



SURVIVOR PERSPECTIVES
CONSULTING **GROUP**



BRIEF FOR THE COMMITTEE ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN'S STUDY ON SEXUAL MISCONDUCT WITHIN THE CANADIAN ARMED FORCES

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**PRESENTED BY MJ BATEK ON BEHALF OF
SURVIVOR PERSPECTIVES CONSULTING GROUP**

WWW.SURVIVORPERSPECTIVES.COM

Introduction

As the decades-long crisis of sexual misconduct in the Canadian Armed Forces becomes more and more prominent, we, a small group of Canadian Military Sexual Trauma (MST) Survivors, have decided to build an organization that would be a 'one-stop-resource' for the Canadian Military Sexual Trauma Survivors' perspective.

There is an obvious gap at the proverbial 'executive table' and we want to fill that gap by providing a professionally coordinated Canadian Military Sexual Trauma Survivor perspective, which potential clients such as the Canadian Armed Forces, Veteran Affairs Canada, and other stakeholders could easily access.

We are a strong community of Survivors. We all wish we could contribute to making the Canadian Armed Forces better. We simply need a professionally coordinated way to do so.

We are the *Survivor Perspectives Consulting Group* (SPCG).

Who We Are

We have written an Open Letter to the Leadership of the Canadian Armed Forces (*see page 6*) wherein we explain how "We, the Survivors, are tired of watching the leadership shoot themselves in the foot. [...] We have been through the system as victims and are now prepared to help fix it as Survivors. It is time [...] to hand us the microphone. We have opinions, suggestions, and a lot of answers to the questions [they] should be asking [themselves]. [...] We are the voice of the Survivors of military sexual trauma. We have the experience that [they] need, wrought through the pain and frustration we suffered while in the system. We know the system. We know the gaps and the issues. We know better than anyone. [...] We are here for consultation, advice, and perspective. We can offer a sounding board, consolidated feedback, and alternative training."

Survivor Perspectives Consulting Group consists of a small group of volunteer Military Sexual Trauma Survivors who are poised to use their personal and professional experience in the creation of an organization that can provide a service that will be of immense benefit the Canadian Armed Forces, Veteran's Affairs Canada, and other stakeholders. This organization will fill a large gap that existed in past strategies to eradicate sexual misconduct from the military; any strategy from this point forward will have every opportunity to be Survivor-informed.

What We Can Do

We are currently in the building phase of our organization. We are preparing to provide the Military Sexual Trauma Survivor perspective to the Government of Canada as well as any other stakeholders with a valid interest in the Military Sexual Trauma Survivors perspective. We intend to represent multiple identity factors including Men, Indigenous Peoples, LGBTQ2+, Veterans, Reservists, and Civilian Survivors, among others, especially given this is not solely a *Women's* issue.

Just as the Government of Canada uses Gender Based Analysis PLUS, which goes beyond sex and gender to other intersecting identity factors such as race, ethnicity, or age; the Canadian Armed Forces and Veteran's Affairs Canada should consider the perspective of Military Sexual Trauma Survivors at every stage of strategy and policy development. We at SPCG are willing to work towards the provision of that perspective, in a professionally coordinated format.

We do not propose to have all the answers; we are not organizational culture or military justice experts; but we are the unfortunate experts with hard-earned experience in Military Sexual Trauma.

