedent in going through this process, in terms of what the end results might have been through the human rights tribunals.

Do you know of any other individuals who have gone down this road, or are you pioneering this?

Ms. Paula MacDonald: I don't know of any other individuals who went through it to the extent I have. I know there are other individuals who brought their situations before the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal, but I don't know of any who have dealt with the specifics I've dealt with.

Mr. Phil McColeman: I know a significant amount about the veterans community and how they tend to gravitate through social media, particularly those who have been diagnosed with PTSD or other issues related to mental health. They tend to communicate back and forth regularly with their colleagues who have, in most cases, been medically discharged from the services.

Do you have any network of people such as that?

Ms. Paula MacDonald: Yes. I'm highly connected with the group "It's Just 700". It's women and men, because the sexual exploitation happened to both genders. There are more women who experienced this or are willing to speak to this than men at this particular time. I'm part of the group "It's Just 700".

• (0930)

The Chair: Actually, we're over our time.

Sorry, Phil.

I'm going to pass it over to Eva.

Eva, you have five minutes.

[Translation]

Mrs. Eva Nassif (Vimy, Lib.): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Ms. MacDonald.

In my riding of Vimy in Laval, we have the 4th Battalion of the Royal 22e Régiment.

Last Saturday, Minister Sajjan came to speak to the military personnel and to thank them for their work in helping with the flooding in Quebec and elsewhere. I had a look at the people in the room and tried to count the number of female members of the Canadian Armed Forces. I think women comprised perhaps 4% or 5% of those present.

Based on the results of a survey done in 2016 by Statistics Canada on sexual misconduct in the Canadian Armed Forces, 23% of those surveyed said they had been the victim of sexual assault during the past 12 months. The survey also indicated that 7% of those persons had reported the incidents. Of the 23%, that 7% accounts for 3% of those who reported incidents. What do you think are the factors that contribute to the low reporting rate of incidents and inappropriate sexual behaviour within the Canadian Armed Forces?

[English]

Ms. Paula MacDonald: I think that the members who report do experience retaliation and additional harassment for reporting. As for the outcomes of having a report done, people are aware that it will not be pleasant for members who report they are a victim of sexual assault.

Basically, there's no winning after you've been victimized by a sexual assault. I don't believe that you as a victim will get a good outcome from reporting, no matter what. Even if your harasser or your abuser is found guilty, it will still be a hard road to go down. It will not be a pleasant experience.

[Translation]

Mrs. Eva Nassif: How do you think the duty to report all incidents of inappropriate sexual behaviour will affect the reporting rate? Do you think it will help the situation?

[English]

Ms. Paula MacDonald: I think you're getting into where they have mandatory reporting and forced reporting in the Canadian Armed Forces. Although that process is well intended, because it's intended to try to stop the abuse, it does put a lot of pressure on the victim who experienced the abuse.

I don't want anyone to experience hardship like this in their lives, so I'm not sure it's the best way to go to have mandatory reporting. What types of supports are there for the victim? How will you protect the victim's mental health throughout the procedures? Those factors that would be there to support the victim aren't there. I think we need to create a victim-centred way of dealing with the sexual harassment and the sexual abuse.

Mrs. Eva Nassif: Yes.

[Translation]

What is the best advice that you could give us now that we could include in our report so that the government can act on this issue?

[English]

What's the top priority for you?

Ms. Paula MacDonald: Change the management structure in terms of how investigating...or move the administrative authority from the chain of command to the sexual response centre, as the Marie Deschamps report recommends. Follow through with the recommendations in the Marie Deschamps report.

The next recommendation would be ensure that you have a victim-centred approach in terms of having the appropriate mental health care supports and resources so that the victim can pick up their lives and keep moving. Concentrate on supporting the victims and have some sort of program to deprogram the individuals who are behaving in hostile, sexualized ways in their day-to-day lives.

• (0935)

[Translation]

Mrs. Eva Nassif: I have another quick question for you.

The fact that more women...

[English]

The Chair: No. Eva, you're done now.

