

# Advancing Canadian Research on Servicewomen and Women Veterans

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A French translation of this report is also available.

Une traduction française de ce rapport est également disponible.

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## List of Acronyms

CAF	Canadian Armed Forces
CFHS	Canadian Forces Health Services
CIMVHR	Canadian Institute for Military and Veteran Health Research
CPCC	Chief Professional Conduct and Culture
DGMPRA	Director General Military Personnel Research and Analysis
DND	Department of National Defence (Canada)
DRDC	Defence Research and Development Canada
GBA Plus	Gender-Based Analysis Plus
LGBT	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender
2SLGBTQI+	Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, and others who identify as part of sexual and gender diverse communities
MST	Military Sexual Trauma
MSVU	Mount Saint Vincent University
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
RCMP	Royal Canadian Mounted Police
SAGER	Sex and Gender Equity in Research
TCPS 2	Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans
VA	Veterans Affairs (United States)
VAC	Veterans Affairs Canada

# Executive Summary

## Purpose

This study provides an analysis of the state of Canadian servicewomen and women Veteran research. We identify key research gaps and propose a framework for future research on servicewomen and women Veterans in the Canadian context. This study aims to advance research on the experiences, needs, health, and well-being of military and Veteran women in Canada.

## Methodology

We used a scoping review methodology as it provides a clear, organized approach to determine the breadth and nature of a body of research, identify gaps in existing literature, summarize and disseminate research findings, and guide recommendations for subsequent research. We included consultations—with an advisory team of researchers and governmental and non-governmental stakeholders—as a component of our methodology.

## Key Findings

- 1) We identified a total of 177 sources of Canadian literature that met our study's inclusion criteria. We also reviewed an additional body of research to contextualize our findings, including international scoping reviews, systematic reviews, literature reviews, and meta-analyses on servicewomen and women Veterans and Canadian literature that is related to the topic of servicewomen and women Veterans, but does not explicitly meet our inclusion criteria.
- 2) There are many knowledge gaps that need to be filled when it comes to understanding the experiences, needs, health, and well-being of servicewomen and women Veterans in Canada during and after service and across the life course.
- 3) The field of Canadian servicewomen and women Veteran research has been historically neglected and undervalued, but is currently experiencing an upswing. However, this new growth is unevenly developed and lacks strategic coordination and interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral collaboration.
- 4) The international research points to sex- and gender-specific military occupational hazards and life impacts on servicewomen and women Veterans that remain largely unexplored in the Canadian context.
- 5) It is paramount that these gaps in knowledge be filled to ensure sex- and gender-informed harm prevention and care for service-related injuries and illness, and their sequelae impacts over the lifespan of a woman (work, childbearing, menopause, aging, etc.).

## Recommendations

- 1) Research gaps should be acknowledged, and dedicated government research funding set aside to address them.
- 2) Multiple types of research on servicewomen and women Veterans are needed: clinical medical, holistic health and social sciences, longitudinal research, mixed-methods research, and more.
- 3) Military and Veteran research on women needs to apply (and correctly use) sex, gender, and intersectional analysis, and be consistent with existing trauma-aware, military culture-aware, feminist-informed, and ethical research best practices.
- 4) It is crucial that researchers (and policymakers) do not conflate or make invisible women's experiences in attempts to address the needs of all minority military members and Veterans, for example, through the broad application of inclusion and diversity. There remains a need for separate women's sex- and gender-specific research (and policies, programming, services, and care). There is also a need for separate dedicated research on transgender women's experiences and needs.
- 5) There is an urgent need for strategic, coordinated, interdisciplinary, cross-departmental, and cross-sectoral collaboration to fill the gaps in existing research knowledge on servicewomen and women Veterans.
- 6) There is a need for training, mentoring, and networking of emerging scholars working on servicewomen and women Veteran research.
- 7) Government has an opportunity to leverage existing and newly emerging sources of government data to produce quick wins in the area of population and client-level studies on servicewomen and women Veterans, as well as to make publicly available and accessible all relevant data and research on servicewomen and women Veterans.

## Conclusion

To date, individual researchers inside and outside of government have taken the initiative to begin addressing gaps in research on servicewomen and women Veterans in Canada, but individual researchers can only advance this research area in a limited way. This report recommends a collaborative, interdisciplinary, cross-sectoral, and cross-departmental approach to programmatically move forward this important research area of servicewomen and women Veterans in Canada.

## Introduction

There is a historic lack of Canadian research on women working in the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) in general, and specifically research on the sex- and gender-specific occupational and operational impacts of military work for women during and after service. Despite Canadian women working side by side with men in all military occupations and trades for over thirty years now and in increasing numbers, research is still largely informed by the historic and still dominant assumption of the male military and Veteran norm.

The male norm, combined with sex- and gender-blindness, as well as the shift to “gender-neutrality” in the 1990s, has reinforced the lack of research interest in servicewomen and women Veterans in Canada. Women as military members have either been assumed to be absent (hence, not requiring research) *or* the same as men (hence, not requiring separate sex- and gender-specific research). *Sex- and gender-blind* or *neutral* approaches are reflected in the common military phrase, ‘A soldier is a soldier is a soldier’, and post service by the common Veteran phrase “one Veteran, one standard” (Veterans Affairs Canada, 2019a).

Such a sex- and gender-blind approach is deeply problematic, as women and men’s experiences differ both outside and within the military as a result of gender role expectations, gender stereotypes, and biological and physiological differences based on sex (Davis, 2020). A sex- and gender-blind approach to research, policy, programming, and services is not evidence-based and may inadvertently cause harm. Thus, a *sex- and gender-informed* lens must be adopted in all military and Veteran research in order to reflect the lived realities of servicewomen and women Veterans, and to remove existing historic biases that may cause harm and prevent equitable health and well-being outcomes (Eichler, 2021).

The need for a sex- and gender-informed lens in all military and Veteran research is reinforced by international guidelines such as the Sex and Gender Equity in Research (SAGER) guidelines (Heidari et al., 2016). The need for a sex- and gender-informed lens for military and Veteran research is further reinforced by the Government of Canada call for Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA Plus, inclusive of sex) to be part of all government funded research, policies, and programs. Furthermore, the CAF is a unique federal workplace in that it is also responsible for the health care provision of its members, which further highlights the need for sex- and gender-informed evidence-based research in support of equitable health care provision.

Despite calls for a sex- and gender-informed lens, sex and gender remain absent from the vast majority of military and Veteran research in Canada. For instance, a recent overview article about the “Depth and breadth of Canadian military, Veteran and family research” summarizes 10 years of research presented at CIMVHR forums but does not make sex, gender, women, or females visible in any way, whether in relation to topic areas, approaches, or researchers (Thompson et al., 2022). A typical explanation for why there is so little research on women or sex and gender differences in Canadian military and Veteran research is that “Males greatly outnumber females in military service” and “smaller samples of women limit[ ] abilities to draw conclusions” (Thompson et al., 2021, 938).

However, it is time we go beyond the excuse of small numbers and the claim of sex and gender blindness or neutrality, and instead recognize the need to build a robust knowledge base about the experiences, needs, health, and well-being of servicewomen and women Veterans in Canada (Park, 2021). With this project, we evaluate the state of servicewomen and women Veteran research in Canada and propose ways to move forward in addressing existing gaps and biases.

The term ‘women’ is contested and needs to be clearly defined in research. In this study, we understand the category of ‘women’ to be inclusive of both cis and trans women. Our approach includes attention to gender as well as to sex-specific female health issues. While we recognize that sex-specific female health issues might also be experienced by transgender men, our study does not explicitly include transgender men. The focus of our study is on women broadly defined. That being said, the overwhelming majority of existing, especially historic, research does not explicitly state who is included in the category of women and we must therefore assume it is more often than not based on cisgender women. Overall, it needs to be underlined that terminology and its changing, different, and inconsistent use across the research literature present significant challenges when dealing with this topic area.

The term ‘Veteran’ is also contested. In Canada, former RCMP members are considered Veterans for the purposes of entitlement to services and benefits from VAC. In this study, we therefore include both CAF and RCMP women Veterans. We also include women serving in the RCMP, as there are likely overlapping needs and challenges faced by women in the RCMP and CAF that should be considered in research and policy. Overall, it should be pointed out that RCMP members and Veterans remain a blind spot in military and Veteran research and this is exacerbated when it comes to serving and Veteran *women*.

Our research was guided by the following questions:

- 1) What is the state of research on servicewomen and women Veterans in Canada?
- 2) What does research tell us about servicewomen and women Veterans in Canada? How has it addressed Canadian servicewomen and women Veterans’ experiences, needs, health, and well-being?
- 3) What are the most significant research gaps in relation to knowledge about the experiences, needs, health, and well-being of servicewomen and women Veterans in Canada?
- 4) What conceptual and ethical considerations should inform future Canadian research on servicewomen and women Veterans?

This research study has three key objectives:

- 1) To provide a *comprehensive description and analysis* of the current state of research on servicewomen and women Veterans in Canada. Using a scoping review methodology, our approach casts a wide net, including social and health sciences as well as medical research; peer-reviewed and grey literature; sex and gender (female-specific issues and women’s issues, including transgender issues); military and RCMP Veterans; and service and post-service life research.
- 2) To identify the most *significant gaps in Canadian research* based on our comprehensive analysis of Canadian literature on servicewomen and women Veterans and through comparison with the international literature on servicewomen and women Veterans and in the context of adjacent and other Canadian research.



- 3) To develop *recommendations to advance research* on servicewomen and women Veterans in Canada from our analysis of the literature, and in consultation with our advisory group of research collaborators and governmental and non-governmental stakeholders. Our recommendations include the “what” (the most significant gaps that need filling and the types of research needed) as well as the “how” (what conceptual and ethical considerations should guide future research on servicewomen and women Veterans in Canada).

This study was conducted by a multidisciplinary team, including a core research team and an advisory group. The bulk of the research was carried out by the core research team consisting of the principal investigator and three co-investigators, whose disciplinary expertise lies in military and Veteran studies, women and gender studies, political studies, family studies, psychology, and anthropology. All four main researchers had prior experience conducting scoping or literature reviews related to the topic of servicewomen and women Veterans. They all identify as (cis) women but lack first-hand lived experience of military service. The core research team was supported by an advisory group of collaborators with a diverse range of multidisciplinary and lived experience perspectives. Our advisory group includes social scientists and health scientists, former military members, and women from diverse backgrounds in terms of race, Indigeneity (Métis), language (English and French), gender identity, and sexual orientation.