- **We can help *define this problem*; the extent of which is still unknown. We can point to *specific gaps, deficiencies, and issues*.** For example:
 - We know that the internal reporting process is flawed by the fact that it falls under the responsibility of the Chief of Defence Staff; a position that our community is no longer confident is appointed with trustworthy leaders. It seems obvious to us that the loss of trust in the institution, and in the leaders of the institution, has made it impossible for that same institution to provide a reporting mechanism that is trusted and safe for all. In order to earn that trust back, the institution needs to let go of that responsibility. We believe that military members do need an external reporting office; one that protects all complainants (victims, and third parties) from reprisals, and that provides professional investigative and support services that is not compromised by a system of power and control. Not only does culture change at the lowest level need to happen, as Minister Sajjan emphasized during his testimony to the Committee on the Status of Women on March 23rd 2021, but the accusations levied against General Vance, Admiral McDonald, Major-General Coates, and Vice-Admiral Edmundson indicate that the culture needs to change first and foremost at the highest levels. And until that change happens, and that trust has been regained, victims need an external resource they can trust for reporting and for support. Only once that safe space for reporting is established, will we be able to learn the real extent of this problem as all victims feel comfortable coming forward.
 - Lieutenant-General Eyre pointed out to this Committee during his testimony on March 23rd 2021 his understanding of certain gaps in current training, like the fact that hierarchy creates a power dynamic that is not well understood, and what exactly abuse of power looks like. We can identify other areas where lack of understanding leads to sexual misconduct, areas such as what *enthusiastic consent* looks like, how *victim blaming* is insidious, and what *bystander intervention* really means. Though the Canadian Armed Forces did launch bystander intervention training as part of Operation Honour, the training was often mocked, especially when delivered by inexperienced leaders, or leaders who obviously did not believe in its necessity and were simply giving it lip service. We suggest that this type of training should be delivered by a combination of leadership, trained military sexual trauma survivors, and properly trained, trauma-informed professionals with a variety of gender identities represented.
 - Our community has been begging for a formal Peer-Support Program for years. Many informal online support groups currently exist; and when Mme Deschamps' report was released in spring 2015, one such group (*It's Just 700*) was created and managed by a volunteer. She has recently had to step away from those duties partly due to burnout. The Government of Canada cannot keep depending on Survivor-volunteers to do this work. In addition to an online platform that may be the best service for some, Survivors also need a formal Peer-Support Program to have options for in-person meetings across the country at regular intervals; these are just the minimum requirements.
 - There is a gap in the provision of support provided to Survivors by the Sexual Misconduct Response Centre (SMRC). The Centre has established the services of dedicated *Response and Support Coordinators*, however, these coordinators are not available at every base across the country. Survivors have indicated their need for these support persons to accompany them to meetings with the police, the chain of command, and even medical staff. This service can make the difference between a Survivor having a voice and advocating for themselves, or shutting down from fear and intimidation, and possibly becoming severely ill as a result.
 - On the point of support to Survivors, we can confirm that there is currently an inconsistent application of Survivor-led support in the aftermath of sexual harassment and sexual assault incidents. Though it has not happened in every case, it has severely traumatized many Survivors when the persons they report to, or persons who learn about incidents, do not consider the Survivor's wants and needs as a priority. The Canadian Armed Forces have begun to explore this issue by revisiting the *Duty to Report* by considering a change to *Duty*

to Respond, but we at SPCG feel that we must insist that every Survivor's wants and needs must be respected in every case regardless of what the chain of command and/or medical professionals may think is best. Only the Survivor knows what is best for them, and that must be respected; the needs of the Survivor must be prioritized above those of the Canadian Armed Forces.

- Though Brigadier-General Atherton has stated that Canadian Armed Forces has implemented all of the recommendations from the Deschamps Report, we disagree. Recommendation Number 3 recommends that an "independent centre for accountability for sexual assault and harassment outside of the CAF [...] act as a central authority for the collection of data". This has not been implemented and is, from our Survivors' perspective, key to ensuring that real data is collected and studied so that adjustments to the culture change strategy can be made at regular intervals. As Survivors, we can point easily to the issues and gaps in the system post-incident, but we are just as passionate about ensuring *prevention* is a bigger part of the culture change strategy. As Stéphanie Raymond mentioned during her testimony to this Committee on April 8th 2021, Operation Honour addressed mostly the symptoms and not the cause. We implore the Government of Canada to finally implement a culture change strategy that will prevent sexual harassment and assault, not just deal with victims afterwards.
- **We can help *find and develop solutions*: immediate, medium, and long term solutions, because we have ideas. We have ideas that can be developed into plans, policies, and programs.** For example:
 - We at SPCG have developed a one-day workshop that can be used in the immediate term to help kick start the culture shift that is desperately needed throughout the organization. A training package that is based on civilian best practices and curated specifically for the Canadian Armed Forces. This is a bold workshop, developed and delivered by a Military Sexual Trauma Survivor, that will challenge and confront the social norms, unconscious biases, and inappropriate behaviours of the attendees; it will shake their ethical foundations and open their minds unlike anything the military has done before. Specifically, the curriculum of the Front-Line Workshop has been curated especially *for* the Canadian Armed Forces. It is based on the curriculum of the ***First Responder Course*** from the Alberta Association of Sexual Assault Services, as well as the ***Leading Change Program*** from the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters (ACWS) who based their program on the Sexual Harassment and Gender Violence Prevention Program by internationally renowned expert in gender, race, and violence, Dr. Jackson Katz.
 - Another idea that has been brought to our attention is the creation of a *Commanding Officer's Handbook on How to Handle Sexual Assault at Unit Level*. Such a handbook would be instrumental in ensuring that unit leaders have a guide to dealing with victims, alleged perpetrators, witnesses, and unit members, at their fingertips. This is important, just like the Acting Chief of Defence Staff has requested an Aide-Mémoire (a Playbook) to help him deal with incidents of senior leader misconduct, leaders at unit level also need guidance throughout the various stages of such an incident, and especially in the first hours and days as these are crucial for Survivors.
- **We can provide *feedback on, and input into, strategies, plans, and policies, every step of the way. During development, implementation, and monitoring stages. Just like any GBA+ analysis of various identity factors, we want to provide the Military Sexual Trauma Survivor Perspective.*** For example:
 - We have valuable feedback to share regarding the military's plan for the Restorative Engagement part of the Heyder Beattie Class Action Lawsuit, currently being planned by the Sexual Misconduct Response Centre (SMRC). As far as we are aware, the military's plan is to ask for volunteers to meet with the claimants who will share their stories through the Restorative Engagement program. But that plan, though it may have been developed in consideration of many important planning factors, in our view, represents a huge missed opportunity to educate all, if not most, military personnel. Those who *volunteer* to receive disclosures from claimants are the people who *already understand the problem*; who have