I'm now going to move over to Rachael Harder.

Rachel, you have five minutes.

Ms. Rachael Harder: I understand that you're using the language that is outlined in the report when you use the term "hostile sexualized culture". You've described a few instances that you observed or experienced personally.

If you're comfortable with it, I wonder if you can help give us a fuller understanding of what that looks like within the context of the Canadian Armed Forces, either giving specific examples that you experienced or that you observed other women experience within the Canadian Armed Forces.

Again, I understand that I'm asking for you to do something that could potentially be quite tender. I'm certainly not wanting to make you uncomfortable.

Ms. Paula MacDonald: Yes.

Ms. Rachael Harder: If you would be okay with it, it would help us gain a better understanding of what's going on.

The Chair: I'm going to get involved for a second.

Would you like to go in camera for this portion, meaning that it would be private, or would you like this to stay in public on the record?

It's up to you how you would like to proceed. We can go in private for you so that you can share all your information, or we can stay public. How would you like to do it?

Ms. Paula MacDonald: We'll just stay public.

The Chair: Okay. Fantastic.

Ms. Paula MacDonald: While I was trying to advocate for people in the Canadian Armed Forces who were experiencing sexual harassment, there were two newspaper articles done by the CBC. In the articles, they went through the baselines of how the hostile sexualized culture starts.

It starts with sexualizing basically every aspect of your day-to-day life, such as where they're giving a sexualized name to different types of equipment.

An example would be....

The Chair: It's okay.

Ms. Paula MacDonald: They would refer to a gun as a dick, or they would call an unformed beret a loose cow vagina. They are using gross ways of explaining their day-to-day life.

In their presentation at the Canadian Forces Leadership and Recruit School, whenever they had a letter received from a family member, the course instructor would ask the student who was getting up, "Is she hot?"

We had a guest speaker who came in from Ottawa, a high-ranking NCM, who said that his daughter was hot and that his wife was hot. He was sexually objectifying the members of his family.

A warrant officer told me that all the men in the unit were going to want to have sex with me, and for me not to do it in the corridor. Whenever I complained about it, the higher leadership at the colonel level told me that the warrant officer was advising me on good order and discipline, as though he was counselling me on how to behave appropriately. I'm saying, well, this warrant officer is sexually objectifying me and that's not appropriate.

There are other types of incidents. At the reserves in Saint John, New Brunswick, there was an incident where they were training me to do different types of medical procedures. A higher-ranking member of the unit was describing it in terms of giving manual stimulation of a penis. This is completely inappropriate. This is teenage-boy-gone-wild behaviour, and it would escalate. The behaviours would escalate in the reserves to the point where they smelled my hair. It was escalating—coming into your space and behaving inappropriately.

There were other incidents where these reservists were talking about their sexual lives and what they wanted, or their sexual fantasies, and then they were touching women who were in the group with them. It's inappropriate. There's a sexual intent behind it, because you're talking about it and then you're going and doing it, or you're touching someone in a sexual way. The leadership wouldn't act, so that was an issue.

There are issues in how they design the training at the Canadian Forces Leadership and Recruit School, where they did not use appropriate health and safety techniques. They had the women and the men sleeping in open quarters together, where they would have a sheet separating the women from the men, so you were going to be able to see people changing. You were going to be able to see people doing different types of things.

They had it where you'd go into open showers. There were incidents where female recruits would report being sexually assaulted and the chain of command would not respond appro-

priately. There were incidents where women got drummed out because of that.

• (0940)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Paula. We're going to move over to Bob Bratina.

Bob, you have five minutes.

Mr. Bob Bratina (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, Lib.): Thanks for your very honest openness about what you experienced. It will be helpful for us.

How many women were your colleagues at the time? Were you by yourself or were there other women?

Ms. Paula MacDonald: When I joined the reserves, I'd say that 10% were women, or maybe higher, maybe 15%. A 17-year-old girl joined at the same time, and she dropped out of the military after experiencing the harassment.