## Methodology

To provide a comprehensive analysis of the state of military and Veteran women research in Canada, we take a multidisciplinary, holistic view to be inclusive of a wide range of issues that concern servicewomen and women Veterans across the domains of well-being (Government of Canada, 2019; Pound, 2019; Thompson et al., 2016). Our methodological approach is guided by GBA Plus (CIHR Institute for Gender and Health, 2012; Status of Women Canada, 2020) and SAGER guidelines (Heidari et al., 2016). Our research team recognizes the distinction between biological sex (male, female, and intersex) and gender (social and cultural norms and expectations on the basis of perceived sex, as well as individual masculine, feminine, non-binary, and gender-fluid identities and expressions). Distinguishing between, and paying attention to, *both* sex and gender enabled us to identify relevant medical and health research as well as relevant social sciences and humanities research on servicewomen and women Veterans. Sex and gender are both crucial factors influencing the experiences and outcomes of servicewomen and women Veterans that each need to be carefully considered in their own right, in their interplay, and in intersection with other factors (Eichler, Spanner et al., 2021).

We understand the category of ‘women’ to include all people who identify as women, including transgender women. Therefore, our approach includes attention to gender as well as to sex-specific female health issues, including those that might still be experienced by transgender men. However, we do not explicitly include transgender men in this study. An intersectional sex and gender lens allows for consideration of specific issues arising for subpopulations of military and Veteran women, for example, Indigenous, racialized, or 2SLGBTQIA+ women as well as consideration of how sex and gender interact with military rank, member-status (non-commissioned member versus officer), and relationship and parental status.

Following the framework of Arksey and O’Malley (2005) (see **Figure 1**), we applied a scoping review methodology (1. identifying the research question, 2. identifying relevant literature, 3. selecting literature, 4. charting the data, 5. collating, summarizing and reporting the results, and 6. consultation) to identify existing literature on the topic of servicewomen and women Veterans in Canada. Scoping reviews provide a clear, organized approach for determining the breadth and nature of a body of research, identifying gaps in existing literature, summarizing and disseminating research findings, and guiding subsequent research (Arksey & O’Malley, 2005; Pham et al., 2014).

We developed our analysis by first identifying and synthesizing the findings of Canadian scoping, systematic, and literature reviews on the topic of servicewomen and women Veterans (Eichler, 2017; Eichler & Smith-Evans, 2018; Eichler, Smith-Evans et al., 2021; Poole, 2021; Tam-Seto & Imre-Millei, 2022). Next, to temporally and thematically expand on existing reviews, we searched for historic and contemporary Canadian research on servicewomen and women Veterans; this enabled us to identify literature that was not captured in existing reviews, with a view toward encompassing the most comprehensive publications on the topic. In parallel, we completed a rapid review of international scoping reviews, systematic reviews, literature reviews, and meta-analyses about serving and/or Veteran women. We used the analysis of international reviews for comparison purposes only, to help us contextualize and identify the most significant gaps in the existing Canadian research on servicewomen and women Veterans.

**Figure 1**

*Depiction of Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) Scoping Review Framework*



Consultation is an optional, sixth stage of scoping reviews proposed by Arksey and O'Malley (2005), and its value has been subsequently discussed by other researchers who have undertaken and evaluated the methodology of scoping reviews (e.g., Brien et al., 2010; Daudt et al., 2013; Levac et al., 2010; O'Brien et al., 2016; Tricco et al., 2016). We engaged in ongoing consultation with our advisory group of collaborators over the course of the study, including meetings to discuss our search strategy, receive feedback on preliminary findings, and obtain relevant sources of academic and grey literature. We also consulted the wider community of relevant government and non-governmental stakeholders. Consultations involved the following stakeholders: Department of National Defence/Canadian Armed Forces (CFHS, CPCC, DGMPPRA, and DRDC), Veterans Affairs Canada (Research Directorate), Office of the Veterans Ombud, Military Sexual Trauma Community of Practice, Women Veterans Research and Engagement Network, RCMP Veteran Women's Council, the Military Women's Health Research Interest Group, and individual women Veterans. Consultations were held to share information on our project, receive input, and help identify relevant grey literature as well as to elicit feedback on preliminary findings and recommendations. Preliminary findings were also shared at the annual CIMVHR Forum (October 2022). The final draft report received detailed feedback from our advisory group of collaborators as well as individual stakeholders in the Veterans lived experience community.

## Search Strategy

Our literature search strategy included three parts (see also **Figure 2**):

- 1) Existing reviews: Canadian and international scoping reviews, systematic reviews, literature reviews, and meta-analyses on servicewomen and women Veterans published in peer-reviewed journals (since 1885 for Canadian reviews and since 2010 for international reviews).
- 2) Historic and contemporary research: research on Canadian servicewomen and women Veterans between 1885 and 1989 (historic literature) and 1990 and 2022 (contemporary literature). We included research that focused on Canadian serving or Veteran women of the CAF or RCMP, mentions them in the title or abstract, and focuses on women's experiences per se or on a comparative analysis of sex and/or gender that highlights the unique outcomes or experiences of women.
- 3) Consultation: as described previously, we consulted with our advisory group of collaborators and a wider relevant community of stakeholders to identify grey literature and additional academic literature.

**Figure 2**

### *Literature Search Strategy*

Existing reviews	Historic and contemporary research	Consultation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Canadian and international</li><li>• Scoping reviews, systematic reviews, literature reviews, meta-analyses</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Canadian only</li><li>• 1885–1989 (“historic literature”)</li><li>• 1990–2022 (“contemporary literature”)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Canadian only</li><li>• Advisory group of collaborators</li><li>• Wider community of relevant government and non-governmental stakeholders</li></ul>

Literature was identified for screening through electronic databases, hand searching of key sources, and consultation. We included sources for screening based on whether titles and abstracts indicated a focus on servicewomen or women Veterans specifically or applied a sex or gender lens to military and Veteran issues in Canada. We then applied our inclusion criteria to select sources for further analysis. If it was ambiguous as to whether the research spoke to women, a closer reading was conducted to determine inclusion. In some cases, a piece was included even though it did not mention servicewomen or women Veterans in the title/abstract, because it did include an analysis of women.

Our search and selection processes were iterative, evolving as we became more familiar with the research. We repeated some searches with new key words (e.g., peacekeepers, nursing sisters, military nurses) and an expanded time frame (going back to 1885 when women first joined the armed forces, which was not our initial intention). See **Appendix A** for more details on our literature search strategy, including search terms and inclusion/exclusion criteria.

The complete reference list of literature specifically about Canadian servicewomen and women Veterans (i.e., that met study inclusion criteria) can be found at the end of this report (see **Appendix B**).

While applying our selection criteria to the collected literature, we screened out a body of research that was not specifically *about* women or had not specifically applied a sex or gender lens but examined questions of relevance to the topic of servicewomen and women Veterans more broadly (e.g., sexual misconduct, military culture, health outcomes, etc.). Although these sources did not meet our inclusion criteria, we include them in our discussion of findings to provide context, and we append a list of them at the end of this report (see **Appendix D**). We chose this strict application of inclusion criteria in order to not overstate the extent of research directly focussed on Canadian servicewomen and women Veterans. Please note that not all the literature found through this scoping review is referenced in the report, but the complete lists of references can be found in **Appendices B, C, and D**.

## Findings: The State of Research on Servicewomen and Women Veterans in Canada

In this section we present our findings on the state of research on servicewomen and women Veterans in Canada. A total of 177 sources met our study’s inclusion criteria; the breakdown of numbers by type of research is shown in **Table 1** and the full list of 177 references is provided in **Appendix B**. Through our scoping review, we identified a variety of publications including scoping and literature reviews, books, book chapters, academic research articles, Master’s and doctoral theses, and government grey literature such as reports. Our findings cover the time period from 1885, when women in Canada first began to serve in the armed forces, through the key historic turning point of 1989 when the Canadian military was ordered to integrate women into all occupations and trades, until September 2022. While our focus was on military members and Veterans, we did include RCMP servicewomen and women Veterans in our search as they likely experience similar issues and because the VAC mandate includes both CAF and RCMP Veterans.

**Table 1**

*Total Number of Sources Included in Study (N = 177) by Type of Research.*

Type of Research	Total Sources Included in Study
<b>Canadian reviews</b>	5
<b>Historic research (1885–1989)*</b>	20
<b>Contemporary research (1990–2022)</b>	117
<b>French research</b>	17
<b>Grey literature</b>	18

\* Please note that only sources from 1975 to 1989 were identified for this time period.

### Canadian Scoping Reviews

We found five Canadian scoping reviews about servicewomen or women Veterans. Only two reviews focus specifically on women, and the findings of all five reviews point to a lack of Canadian research on serving or Veteran women. Three of the five reviews cover Canadian and international gender and military-to-civilian transition research (Eichler, 2017; Eichler & Smith-Evans, 2018; Eichler, Smith-Evans et al., 2021), one is dedicated to Canadian women Veteran research (Poole, 2021), and one focuses on mentorship programs for serving women (Tam-Seto & Imre-Millei, 2022).

Four of the five reviews cover both Canadian and international literature, with a focus on the Five Eyes (Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States). These include:

- The publications by Eichler (2017) and Eichler and Smith-Evans (2018) are based on the same scoping review. Their scoping review focuses on the literature on gender and veteran transition/reintegration research published from 1990 to 2015. Their review included only one Canadian source (Fetzner et al., 2013), which does not, however, fit the inclusion criteria of the present study.
- Eichler et al. (2021) focuses on gender and diversity (GBA Plus) research on military-to-civilian transition published from 2010 to 2020. Their scoping review identified 26 Canadian references (10 research and 16 government sources), but only four of them fit the inclusion criteria for the present study.
- Tam-Seto and Imre-Millei (2022) focus on mentorship for servicewomen. Their review identified only one piece of Canadian research which does fit the inclusion criteria for the present study.

The fifth review, by Poole (2021), is focused on Canada and has broad inclusion criteria aimed at capturing any research with findings about women or female CAF or RCMP members and/or Veterans. Although her review identified 84 Canadian references, only 10 articles meet the narrower inclusion criteria of our current scoping review.