already seen for themselves what behaviours contribute to the sexualized military culture. These are not the people who need to hear these stories. Alternatively, the people who need to hear these stories don't know that they need to hear them; they don't know what they don't know. Restorative Engagement is not only meant to facilitate healing for the Survivors, but it is also meant to open the minds of the people receiving the disclosures; it is meant to change the attitudes and behaviours of those who otherwise don't understand this problem. It is the most impactful and effective tool the military has to change the culture. But if it remains a volunteer activity, it will be a useless exercise for the organization.

- When Lieutenant General Eyre mentioned to this Committee his plans to produce a “proscriptive Code of Professional Military Conduct”, feedback from some members in our community suggested this could be confusing as there are already several “Codes” that members must adhere to, such as the Royal Canadian Navy’s Code of Conduct, in addition to all the Orders, Directives, and Regulations members are supposed to be well versed in. A suggestion to go back to basics by re-invigorating the Code of Values and Ethics was made, suggesting that its stated most important principle, to “Respect the Dignity of all Persons”, is exactly what needs to be re-emphasized throughout the organization. Why not use the doctrine that already exists by reinvigorating the Defence Ethics Program, a program that has been pushed to the wayside for too many years. If military members actually understand and believe that they are indeed *supposed* to question behaviours and orders they believe may be unethical, the culture of silence that Lieutenant-Colonel Eleanor Taylor spoke of in her memorandum might have a chance of being eliminated. We are suggesting a real focus on Ethics education and training, not just “check-in-the-box lectures” that have become the norm.
- **We can also provide perspective regarding *the ground truth*; what is really happening throughout the organization.** For example:
 - There is often a disconnect between what strategic organizational leadership says, and what operational and tactical leaders actually implement. SPCG is connected to active duty Survivors from a multitude of ranks and environments (Army, Navy, Air Force, Special Force) who experience *how* new policies and programs are *actually* rolled out in the units throughout Canada. This can provide a very unique and honest perspective that the organization is unlikely to be able to learn themselves.

Conclusion

We are building a Team of Experts in Military Sexual Trauma, a team of Survivors, who can provide the perspectives needed to ensure that every Strategy, every Plan, every Policy, and every Program aimed at tackling this crisis is reviewed through a Survivor-informed lens.

We want to be consulted in a meaningful way, for the first time ever.

An open letter to the Leadership of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF),

We, the Survivors, are tired of watching the leadership shoot themselves in the foot. We are not broken beyond repair, or so delicate that we can't play a part in this fight. We have repeatedly been (proverbially) told: "Okay, have a seat now, we know how to take care of this".

Clearly not.

We have *been through* it.

We have been through the system as victims, and are now prepared to help fix it as Survivors. It is time for you to hand us the microphone. We have opinions, suggestions, and a lot of answers to the questions you should be asking yourselves. We have proven solutions ready to go.

It is time we had a voice.

It is time we had a seat at the table.

It is time to get this culture changed, once and for all.

We are the voice of the Survivors of *military sexual trauma*. We have the experience that you need, wrought through the pain and frustration we suffered while in the system. We know the system. We know the gaps and the issues. We know better than anyone.

Changing the culture shouldn't take this long and it certainly will never happen with repeated missteps and mistakes. Recent events have contributed to a lack of accountability, and a total loss of trust.

Our new organization is made up of active and veteran members of the CAF, from a variety of ranks, trades and environments, as well members of the public who have experienced Military Sexual Trauma. We have one common attribute: an absolute commitment to making the CAF better.

We are the *Survivor Perspectives Consulting Group*.

We are here for consult, advice, and perspective. We can offer a sounding board, consolidated feedback, and alternative training.

We can change the culture by helping every CAF member recognize their subconscious biases, empathize with victims of sexual misconduct, and ultimately *start taking action* to eliminate the root causes of sexual misconduct through a dynamic and engaging workshop based on current best practices.

There are still members suffering, and we won't leave them behind.

We are here and we are ready. Let's do this.