When I went through for direct entry officer into the basic training, I would say that there were about 15 women who were there with me. It was the same ratio. It's basically statistically accurate with what everyone is saying is the ratio of men to women.

Mr. Bob Bratina: I'm wondering, did you get any peer support from either male or female colleagues?

Ms. Paula MacDonald: No. My female colleagues said to me that they would never say that there was sexual harassment going on. They wouldn't do it because they didn't want the negative harassment to happen to them.

Because I went forward, I did not receive support. No, nobody supported me. I was like not.... No.

Mr. Bob Bratina: As a young woman growing up, what aspirations did you have for your career and what led you to the military?

Ms. Paula MacDonald: I always had aspirations of participating in public service. I wanted to do social work, and my master's degree is in international social work, so I thought the Canadian Armed Forces would be a good fit. I had always thought that the Canadian Armed Forces would be a place where I wanted to go, and it didn't work out.

Mr. Bob Bratina: Right.

Let me ask you this. This is a tough one, because you've experienced things that are unpleasant and unnecessary. The military is training people for a workplace that could be a battlefield such as Afghanistan or the former Yugoslavia.

Ms. Paula MacDonald: Yes.

Mr. Bob Bratina: How would you differentiate the toughness aspect of bringing people along and finding out what they can take, versus the direct personal things?

Ms. Paula MacDonald: Yes. The whole idea that you're going to create toughness by acting the way that the members of the Canadian Armed Forces are acting is not going to work out, because you're going to have a lot of injuries, and a lot of things where you're going to end up killing people before they even get over to Afghanistan. You can see that happening where you have the seven suicides that happened in the training.

Also, if you guys were to investigate how many injuries you're having in the training.... On the idea of creating toughness or being able to create people who can cope in adverse situations, you have to be able to do it at increasing levels, and you have to do it from a strength perspective as opposed to trying to—

• (0945)

Mr. Bob Bratina: Humiliate....

Ms. Paula MacDonald: Yes, humiliate and beat people up: that's not going to work.

Mr. Bob Bratina: You see the difference.

Ms. Paula MacDonald: I see the difference. I see it where they.... In the Canadian Armed Forces, in the training, they had policies and procedures that were put in place to try to protect against injuries, but the leadership just wasn't following them. An example would be that you're only allowed to strap 40% of your body weight onto your body whenever you're participating in military exercises. They didn't follow that procedure, and they had a lot of fractures in the pelvis.

If you do this to your young people, where you're giving them these injuries that are going to follow them the rest of their lives, then you're not building up strong people or building up an army. You're creating a health and safety crisis in one of your organizations.

The Chair: Excellent.

Irene, you have the floor for three minutes.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: You touched very eloquently on one of the things that we've heard in Veterans Affairs, and that is that when you join, your personality and your resilience are destroyed to make you somehow tougher. It means that in coming back to civil society, there is this inability to relate to the norms of society.

The decision or the suggestion at that time—and this would have been at the same time that Madam Deschamps was writing—was to take a different approach. You have outlined that approach succinctly and I think very well.

I do have one question. You referenced “It's Just 700”, and there may be folks here who are not familiar with that organization, so I wonder if you could describe it and explain what “It's Just 700” does.

Ms. Paula MacDonald: It's an online group that was formed by Marie-Claude Gagnon. It is a group that's a safe place for people who have experienced the hostile sexualized culture to go to and to get peer support from. It's where people understand what happened—or they have some sort of an understanding of what happened—and what the social structure was like in the Canadian Armed Forces. They can receive support there. It's a safe place for victims, and there aren't that many.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Yes, and it's interesting. I have something written by Marie-Claude here, and she talks about being sexually assaulted, asking for help and being directed to the Sexual Misconduct Response Centre phone line, but it had been discontinued. Has that resource been put in place again? Is it effective?

Ms. Paula MacDonald: My experience is that the Sexual Misconduct Response Centre is there, but it functions very similarly

to the ombudsman's office. You can call them up, and they'll do basic crisis intervention with you, but they're going to be directing you back into the chain of command. That has to stop because the chain of command has proven over the last four and a half years that it is not equipped to deal with this crisis.