Two of the five Canadian reviews focus specifically on female or women service members or Veterans, and those two reviews combined found only 11 articles that meet our inclusion criteria. The other three reviews focus on gender and diversity and two of those three focus specifically on military-to-civilian transition.

The low numbers of Canadian research found across these reviews indicate that there is a very limited number of publications from Canada that focus on serving or Veteran women. Building on these reviews, we thematically and temporally expanded on their search criteria to determine the state of Canadian research on servicewomen and women Veterans. Next, we present the Canadian literature that met our inclusion criteria, organized by research literature and grey literature.

## Canadian Research Literature

### *Historic Research, 1885 to 1989*

Our search of Canadian research on servicewomen and women Veterans published between 1885 and 1989 identified only 20 pieces that fit our inclusion criteria, all on the military except for one which focused on the RCMP. Even though we searched databases from 1885 to 1989, the research we found clusters around 1975 to 1989, with five pieces published in the 1970s and 15 pieces published in the 1980s. None of the research we found for this period was published in French.

The little research that exists centres on three topic areas: 1) Canadian women's participation in war, especially the Second World War; 2) Canadian women's deepening integration into the military over time, with a focus on their integration into combat and combat support roles; and 3) one lone article on women's experience in the RCMP.

Research on Canadian women serving in the Second World War owes much to the pioneering work of feminist historian Ruth Roach Pierson (1976, 1978, 1979, 1981, 1982, 1983 1986a,

1986b, 1988), which highlights women's wartime contributions alongside the marginalization and objectification they experienced *as women* in the armed forces. Her work stands out in applying gender as an analytical lens compared to other historical research on women's service in the world wars that tends to be more descriptive (see, for example, Gerald W. L. Nicholson's 1975 book, *Canada's Nursing Sisters*).

The second cluster of research published during this period centres on women's experiences in Canada's post-war military (Simpson, 1982), and the move towards their deepening integration into the military (Odorico, 1983; Scheuer, 1989). Here the work of military nurse LCol (Retired) Shirley Robinson stands out. Robinson famously authored the piece, "Women in Combat: The Last Bastion," in the journal *Canadian Women Studies* in 1985, as well as a 1988 piece entitled, "The Right to Serve: Women and the 'Combat Issue'". Robinson's writing is informed by her experiences as a military woman and advocate for women's integration into all military roles and Canadian women's right to equally serve in the military—including their right to fight in combat.

Finally, there is one piece we identified for this time period that examines "Attrition among Male and Female Members of the RCMP" (Linden, 1985). This piece is based on a survey study that oversamples female participants (serving and retired RCMP) to explore their job satisfaction and reasons for leaving. Unusual for its time, Rick Linden explicitly highlights that only women reported "discrimination or harassment and difficulty in arranging shifts compatible with those of a spouse", drawing attention to the intersections of gender with discrimination and relationship status (Linden, 1985, abstract).

It is worth noting that four of the 20 identified pieces of research about Canadian servicewomen and women Veterans for this period of 1885 to 1989 are based on student research: one doctoral dissertation by Simpson (1982) on the influence of supervisors' attitudes on the performance evaluation of women in the CAF, and three Master's theses on the experiences of Alberta women in the Second World War (Zwicker, 1985), on the experiences of women officers (Karmas, 1984), and on women's experiences in the SWINTER trials (Odorico, 1983). The fact that a fifth of the sources found for this period are authored by students as part of their degree completion requirements and nine pieces are written by one author (Pierson) indicates that the field of research on servicewomen and women Veterans is highly unevenly developed during this period. But as noted previously, we see an uptick in research in the 1980s as a reflection of growing advocacy for women's equal right to serve in combat.

No research was found that explicitly addresses the experiences of transgender women or explicitly includes them, and we must therefore assume that this research speaks only to the experiences of cisgender women.

### *Contemporary Research, 1990 to 2022*

For the period of 1990 to 2022, our search identified 112 English-language references related to Canadian military members and Veterans and five references related to the RCMP women. Topics include a much wider range than in the preceding century. French-language research included 17 additional references which are discussed separately below.



## *Military women*

Research on military women clusters around three topic areas: 1) women's integration and lived experience in the military; 2) women's participation in war; and 3) women's health.

Women's deepening integration into the military continues to be a key topic of interest, though with a shift in emphasis from challenging legal restrictions to exploring sociological barriers to women's full and meaningful integration. Research examines women's inclusion into combat roles (Symons, 1990), into regiments, such as the Royal Newfoundland Regiment (Kitchen, 2004), and into particular elements such as the Air Force (Power, 1998). There is much focus on women's leadership, especially in two edited volumes published by the Canadian Defence Academy Press (Belanger & Davis, 2010 and Davis, 2007). Karen Davis' (2007) edited volume *Women and Leadership in the Canadian Forces: Perspectives & experience* includes ten chapters by researchers and individuals with lived experience. The volume uses perspectives of women leaders in the military to illuminate the unique experiences of women and draws lessons about how leadership can support women's growing integration. The edited volume *Transforming Traditions: Women, leadership and the Canadian Navy, 1942–2010* was published in recognition of the Navy's centennial and examines the perspectives and experiences of women in the navy in 20 chapters, again through both lived experience narratives and academic research (Belanger & Davis, 2010). Donna Winslow and Jason Dunn's (2002) piece on "Women in the Canadian Forces: Between legal and social integration" is a key text that insightfully lays out the limitations of women's *social* integration into the CAF despite the removal of legal barriers.

The attrition of women from the military (Davis, 1994, 1997) drew particular attention during the 1990s, while recruitment and retention are key subjects of research interest today (MacKenzie & Gunaydin, 2022; von Hlatky & Imre-Millei, 2022; Waruszynski et al., 2019, 2022). Sexual harassment and sexual assault experienced by women in the military are also key topics of research focus (Gill & Febraro, 2013; Hajizadeh et al., 2019; Kovitz, 2000). More recently, women's mentorship in the CAF has emerged as a theme in Canadian research on military women (Tam-Seto, 2021, 2022; Tam-Seto & English, 2019; Tam Seto & Imre-Millei, 2022).

In the contemporary period, women's lived experience in the military across intersectional lines is beginning to receive more attention. This includes research on servicewomen as mothers (Taber, 2005; Yeboah-Ampadu, 2017), single parents (Skomorovsky et al., 2019), and racialized women (George, 2020). The experiences of lesbians in the military have been documented through the important work of Lynne Gouliquer and Carmen Poulin (Gouliquer, 2000; Gouliquer et al., 2018; Poulin et al., 2009; Poulin et al., 2018).

Servicewomen's participation in war continues to be an important theme. There is a significant cluster of research on Canadian nursing sisters in the First World War ( $n=23$ ), examining their experiences during deployments, impacts on their health, and how the war shaped the nursing profession. Nearly half of the references on nursing sisters are authored by just two scholars (Quiney, 1998a, 1998b, 2002, 2018 and Toman, 2003, 2005, 2007, 2008, 2015, 2016; see also Quiney & Landells, 1999). Furthermore, there is research on women's participation in the Second World War that highlights the experiences of subpopulations of women such as Jewish women (Lipton, 2017) and Indigenous women (Poulin, 2007), as well as women in the Women's Royal Canadian Naval Service (Redstone-Lewis, 2007). Analyses of media coverage on women in combat, with a focus on the war in Afghanistan, highlight the tensions in how women in war are portrayed as both equal with and different from men (Chapman & Eichler, 2014; Davis,

2011; Sjolander & Trevenen, 2010). The topic of military women in peacekeeping has begun to receive interest among emerging scholars (Biskupski-Mujanovic, 2019; Hassan, 2017).

Over the last decade, health-related research on servicewomen or with a sex or gender lens has emerged as a topic in the Canadian literature. This includes research on the health of CAF members with a sex lens (Hall et al., 2022; Mota et al., 2012; Mota et al., 2013; St Cyr et al., 2021; Tingelstad et al., 2018) and a gender lens (Oakley et al., 2020; Sudom et al., 2021). In this cluster of research, we also find a sex-based analysis of reasons for medical release (Serré, 2019). In 2020, we find the first Canadian article fully dedicated to military women's health, which examines cervical cancer screening for CAF women (Naiker & Hawes, 2020). The only other Canadian article fully dedicated to military women's health appears in 2022 and is focused on the association between reproductive health factors and musculoskeletal injuries in female CAF members (Puranda et al. 2022).

### *Women Military Veterans*

Compared to research on serving military women, much less research exists on women Veterans (women who have released or retired from the military or left wartime service). There is only one piece that explores benefits for women Veterans after the Second World War (Neary & Brown, 1995). Research has also emerged examining contemporary Canadian women Veterans' experiences during and after service (Eichler, 2022), including access to Veteran services (Shoemaker & von Hlatky, 2018; Tam-Seto & Dussault, 2022). There is also research on sex-based differences in post-service adjustment to civilian life (Hachey et al., 2016) and the sex- and gender-based differences in access to health care for Canadian Veterans (MacLean et al., 2021).

### *RCMP Women*

Our scoping review identified only five sources on women in the RCMP for this period, one of which is a Master's thesis published in 1990 (Comeau, 1990). All other sources on women in the RCMP are authored by Bonnie Reilly Schmidt, a research pioneer on this topic. Schmidt's research (based on her PhD dissertation) provides a detailed examination of women's fight for equality in the RCMP, including both internal and external perceptions of their role (Schmidt, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015).

### *Analytical Summary of Contemporary English Research*

We found 15 publications for the 1990s, 28 for the 2000s, and 45 for the 2010s, with 12 sources being from 2019 alone. Thus, beginning in 2019, there is a sharp rise in publications related to servicewomen and women Veterans. From 2020 to 2022, we identified 29 references that met our inclusion criteria, showing that the research area has reached a level of ongoing development with an average of just under 10 publications being added per year.

Most Canadian research in our area of interest examines women in the military. Significantly less research has been dedicated to CAF women Veterans and women RCMP members, and nothing captured during this period focuses explicitly on RCMP *Veteran* women. Research tends to focus on *either* serving women *or* women Veterans. We found only one piece for this period that includes both CAF servicewomen and women Veterans, with an overall focus on gender differences in

clinical presentation for Operational Stress Injuries among military personnel and Veterans (Oakley et al., 2020).

We see more of an intersectional lens emerging during this most recent period compared to the preceding decades and century. Research is beginning to look at the intersections of women's experiences with their ethnic or racial background, parental status, relationship status, sexuality, rank, element, and more, but many aspects of intersectionality are still missing from research on servicewomen and women Veterans.

We see new topics emerge such as sexual harassment in the military and women's attrition from the military that were not discussed in much detail earlier (though Linden's work did for the RCMP in 1985). A key new area of interest that emerges during this period is health. Only two references were dedicated to women's health, but several other pieces examine the health of CAF members and Veterans through a sex or gender lens.

Often one or two people dominate an area of research, such as Karen Davis on women's military integration or Lynne Gouliquer and Carmen Poulin on lesbian military women. While their dedication to research on servicewomen has greatly contributed to our knowledge base, it also indicates that the field is still underdeveloped and may not be sparking a wide interest among scholars.

Of the 112 references on the military and Veterans, 8 are doctoral dissertations and 15 are Master's theses. Of the five RCMP-related references, one is a doctoral dissertation and one a Master's thesis. That a fifth of the relevant literature is written by students, reflects that this is a research area that continues to be taken on primarily by junior scholars and much less so by senior military and Veteran researchers.

Remarkably, there is no contemporary research that we could identify for RCMP women since 2015, or on RCMP women Veterans specifically, which indicates a significant blind spot in the research. This is an important gap that cannot simply be filled by research on serving or Veteran CAF women. While there is some overlap in experiences and needs between CAF and RCMP women, there are likely also distinct experiences. Women RCMP members and Veterans therefore deserve research attention in their own right.

While some of the more recent research mentions transgender women in passing, for example as part of the 2SLGBTQI+ umbrella term, there is still no research dedicated to their experiences and most research does not explicitly state whether or not it includes transgender women. We must therefore assume that the reviewed research is overwhelmingly based on the experiences of cisgender women.

### *French-Language Research*

We conducted a separate search for French-language research. Research conducted in and reported on in French represents a small portion of the research on military and Veteran women. Only 17 publications were identified, including journal articles, books, and books chapters. All are published after 1990 and thus are discussed here as part of the contemporary Canadian research.

Thematically, most of the recent Canadian pieces ( $n=10$ ) which are available in French are concerned with women's integration into the CAF and the barriers to equitable employment they experience. These include, for example, research on the impact of women's inclusion on

operational readiness in the context of peace and security (Waruszynski et al., 2019) and on how the valuing of masculinity impacts the attrition of CAF members, especially of women (Désilets, 2021). Otherwise, this group of research is concerned with women's military contributions through nursing, especially during large conflicts, such as the First World War ( $n=7$ ).

Some Canadian research on military and Veteran women ( $n=5$ ) is published in bilingual sources and is thus available in both English and French, but most often represents a French translation of research originally conducted in English. Many of these pieces are found in the *Canadian Military Journal/Revue Militaire Canadienne*, which is a bilingual journal run by the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces.

Close to half of the French-language references ( $n=6$ ) are student theses, pointing to the uneven development of this research area. As we noted above in relation to the English-language research literature, this kind of uneven distribution of research on servicewomen and women Veterans indicates that while there is interest in the topic among junior scholars it is a topic that is undervalued by more senior scholars.

We could not identify how many of these 17 pieces had been conducted in French or completed with Francophone populations. That 5 of the 17 pieces were available in English and French suggests a significant portion of the research published in French may not necessarily be conducted in French. It is often not explicitly identified whether a piece of research was conducted in French or with French populations, which is a problem in and of itself. It is important for researchers to be clear about the language they are using in their research, and the language of the populations which they are investigating.

Overall, there is very little research on military and Veteran women in Canada conducted in and/or reported on in French. Importantly, very little research is being done on Francophone sub-communities among servicewomen and Veteran women in Canada. Indeed, this distinction is an important one: research being conducted and published in the French language cannot be assumed to be conducted on Francophone women. Moreover, it is important to consider Francophone women both within and outside of Quebec, such as in Acadia, Manitoba, and parts of Northern Ontario. Again, this research appears to not include the experiences of transgender women.

## Canadian Grey Literature

We identified 18 sources of Canadian grey literature through our searches. DND/CAF and VAC play a key role in military and Veteran research in Canada. For the purposes of this study, we have focused on grey literature such as research-based reports and other materials (e.g., scientific letters) produced or contracted by DND/CAF and VAC as well as other government departments, agencies, and fora such as Parliament.

In this scoping review, we chose not to include historic grey literature because it was not practical to seek access to historic reports, many of which are not organized or stored in a way that they can be readily shared with external researchers. For a partial list of historic grey literature related to internal DND/CAF research on women in the military, we refer readers to the extensive reference list in Davis' doctoral dissertation (Davis, 2013) which includes many DND/CAF relevant government sources on military women.

Some research produced by government departments and published in peer-reviewed journals walks the line between grey literature and academic research. We have chosen to include such work in our analysis of peer-reviewed literature above. Thus, we do not include grey literature that was also published in peer-reviewed journals in an almost identical fashion as part of our review of the grey literature.

This research is not always clear on how it defines women, with the exception of sex-based research which deals with cisgender women.

### *Military Women*

DND/CAF shared a large number of potentially relevant grey literatures with us; however, most did not fit our inclusion criteria. They did not deal directly with servicewomen and instead focused on adjacent areas of interest such as sexual misconduct. Sexual misconduct is a topic which overlaps with many women's issues. However, while it is a gendered issue it is not itself *about women* (though it is often problematically conflated with women).

Only 12 DND/CAF authored or contracted reports we found fell within our inclusion criteria. They cover two main research areas:

- 1) *Women's integration and lived experience*, including in the combat arms (Febbraro, 2003); their attraction, recruitment, and retention, in the primary reserve and the regular force (Earnscliff Strategy Group, 2017; Waruszynski et al., 2018; Waruszynski et al., 2021a, 2021b); the identification of barriers to women's participation in the military (Guerin & Howe, 2021) and on peacekeeping deployments (Phoenix Strategic Perspectives Inc., 2022); and a gender-focused workforce analysis of Naval Technical Officers' human resources data (Vincent, 2021).
- 2) *Military women's health*, including the role of gender and sex in military personnel health (Sudom, 2009) and sex disparities in musculoskeletal injuries in military members (Adamo & Semeniuk, 2021a; Adamo & Semeniuk, 2021b; Adamo & Semeniuk, 2022).

In addition to DND/CAF-produced or contracted grey literature, our review captured two more reports on Canadian servicewomen: the 2019 House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women Report, "A Force for Change: Creating a Culture of Equality for Women in the Canadian Armed Forces," and a 2017 report from the Privy Council Office, "Behavioural Insights Project: Increasing Recruitment of Women into the Canadian Armed Forces."

### *Veteran Women*

Over the past few years, the VAC Research Directorate has begun to apply a sex- and gender-lens to some of its research, though there is still minimal (internal and contracted) VAC research that exists on women Veterans. This research includes:

- One piece that provides a sex-disaggregated profile of Veterans in Canada released since 1998 (MacLean et al., 2018).
- One report contracted by the VAC Research Directorate on Canadian women Veterans' experiences of military-to-civilian transition (Eichler et al., 2022).

There is one relevant report from the Office of the Veterans Ombud entitled, “The Adjudication of Sexual Dysfunction Claims Consequential to an Entitled Psychiatric Condition.” This report documents sex-based biases in the tools and guidelines used by VAC to make decisions on disability benefit claims for sexual dysfunctions caused by medications used to treat mental health conditions. It finds that female VAC clients are disadvantaged in the decision-making process compared to male VAC clients (Poole & Siew, 2022).

### *RCMP Women*

The only grey literature directly on RCMP women identified in our scoping review is the Bastarache Report (2017), which focuses on the effects of sexual harassment on RCMP women. This report was produced as part of the implementation of the Merlo Davidson Settlement Agreement. It examines women and their experiences of sexual harassment through the lens of the RCMP’s toxic culture.

## Discussion: Contextualizing Canadian Research on Servicewomen and Women Veterans

This section provides a higher-level analysis of what we have found by summarizing key trends in the research area of Canadian servicewomen and women Veterans and identifying the most significant gaps. To situate the historic and contemporary literature discussed above, we briefly outline some of the existing international literatures on servicewomen and women Veterans as well as adjacent and other Canadian literatures.

### Situating our Findings

#### *International Context*

To provide context for the five Canadian scoping reviews we found, we also completed a rapid review of international scoping reviews, systematic reviews, literature reviews, and meta-analyses that focus on military and Veteran women. A full list of these international references can be found at the end of this report (see **Appendix C**). We used a stricter inclusion criterion for international reviews compared to Canadian reviews. We only included international reviews that had servicewomen and women Veterans as their main focus, whereas we included any Canadian reviews that had information on servicewomen and/or women Veterans even if the primary focus of the review was broader (e.g., on GBA Plus).