What we need to do is move the responsibilities and bring in people who can assist them in terms of dealing with this crisis.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Rachel has asked for one more question. Is there anyone over here who has another question to ask?

Okay, all the Rachels have another question, so we'll go Rachael, Rachel, and then, Irene, if you have another question. I want to keep it really succinct—so no preamble, but just the question.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Oh, we're going to start with me?

The Chair: Yes.

Ms. Rachael Harder: I understand that you're in a really tough situation here, and clearly your experience has been very negative. You've been very courageous and very brave to come forward today with your testimony.

One of the things that you talked about was that it starts with the leadership and then works its way down in forming a culture. The Prime Minister of Canada has also been accused—

• (0950)

Ms. Rachel Bendayan: There was no preamble to the question.

The Chair: Yes—

Ms. Rachael Harder: Sorry, it's just that the context is quickly needed. I'll wrap it up in 30 seconds—

The Chair: Be very short.

Ms. Rachael Harder: —or less.

The Chair: Okay.

Ms. Rachael Harder: The Prime Minister was accused of actually inappropriately groping a member of the media—

The Chair: Rachael.

Ms. Rachael Harder: —so then he said this—

The Chair: Rachael, get to the question.

Ms. Rachael Harder: He said that men and women experience things differently.

The Chair: That's not the question.

Ms. Rachael Harder: The question is this. Is that okay? Is it okay to simply say that men and women experience things differently?

Ms. Paula MacDonald: I've talked to both men and women from the Canadian Armed Forces who were sexually exploited, and in some cases, it was easier.... It's easier for me to come forward and say, "I experienced sexual harassment in the Canadian Armed Forces," than it is for one of my male colleagues or one of my male friends who experienced the same thing, because there are different types of social cues, or it would be viewed as being less manly. For instance, why weren't they able to protect themselves? There's that issue, too.

There are a lot of societal issues, and sexual assault and sexual exploitation happen within the social structure.

The Chair: Okay, go ahead, Rachel.

Ms. Rachel Bendayan: In order to assist us with our recommendations, could you let us know when...? You mentioned that you were allowed legal representation in some procedural instances and not in others.

Ms. Paula MacDonald: It's not that I'm not allowed them. It's that I have to come up with the resources to pay for them on my own—

Ms. Rachel Bendayan: Okay.

Ms. Paula MacDonald: —and I don't have that ability.

Ms. Rachel Bendayan: So, in your opinion, victims should have lawyers paid for by—

Ms. Paula MacDonald: Yes, and I believe that victims in the Canadian Armed Forces need their own lawyers. If you're going to go, you need to have your own lawyer. You need an advocate. You need someone to protect you when you're going through that system.

Ms. Rachel Bendayan: Absolutely. Thank you. That's very helpful.

The Chair: Irene, you have the last question.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Again, thank you, Paula. Thank you so much.

This whole issue of your having to come up with the financial resources to pay for your own lawyer is very, very troubling, and I wonder about the impact on your financial security as a result.

What do you hope will come of the hearing at the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal?

Ms. Paula MacDonald: I hope that they will correct the damages and the harm that was done to me and they'll lift the discrimination. I hope that will happen. I can't afford legal representation. What I've done is I've tried to do it myself. It's hard. I have a background in human resource management. I had an HR degree and a Bachelor of Commerce before I went in. I have some MBA training.

I took a couple of legal courses before I went that would help me in terms of being able to do this. I don't think that a lot of people would be able to do it on their own because of what's required. I think that system needs to be looked at.

The Chair: On behalf of the committee, I'd really like to thank you for coming and sharing your story in detail. It will be very helpful for us as we're moving forward.

We are going to be suspending. You're allowed to have one assistant, and one member from each party is able to be here.

We will have to clear the room and we'll restart in three minutes.

We're going to suspend for three minutes.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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