We identified 59 international reviews—all from the United States—covering a much broader range of topics specifically about servicewomen and women Veterans and offering more depth of research on individual topics than the five Canadian reviews. This indicates a much more developed state of research on servicewomen and women Veterans in the United States compared to Canada. A few highlights are:

- 26 of the international reviews focus on serving women, 29 focus on women Veterans, and 4 include both Veteran and serving women in the same study. *Similar to Canada, reviews covering both servicewomen and Veteran women or examining servicewomen/women Veterans over their life span are an exception.*
- Overarching themes in the international literature are: physical and/or mental health, pregnancy and reproductive health, health care and administration of benefits, physical injuries, sexual trauma, sleep health and disorders, and gender integration into the military (see **Table 2** for a detailed list of themes). *Unlike Canada, many more themes are explored, and health and well-being research on servicewomen and women Veterans is much more developed in breadth and depth.*
- Most international reviews we identified cover research completed on and in the American context and focus mainly on aspects of physical and mental health ( $n=15$ ). Reproductive and sexual health emerge as a particular area of interest ( $n=12$  in addition to the above 15). This is partly due to a special issue of the journal *Women's Health Issues* (Volume 31, Supplement 1) which focuses on military women's health. This 2017 special issue contains eight articles about military women in the United States, five of which focus on reproductive health and all of which are included in our analysis of international reviews on serving women. *Compared to the international literature, the*

*themes of physical and mental health and reproductive and sexual health of military and Veteran women is extremely underdeveloped in Canada.*

- Reviews on serving and Veteran women’s mental health, well-being, and physical health often address the topic(s) of health, well-being, and mental health very broadly while research on sexual and reproductive health, along with most other topics, are investigated in a patchwork fashion, focusing on specific elements rather than the overall picture. *These research themes are not well enough developed in the Canadian reviews and research literature to make a comparative assessment.*
- Compared to the international reviews, there is a general lack of reviews on Canadian serving and Veteran women. The landscape of scoping reviews, systematic reviews, literature reviews, and meta-analyses involving these populations is relatively new in Canada (with the first review published in 2017) and covers a narrower range of topics (e.g., a focus on military-to-civilian transition or mentoring). Three of the five Canadian reviews focus on gender broadly and not specifically on women or female service members/Veterans.
- There is lack of original Canadian research to be reviewed. The vast majority of themes from the international (i.e., United States) literature have not yet begun to be explored in the Canadian context, pointing to significant gaps in our knowledge of the specific experiences of Canadian servicewomen and Veteran women. Those looking for answers in the Canadian context must currently look to the international landscape for research on servicewomen and women Veterans.
- Much of the research covered in the United States reviews is produced by researchers affiliated with the VA and the Department of Defence. In addition, the United States has forums such as the Military Women’s Health Research Interest Group organized by the TriService Nursing Research Program with the goal to “expand the foundation of knowledge upon which can be built expert practices in the preventive, acute, and chronic health care of servicewomen and evidenced-based policies and programs” (*Military Women’s Health RIG, 2022*). Even the United Kingdom, which also lags behind the United States in this research field of servicewomen and women Veterans, now has a third-sector (non-governmental) research centre dedicated to servicewomen, the Centre for Military Women’s Research, that was launched in 2021 (*Centre for Military Women’s Research, 2022*).



**Table 2**

*Themes Identified in International Reviews About Serving and/or Veteran Women*

<p><b>Physical Health</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physical injuries             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Amputees</li> <li>◦ Brain injuries</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Cancer</li> <li>• Clinical complexity and comorbidities             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Multisystem illnesses</li> <li>◦ Chronic diseases</li> <li>◦ Pain and pain conditions</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Palliative and hospice care</li> </ul> <p><b>Reproductive and Sexual Health</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Impact of service on sexual and reproductive health</li> <li>• Sexual function/dysfunction             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ MST and sexual function/dysfunction</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Sexual behaviours</li> <li>• Fertility/Infertility</li> <li>• Contraceptive use</li> <li>• Menstruation             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Menstrual suppression</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Pregnancy             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Unplanned pregnancy</li> <li>◦ Abortion</li> <li>◦ Perinatal health and outcomes</li> <li>◦ C-Sections</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Post-pregnancy health and well-being             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Mental health</li> <li>◦ Return to work</li> <li>◦ Breastfeeding</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Menopause</li> <li>• Cervical cancer</li> <li>• Sexually Transmitted Infections</li> <li>• Gynecological care</li> <li>• Bladder conditions/pelvic floor issues</li> </ul> <p><b>Mental Health</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Specific Disorders             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Eating disorders</li> <li>◦ Adjustment disorder</li> <li>◦ Personality disorders</li> <li>◦ Schizophrenia</li> <li>◦ Substance-use disorders</li> <li>◦ Non-PTSD anxiety disorders</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Co-existing mental health conditions</li> <li>• Military Sexual Trauma</li> <li>• Moral injury</li> <li>• Mood regulation</li> </ul> <p><i>(Mental Health continued top of next column)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stress</li> <li>• Suicide</li> <li>• Adverse childhood experiences</li> <li>• Risks and protective factors</li> <li>• Therapies and interventions</li> </ul> <p><b>Healthcare and Administration of Benefits</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to care             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Barriers to care</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Quality of Care</li> <li>• Health care utilization patterns             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ For Veterans who are VAC clients and those who are not</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Impacts of service-related disabilities on Veterans</li> <li>• Healthcare/treatment outcomes</li> </ul> <p><b>Intersectional Considerations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visible minorities             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Indigeneity</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Aging/life-span research</li> <li>• Spirituality or Religion</li> <li>• Sexual and Gender Minorities:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Experiences of both trans and cis LGBTQ members</li> <li>◦ MST and sexual minorities</li> <li>◦ Protective factors of service for LGBTQ service members</li> <li>◦ Physical health of sexual and gender minorities with large sample sizes</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b>Community</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social support</li> <li>• Family and other important relationships</li> </ul> <p><b>Other Concerns</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sleep health and disorders</li> <li>• Interpersonal violence (women as victims and perpetrators of)</li> <li>• Veterans and the criminal justice system</li> <li>• Housing insecurity</li> <li>• Recruitment and retention</li> <li>• Resilience and agency</li> <li>• Clinical research</li> <li>• Disabilities</li> <li>• Alternative treatments</li> <li>• Comorbid conditions</li> <li>• Occupational health and safety</li> </ul>
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## *Implications*

In contrast to the United States, in Canada DND/CAF and VAC do not take a leadership role on servicewomen and women Veteran research nor do they make data readily available or accessible to external researchers. VAC has access to information about clients with service-related injuries and treatment-seeking Veterans that cannot be replicated by external researchers. Although this information may not be intended to be used for research, it is a lost opportunity not to leverage VAC client data to better understand the strengths, needs, and context of treatment-seeking women and female Veterans. In a report out of the Office of the Veterans Ombud, Poole and Siew (2022) found that VAC data may not currently be used to its full potential, which therefore limits what we know about treatment-seeking Veterans in Canada. VAC organizes data on their clients using medical pension codes, “which are designed to determine treatment benefits rather than provide information for statistical analysis” (Poole & Siew, 2022, p. 15). VAC was unable to provide information on the gender of clients, certain types of claims, and other important information. The authors state, “We are concerned that, in general, these data issues are not limited to specific program areas but are endemic across programs” (Poole & Siew, 2022, p. 17). In contrast, the United States VA is set up as a research institution and is prolific in its research on servicewomen and women Veterans. They effectively leverage their data, which could be emulated in the Canadian context. Similarly, CAF has access to information about serving women that cannot be replicated by external research, and that is not readily accessible to researchers external to government or in government but external to DND/CAF (Arbour, 2022, pp. 58-59). There are limitations within government to use information for its intended purpose only and not outside of that, so it may require legislative or regulatory changes to make government data more available for research in Canada.

## *Canadian Context*

### *Adjacent Research*

While reviewing the historic and contemporary research on Canadian servicewomen and women Veterans, we came across a large body of “adjacent” research ( $n=96$ ) that is broadly relevant to the topic but not specifically *about women* or specifically applying a sex or gender lens. These 96 references (56 of which fell into the grey literature category) did not meet our inclusion criteria but are noteworthy for the context they bring to the research about Canadian servicewomen and women Veterans. A full list of these references can be found at the end of the report (see **Appendix D**). There are two categories of adjacent literature relevant to Canadian servicewomen and women Veterans:

- 1) Research that is not focused on military women themselves but on the culture, equity, diversity, and inclusion challenges confronting male-normative and male-dominated institutions such as the CAF, VAC, and RCMP. The relevant literature includes reports on CAF such as the Deschamps Report (2015), the Arbour Report (2022), and the Minister of National Defence Advisory Panel on Systemic Racism and Discrimination Report (2022). For the RCMP, this includes reports such as the Standing Senate Committee on National Security and Defence (2013) report titled, *Conduct Becoming: Why the Royal Canadian Mounted Police must transform its culture*. These reports provide broader context and examine the culture in which CAF

and RCMP servicewomen must operate. Auditor General reports on recruitment and retention and on inappropriate sexual behaviour in the CAF (Office of the Auditor General, 2016, 2018) also fall into this category of adjacent literature as does one recent DND/CAF Ombudsman (2022) report on employment equity.

- 2) Research and grey literature that do not seek to study sex/gender differences, but coincidentally report on them. This includes, for example, research that mentions sex differences in military members' transition and health outcomes (McCuaig Edge et al., 2022), Veterans' health care access and use (McLean et al., 2021), and Veteran suicide rates (Simkus & VanTil, 2018; Simkus et al., 2019; Simkus et al., 2017). These articles mention female Veterans, but the analysis is not focused on them, and gender is not employed as an analytical category. This type of research is a step in the right direction, helping to fill gaps in knowledge about women, but still misses the mark by not integrating a sex and gender lens into the research design.

While the above adjacent research literatures provide important context for our research question, it is important that they not be equated with research dedicated to servicewomen and women Veterans.

### *Other Canadian Research*

We also considered how existing servicewomen and women Veteran research connects to other forms of research, specifically Canadian women's health research and Canadian research on women in non-traditional occupations. In reviewing recent scoping reviews, systematic reviews, literature reviews, and meta-analyses on Canadian women's health, we found that none of them include information on military or Veteran women, highlighting the disconnect between military-related and civilian-related research on women's health in Canada (e.g., King & Busolo, 2022; McLaughlin et al., 2022; Paynter et al., 2022). In reviewing recent Canadian literature on women in non-traditional occupations, we similarly found that while there were overlapping themes, researchers rarely collaborate or reference each other's work across military and civilian lines (with the exception of Gouliquer et al., 2020).

The lack of connection we found between Canadian women's health research and Canadian research on women in non-traditional occupations, on the one hand, and Canadian research on servicewomen and women Veterans, on the other hand, represents an untapped opportunity for interdisciplinary collaboration and sharing of best practices. It highlights the need for leadership on cross-sectoral collaborative research across military and civilian spheres. One key gap is the need for more research comparing servicewomen and women Veterans to women in the Canadian general population. While doing such comparisons is important, there are also important caveats to keep in mind. Military and civilian women are not necessarily comparable groups. On average, Adverse Childhood Experiences scores are higher among military members and are highly interrelated with health outcomes (McCauley et al., 2015). Furthermore, medical standards required to enter the military lead to the exclusion of people with a number of health-impacting conditions common in the Canadian general population. Therefore, more nuanced matched studies are needed to be able to make truly meaningful comparisons between servicewomen and women in the general population. Age, childhood experiences and exposures, drinking histories, parental supports, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity, parity status, etc. will vary for women with a service history and need controlling for comparisons to be

accurate and helpful. If conducted well, such comparisons could provide important information about the distinct health and well-being outcomes of servicewomen and women Veterans.

### *Implications*

This brief discussion situating Canadian research on servicewomen and women Veterans within Canadian research more broadly highlights that servicewomen and women Veterans are often left invisible both in current military and Veteran research *and* in relevant civilian-related research on women. Servicewomen and women Veterans seem to fall between the cracks of military and civilian research, as they are not the focus in either of these research areas: they do not fit into military research because they fall outside the male norm, and they do not fit into civilian research because they fall outside the civilian norm (Eichler, 2022). Therefore, research and research funding need to be specifically dedicated to develop this field to be on par with international standards. This is also a necessary step in responding to government calls for expanding women's representation in the military and ensuring sex- and gender-appropriate care and services.

## **A Nascent Field: Canadian Research on Servicewomen and Women Veterans**

Based on our analysis of findings and the context provided by the international and Canadian research more broadly, Canadian servicewomen and women Veteran research can be seen as a nascent field, but one characterized by key limitations that we describe below (see also **Figure 3**).

### *Characteristics of the Field*

- The field of Canadian servicewomen and women Veteran research has been historically neglected, undervalued, and marginalized in Canadian military and Veteran research.
- There is very little research that focuses specifically on military and Veteran women's needs, experiences, and health and well-being outcomes.
- Relatively few themes are covered in Canadian servicewomen and women Veteran research. Most of the research focuses on the general "problem" of women's integration into the armed forces and women's participation in the CAF and in wars. There are significant knowledge gaps in the Canadian literature about serving and Veteran women during and post service and across the life course.
- The international research points to sex- and gender-specific military occupational hazards and life impacts on servicewomen and women Veterans that remain largely unexplored in the Canadian context.
- The field lacks longitudinal research. Research tends to focus on *either* serving women *or* women Veterans, with very few pieces including both serving and retired/released military or RCMP women.
- Most of the research focuses on military women, followed by research on women Veterans, and almost no research exists on RCMP servicewomen and women Veterans.

- The field lacks comparative research. Very little research compares Canadian *military* women with 1) military men, 2) military women internationally, 3) civilian women in general, and 4) civilian women in male-dominated occupations. Similarly, there is little comparative research between Canadian *Veteran* women and 1) Veteran men, 2) Veteran women internationally, 3) civilian women in general, and 4) civilian women in male-dominated occupations. The same lack of comparative work applies to RCMP servicewomen and women Veterans. These gaps pose challenges for researchers to build on in developing research on servicewomen and women Veterans.
- The existing research is uneven across the social and health/medical sciences, with a stronger development of social sciences research than health research on servicewomen and women Veterans.
- There are significant *gaps* in health research and clinical medical research on servicewomen and women Veterans, especially reproductive and sexual health, physical injury, mental health, interpersonal violence, chronic pain, pelvic floor health, and sleep.
- There is a lack of integrated social sciences and health research on servicewomen and women Veterans in Canada, which is arguably an important conduit to gaining holistic knowledge of the needs of women.
- There is a lack of health research that holistically addresses the mental, physical, social, psychological, and spiritual health needs of servicewomen and women Veterans in Canada.
- There is a lack of mixed-methods research, which would be beneficial to achieving a holistic understanding of women's experiences in the military and after. A notable exception is the recent work by Kristi Adamo and her team on musculoskeletal injuries (e.g., Adamo & Semeniuk, 2022).
- There is much less French-language research compared to English-language research on servicewomen and women Veterans in Canada.
- There is almost no research that focuses on racialized people and First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples as it intersects with research on servicewomen and women Veterans.
- There is no research that explicitly focuses on the experiences, needs, and challenges of trans military and Veteran women.

These gaps are significant and filling them would help ensure sex- and gender-informed harm prevention and care for service-related injuries and illness, and their sequelae over the lifespan of a woman (work, childbearing, menopause, aging, etc.). The gaps that need to be filled should minimally include the breadth and depth of themes identified in international research on servicewomen and women Veterans (see **Table 2**) as well as the ones listed above. Canadian-specific new themes should be addressed as they emerge.

### Figure 3

#### *Select Key Characteristics of Canadian Research on Servicewomen and Women Veterans*



How do we best understand why the field of servicewomen and women Veteran research is what it is in Canada? Below we discuss some of the reasons that explain why this has been a historically neglected, underdeveloped, and marginalized field of study within Canadian military and Veteran research (see also **Figure 4**).

#### *Why the Field is What it is*

- The application of SAGER principles is lacking in the broader military and Veteran research community, which further undermines our collective ability to produce research knowledge about servicewomen and women Veterans.
- Small sample sizes of women in past military and Veterans population-level studies have made it difficult to produce knowledge on women. The need for oversampling women has been neglected. Qualitative research has helped fill in some gaps in research, but is not sufficient.
- There is a lack of sex and gender disaggregated data from VAC and CAF (and the RCMP), and the data that exists is not readily shared, which makes it more difficult for external civilian researchers to develop research on servicewomen and women Veterans.
- It is a small field in terms of the number of researchers. Furthermore, a significant proportion of the research is produced by graduate students, many of whom do not go on to build full-time careers in this field, which is a loss to the field.
- It is very difficult for external civilian researchers to gain access to military members for the purpose of conducting research, especially in an operational context (i.e., on operations and deployments).

**Figure 4**

*Reasons for Current State of Canadian Research on Servicewomen and Women Veterans*



- There is a lack of dialogue and collaboration in Canada between research on military/Veteran women and women’s research more broadly. Instead, these research fields exist in silos, separated by the military-civilian divide, missing opportunities for cross-fertilization and cross-disciplinary collaboration.
- Research on servicewomen and women Veterans has been reactive, driven by external media attention, legal pressure, and advocacy by women, especially women MST survivors, and their allies, rather than by a coordinated intrinsic government-led interest in producing evidence-based research.
- There has been no dedicated government funding to develop research on servicewomen and women Veterans in Canada, in recognition of the need to undo existing biases in past research and fill in our knowledge base.
- While the research field of Canadian servicewomen and women Veterans has been experiencing growth over the past few years, there remains a lack of government leadership and of a coordinated cross-sectoral approach to this research.
- There is little to no overlap, synergy, or coordination at the federal government level between DND/CAF and VAC funded research on women *and other* federally funded research on women by, for example, the Department of Health or Women and Gender Equality Canada.

- There is a missed opportunity in Canada where government departments do not 1) take the lead on research on servicewomen and women Veterans, 2) miss crucial opportunities to collect, analyze, and share data, 3) tend to shy away from collaboration with external researchers, and 4) tend to not make internal research readily available to external researchers.

The next section discusses what can be done to overcome the current limitations that characterize the field of servicewomen and women Veteran research in Canada.



## Moving Forward: From Where We Are to Where We Need to Be

Today, the importance of systematically and meaningfully including women in military and Veteran research is beginning to be recognized by government and non-governmental stakeholders, and is reflected in recent DND/CAF and VAC ministerial mandate letters (Trudeau, 2021, 2021a, 2021b). However, the term ‘women’ is often not explicitly defined or examined, and sex and gender are often confused or conflated. As this new research interest develops, attention needs to be paid to *how* research on servicewomen and women Veterans is conducted. There are important conceptual and ethical considerations that should guide this research to ensure that it is theoretically and methodologically sound but also that it is respectful, empowering, not harmful or re-traumatizing, and useful to military and Veteran women themselves. After outlining emerging initiatives and suggesting best practices to be followed in military and Veteran women research, we end this section with a set of concrete recommendations for government and the broader research community to help advance research on servicewomen and women Veterans in Canada.

### Current Context: Emerging Stakeholder Initiatives

There are several emerging government and non-governmental stakeholder initiatives that are important to be aware of as we propose ways to move forward the agenda of servicewomen and women Veteran research in Canada.

#### *DND/CAF*

The 2021 Minister of National Defence Mandate Letter includes new emphasis on servicewomen’s needs, including “Expanding health services available to women in the CAF, ensuring comprehensive access to sexual and reproductive health resources” and “Increasing investments to understand and address the clinical, occupational and deployment health needs of CAF women” (Trudeau, 2021). The 2022 federal budget proposes funding “to expand the Canadian Armed Forces’ health services and physical fitness programs to be more responsive to women and gender-diverse military personnel” (Department of Finance Canada, 2022, p. 136).

In the process of our consultations, we found out that DND/CAF is currently in the process of developing a Women’s and Diversity Health Strategy under the purview of the Directorate of Force Health Protection. Several organizations within DND/CAF are working on servicewomen’s health issues, including DRDC which has contracted a scientometric study on servicewomen research to the National Research Council Canada. Contracted research has recently been completed by Adamo and her team on sex disparities in musculoskeletal injuries among CAF members. This research identified additional areas for potential follow-up studies including on the connections between musculoskeletal injuries and reproductive health concerns unique to military women (Adamo & Semeniuk, 2021a; Adamo & Semeniuk, 2021b; Adamo & Semeniuk, 2022; Puranda et al., 2022).

All of these initiatives indicate a renewed interest in military women, and in particular in military women’s health, research, and services. However, it is important to keep in mind that these initiatives are in their infancy, and it is too early to assess what their outcomes might be. At this time, there appears to be no full-time women’s health subject matter expert at CAF. All CAF military women’s health work appears to currently be done on a part time and/or secondary duty

basis. Furthermore, what was originally conceived of as a separate Women's Health Strategy seems to be now folded into a broader Women's and Diversity Health Strategy, which may once again make women's unique sex- and gender-specific needs and experiences less tangible and visible.

## *VAC*

In May 2019, VAC held the first Women Veterans Forum in Charlottetown, PEI, to discuss the sex- and gender-specific experiences and needs of women Veterans (Veterans Affairs Canada, 2019b). In March 2020, VAC officially announced the opening of its new Office of Women and LGBTQ2 Veterans (Veterans Affairs Canada, 2020). The mandate of the Office is “to work with Veterans, key stakeholders, experts and other Government departments to identify and address challenges and issues specific to women and LGBTQ2 Veterans and their families” (Veterans Affairs Canada, 2020). The Office works horizontally across VAC to raise awareness about the needs of women and LGBTQ2 Veterans as well as about GBA Plus.

Furthermore, VAC's Research Directorate has begun the task of integrating GBA Plus into its work over the past few years. This led, for example, to a working group on “Female Veterans: What do We Know and Where Do We Go from Here” at the 2018 CIMVHR Forum (co-organized by Michelle Morrison and Mary Beth MacLean from VAC and Maya Eichler from Mount Saint Vincent University).

Most significantly, VAC's Research Directorate developed a profile of female and male Veterans in Canada (MacLean et al., 2018) and continues to examine its data collection through a GBA Plus lens to determine sex- and gender-specific experiences and most urgent GBA Plus related research needs. In the course of our consultations, we learnt that the VAC Research Directorate has developed a VAC Women Veterans Research Plan (MacLean et al., 2021), which functions as a living document. It has four main pillars: the well-being of women Veterans; equitable access to and satisfaction with VAC's programs and services; GBA Plus/ intersectionality; sex, gender, and military culture. As part of the Women Veterans Research Plan, three external research projects have been funded on women's military-to-civilian transition, the experiences of military members with MST, and women Veterans homelessness. There is one additional relevant project that was funded through the VAC Veteran and Family Well-Being Fund, the Servicewomen's Salute Portal Project (Servicewomen's Salute, 2022). The Portal was not yet up and running at the time of the writing of this report but could potentially become a significant tool for storing and sharing research on Canadian servicewomen and women Veterans.

While women Veteran research is beginning to be undertaken by VAC, it is mostly being contracted out and it is being broadly conceived to include research on military sexual trauma, military culture, and 2SLGBTQI+ Veteran issues.

## *Centres of Excellence*

VAC funds two Centres of Excellence for Veteran medical care: the Atlas Institute for Veterans and Families (previously called the Centre of Excellence on PTSD and related Mental Health Conditions) and the Chronic Pain Centre of Excellence for Canadian Veterans. Both have begun to turn their attention to sex, gender, and women Veteran issues. The Chronic Pain Centre is

conducting research on “Identifying Differences in Chronic Pain Treatment Based on Sex and Gender in Canadian Veterans” (Chronic Pain Centre of Excellence for Canadian Veterans, 2022). Atlas has recently (Fall 2022) hosted a series of virtual conversations with women Veterans to inform the development of a participatory research project on women Veterans (Atlas Institute for Veterans and Families, 2022). For this purpose, Atlas has also produced a resource on “Women Veterans’ Health Research” that identifies emerging themes and possible gaps for Canadian women Veteran research (Atlas Institute for Veterans and Families, n.d.).

### Best Practices: Conceptual and Ethical Considerations

As research interest in servicewomen and women Veterans increases in and beyond government, it is important to consider how this research is undertaken. Simply adding women to the way we have conducted military and Veteran research in the past—with its systemic sex and gender biases—is problematic and can potentially cause harm (Eichler, 2017). If researchers follow the dominant “add women and stir” type of approach, they are likely to continue using male-assumed questions without capturing the unique sex- and gender-specific experiences and needs of servicewomen and women Veterans. Below we outline best practices that should be followed when conducting research on servicewomen and women Veterans (see also **Figure 5**).

**Figure 5**

*Best Practices for Conducting Research on Servicewomen and Women Veterans*



### *Conceptual Considerations*

At the very minimum, all military and Veteran research needs to apply Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA Plus) and follow Sex and Gender Equity in Research (SAGER) guidelines. GBA Plus as adopted by the Government of Canada calls for a consideration of how the effects of sex and gender intersect with, and may be exacerbated, by other individual or structural factors rooted class, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, Indigeneity, relationship or marital status, age, and more. GBA Plus is a mainstreaming tool to ensure that all policies, programs, and research are inclusive and do not have unintended downstream effects on women, men, non-binary, or gender diverse people across intersectionalities (Government of Canada, 2022). GBA Plus is used across government departments, agencies, and funding bodies, though it is still inconsistently and often superficially applied at VAC and DND/CAF (we are unsure about how it is applied by the RCMP). In the context of health research, GBA Plus is sometimes referred to as SGBA Plus in order to highlight the importance of including consideration of sex in addition to gender, but GBA Plus should include consideration of both sex and gender within an intersectional framework (Health Canada, 2022).

SAGER guidelines call on authors to carefully use the terms sex and gender, and for research to be designed in ways that can reveal potential sex-related and/or gender-related differences or aspects (Heidari et al., 2016). In 2020, CIMVHR as well as VAC adopted SAGER guidelines as a requirement for researchers working with them. As far as we know, DND/CAF and the RCMP have not officially endorsed SAGER guidelines. For additional resources on how to apply GBA/SGBA Plus and SAGER in military and veteran research, see CIMVHR (2020), Eichler (2021), and Belanger et al. (2021).

Beyond GBA Plus and SAGER, feminist theory offers important and more wide-ranging considerations for how to carry out research on servicewomen and women Veterans. Feminism is, among other things, “a mode of analysis... a way of asking questions and searching for answers” that foregrounds sex and gender as categories of analysis (Hartsock, quoted in Cameron, 2019, p. 2). Feminist theory underscores the importance of distinguishing sex from gender (Eichler, 2017), and any research on servicewomen and women Veterans needs to begin with a clear application and correct use of sex and gender concepts. Sex refers to biological classification as male, female, or intersex. It is based on anatomical, hormonal, chromosomal, and genetic distinctions. Gender refers to socio-cultural norms, behaviours, and roles associated with masculinity and femininity as well as to non-binary gender expressions (gender fluid, Two-Spirit, any combination of masculine/feminine). Gender is attributed based on perceived sex, but individuals may not identify with their sex assigned at birth. Sex and gender interact in a large variety of ways. Gender refers to both structural normative aspects and individual identity and expression. It is important for researchers to consider both sex and gender, and their interplay (Eichler, 2021).

Feminist theory underscores that not all women’s lives are shaped in the same way by their sex and gender position in society. It is therefore necessary to examine overlaps and intersections between sex/gender as well as the intersections of sex and gender with other individual or structural factors. Thus, “intersectionality”—a framework first developed by Black feminist legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989)—is part and parcel of conducting feminist-informed research on military and Veteran women. Intersectionality has specific relevance in the military context, where layers of disadvantage may arise, for example, as a result of overlapping experiences of

lower rank, racialized status, gender, relationship status, and non-heteronormative family constellations as well as through the societal and military manifestations and intersections of racism, sexism, homophobia, and more.

In research on servicewomen and women Veterans, it is important to keep in mind that women's experiences are connected to structural and systemic power inequalities based on sex and gender (Hudson, 2020). The goal of feminist-informed research is not only to describe women's experiences or their health outcomes (though that is an important first step) but to help explain *why* women are having these experiences and outcomes and to help bring about positive change leading to greater equity (Eichler, 2017).

One observation we made in the course of our consultations is that there is a newly emerging trend among government (that is replicated in research) to lump together all minority populations in an attempt to address inclusion and diversity. This trend leads to a conflation of the experiences and needs of minority populations and, we believe, does not serve any particular subpopulation well. One can see this trend, for example, in the creation of an Office of Women and LGBTQ2 Veterans at VAC or in the CAF Women's and Diversity Health Strategy. One might term this new approach the "Women Plus" problem—lumping women and other diverse minorities together. While sex- and gender-blindness or neutrality was a key obstacle to servicewomen and women Veteran research in the past, the "Women Plus" approach presents new challenges related to making military and Veteran women's unique sex- and gender-specific experiences and needs visible. While initiatives to promote equity, diversity, and inclusion may benefit women, catch-all solutions meant to resolve issues of inequities for all minority military members and Veterans create new blind spots.

While conducting our consultations, we were also faced with the question of whether all trans and non-binary people should be included in research targeting women. When deciding how and whether to include trans and non-binary people in research specifically about women or female members or Veterans, we recommend starting by evaluating the research goals. Including all groups would appear more inclusive but could be less meaningful. Some studies are concerned with sex differences, others with gender differences, and some with both. Moreover, it is important to keep in mind that cis women's sex- and gender-specific health needs are unique and will have to be addressed separately. For instance, one would not include trans women in a study about cervical cancer among CAF women. Trans and non-binary service members and Veterans should be included in research where appropriate to the research questions and goals, but in many cases, they will require their own separate research. Rather than grouping women, non-binary, and trans military members and Veterans together for the sake of inclusion, it is most vital to have clarity on research questions, goals, and design in order to decide whether the research requires a focus on a particular group of women (e.g., cis women, lesbians, non-binary people, trans women, racialized women, etc.) or include *all* women. Arguably, it may be more useful in the future to clearly separate research on all women, research on cis women versus trans women, research on broader gendered issues such as MST, and research on broader diversity issues such as sexuality. These are all separate topics that deserve their own dedicated research.

### *Ethical Considerations*

Canada has national research guidelines on how to ethically conduct research involving human participants—the Canadian Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS 2) guidelines on ethics. These guidelines apply to all research being conducted within institutions eligible to receive Tri-Council funding. The central principles of TCPS 2 are “Respect for Persons, Concern for Welfare, and Justice” (Canadian Institutes of Health Research et al., 2018). Responsible and ethical research requires: the ongoing informed consent of participants; fairness and equity in research design, conduct, and application; ensuring the privacy and confidentiality of research participants; and more.

The policy addresses issues such as conflict of interest and how to responsibly engage in research with vulnerable or potentially vulnerable populations, which would include all servicewomen and women Veterans, and ensuring fairness and equity in research participation so the benefits and burdens of research are shared equitably.

The TCPS 2 emphasizes the need to be attentive to sex and gender to ensure equity and fairness in research:

Women have historically been inappropriately excluded from participating in some research. This exclusion of women, where unwarranted, has delayed the advancement of knowledge, denied potential benefits to women, and exposed women to harm when research findings from male-only research projects were generalized inappropriately to women, as has often been the case in clinical drug trials. The inclusion of women in research advances the commitment to Justice, improves the generalizability of research findings to women where that is a goal of the research, and is essential to ensure that women and men benefit equally from research (Canadian Institutes for Health Research et al., 2018, p. 50).

While not explicitly stating their definition of ‘women’ in the quotation above, it is important to note that depending on the particular research question and topic, this statement will apply to the inclusion of cis or trans women, or both, depending on the research context.

The TCPS 2 also provides important ethical questions and considerations for research on vulnerable and Indigenous populations that are highly relevant to the military and Veteran context. These are:

- How can harm be prevented and risks minimized?
- How can lived experience voices be meaningfully included?
- How can research become more equitable and inclusive?
- How can benefits of research be accrued more equitably?

All military and Veteran women (cis and trans) need to be actively included, in a trauma-informed way, and have an organized voice in military and Veteran research (as well as policy, program, and care design).

TCPS 2 resonates with feminist scholarship which foregrounds questions of ethics and power in the research process and integrates strategies to address power differentials between the researcher and the researched into their research design. These strategies include self-reflexivity of the researcher on their positionality, participatory research tools, and trauma-awareness (Nagy Hesse-Biber, 2013). Awareness of power differentials and the need to prevent harm to

potentially vulnerable populations (e.g., all military and Veteran women) can be enhanced by applying robust tools such as those of the Canadian Tri-Council.

### *How to Engage Women in Research About Them*

Research conducted on servicewomen and women Veterans should seek to actively involve the populations under study. This can be done through these steps, for example:

- Consult with relevant women and consider co-creation of the research design with them (e.g., in determining the research questions, the methods, the objectives, etc.)
- Design participatory community-engaged research (such as participatory action research), where the appropriate communities have a stake in the research itself and have guaranteed access to the research findings.
- In the implementation and knowledge mobilization, inform the community being studied about the results and actively include them in interpreting the results and in deciding on knowledge translation and policy or program implementation (for the participatory elements that should guide women's research, see, for example: Chrystal et al., 2022).

Women should be actively included in military/Veteran research design, implementation, and knowledge application to ensure the research being conducted is of benefit to them and does not reproduce existing power inequalities. Moving forward, servicewomen and women Veteran voices could also be included in ethics review boards approving military/Veteran research as another way to minimize harm and maximize benefits to the community.

### *Trauma-Informed and Military Culture-Aware Research*

Research on all (cis and trans) serving and Veteran women must be trauma-informed, which involves actively finding ways to prevent any (further) harm being done during research involving potentially vulnerable research participants. This means researchers must learn about the many sources and manifestations of trauma among military and Veteran women, and how to not re-traumatize them as research participants. Considering the small size of the serving and Veteran women population, it is also advisable that researchers collaborate in order to, where possible, minimize the burden on women of time, energy, and effort of retelling their stories. Trauma-informed practices include empowerment, maximizing choice and control, collaboration and relationship building, promoting safety, respect, and acceptance, highlighting strengths and resilience, minimizing possibilities for traumatization, fostering cultural competence, valuing flexibility, and openness to critique (Elliott et al., 2005).

As TCPS 2 also states:

In general, researchers should be familiar with the cultural, social and economic circumstances of prospective participants, groups or communities. Researchers should anticipate, to the best of their ability, needs of participants, groups and their communities that might arise in any given research project (Canadian Institutes of Health Research et al., 2018, p. 54).

Thus, a trauma-informed approach goes hand-in-hand with an awareness and understanding of military culture, including its long-standing history of sexism and misogyny, as it intersects with

other forms of oppression and marginalization such as racism, homophobia, settler colonialism, and ableism (Minister of National Defence Advisory Panel on Systemic Racism and Discrimination, 2022). Without a deep awareness of military history and the lived experiences of servicewomen and women Veterans, the risk of re-traumatization is increased.

Research needs to begin from the principle of “do no harm.” This means ensuring it does not lead to additional risks, burdens, or harms to those being studied. It is best practice to require training of researchers to ensure trauma awareness, sex and gender awareness, military culture awareness, and robust knowledge of how to apply the principles of TCPS 2 by those conducting research with servicewomen and women Veterans.

## Recommendations

Compared to the past, there is much more research on servicewomen and women Veterans being undertaken today, and more is in progress. There is also much more focus on women at VAC and DND/CAF compared to the past. What will it take to turn this momentum and these disparate initiatives into a concerted strategy to fill the existing gaps? Existing historic and contemporary research on servicewomen and women Veterans is primarily driven by the needs of government and external pressure rather than the needs of women themselves. It is time to pivot the focus to research that benefits all (cis and trans) serving and Veteran women and captures their unique experiences and health and well-being needs. Overall, there is an urgent need for strategic and coordinated interdisciplinary, cross-departmental, and cross-sectoral collaboration to fill the gaps in existing research knowledge on servicewomen and women Veterans. Academic researchers cannot make the necessary progress in this area of research without government leadership, dedicated funding, and strategic coordination and collaboration.

### *Recommendations for Government*

- Acknowledge and clearly articulate the gaps in servicewomen and women Veteran research in Canada.
- Allocate consistent and dedicated funding for servicewomen and women Veteran research in Canada to fill the existing gaps.
- Ideally, DND/CAF and VAC would collaboratively lead research on servicewomen and women Veterans. This could include, for example, a DND/CAF and VAC led Research Roundtable or Research Interest Group on military and Veteran women research. The RCMP should be included in these efforts.
- If not interested or able to do so, DND/CAF and VAC could fund the creation of an external university-based research chair in military and Veteran women’s health and well-being research.
- DND/CAF and VAC should consider creating dedicated full-time positions for women’s research to help ensure the necessary coordination of research required to advance military and Veteran women’s research and translate this knowledge into actionable policy, programming, and services.



- DND/CAF and VAC are encouraged to make data about Canadian serving and Veteran women publicly available and easily accessible to external researchers.
- VAC client data could be leveraged to better understand the strengths, needs, and context of treatment-seeking women Veterans.
- DND/CAF is encouraged to find ways to make data on military women, and other sex- and gender-disaggregated data, available to researchers external to DND/CAF. Research on serving women simply cannot be done in an effective way without cooperation and collaboration from CAF.
- DND/CAF should consider compiling and making publicly available a list of all historic and recent servicewomen research conducted or contracted by the department. We also suggest DND/CAF create an outward facing website to share available information on servicewomen research.
- VAC is encouraged to list all of the research they have conducted or contracted that is specifically on women Veterans. The VAC 1992-2021 Annotated Bibliography currently includes only a list of sex and gender research and not of women Veteran research (Agustin et al., 2022).
- DND/CAF and VAC should consider compiling a list of all GBA Plus analyses conducted by the departments and make these analyses publicly available. Open government demands that the public have access to and can review analyses completed by federal departments on their client base.
- VAC and DND/CAF should consider creating a cross-departmental women's health research advisory committee. If the GBA Plus analyses conducted by the two departments cannot for some reason be made publicly available they could be made available to the advisory committee for quality assurance, continuous education, and quality improvement purposes.
- Longitudinal research examining the life course of servicewomen and women Veterans should be conducted. This will require collaboration by DND/CAF and VAC to design studies that cross over between military personnel and Veterans.
- DND/CAF and VAC should consider collaborating on women's research with each other as well as with external researchers, the RCMP, and other relevant government departments (such as Health Canada—Minister of Health and Minister of Mental Health and Addictions—and Women and Gender Equality Canada).
- The RCMP is encouraged to enhance internal research capacity on servicewomen and women Veterans and collaborate with DND/CAF and VAC as well as with external researchers on this.
- There needs to be a mechanism of internal or external oversight to ensure DND/CAF and VAC produce sex- and gender-equitable research, that all DND/CAF and VAC research is designed with GBA Plus and SAGER principles in mind, and this research is made publicly available for research, education, and transparency purposes.

### *Recommendations for the Whole Research Community—Government and Beyond*

- Apply SAGER guidelines to all military and Veteran research in general.
- Conduct research focused specifically on the experiences, needs, health, and well-being of serving/Veteran women, not just research driven by the needs of government or in reaction to external pressures.
- Consistently follow best practices outlined above in terms of the application of feminist conceptual principles, SAGER guidelines, GBA Plus, intersectionality, ethics (TCPS 2) principles, trauma-awareness, and military culture awareness when conducting research on servicewomen and/or women Veterans.
- Do not erase women’s experiences by conflating the needs of all minority military members and Veterans in an effort to address inclusion and diversity.
- Clearly define ‘women’ to state whether research is about cis or trans women or both.
- Recognize that there remains a need for separate cis women’s sex- and gender-specific research (and policies, programming, services, and care).
- Recognize that separate research will be required to capture the experiences, needs, and health and well-being challenges and outcomes of transgender women.
- Researchers completing population-level studies of Veterans or serving members should oversample for women to ensure they are able to make statements about women and compare them to findings about men. This includes intentionally sampling women to investigate intersectional factors such as race, years and type of service, family status, relationship status, and so on.
- Researchers in government and beyond should consider leveraging the new census data that includes information on Veterans to advance knowledge on military and Veteran women (Statistics Canada, 2022).
- Conduct research on RCMP servicewomen and women Veterans as this area presents a particular blind spot in our knowledge.
- Conduct research on a broad range of topics (seen in the international literature) across health/medical and social sciences, including sex-specific topics, gender-specific issues, and on the interplay of sex and gender, as well as on their intersections with a variety of other military and non-military specific factors.
- Encourage a broad variety of types of research on servicewomen and women Veterans to gain holistic knowledge of: 1) sex-specific foundational clinical medical research on servicewomen and women Veterans, that already exists for servicemen and Veteran men; 2) subjective, qualitatively-driven, patient-prioritized, gender-focused research on servicewomen and women Veterans to better understand their unique experiences and needs; 3) collaborative mixed-methods research that may include clinical medical and social determinants of health/social science focused research; and more.

- Conduct relevant comparisons of Canadian servicewomen and women Veterans to uncover specific outcomes and unique experiences. Specifically, compare military/Veteran women with: 1) military/Veteran men, 2) military/Veteran women internationally, 3) civilian women in the general population, and 4) civilian women in male-dominated occupations. These comparisons will help identify those issues that are specific to Canadian military and Veteran women, not just specific women's issues or specific Veterans' issues.
- Given the uniqueness and low numbers of women in some military trades, international collaborative research on servicewomen and women Veteran should be pursued.
- To overcome the current disconnect between research on military women and research on women in the general population, the research community should consider engaging in novel and innovative collaborations on women's research across military and civilian spheres.
- CIMVHR could organize recurring (e.g., annual) one-day military and Veteran women's health and well-being research focussed workshops to bring together researchers inside government and beyond who have an interest in advancing this area of research in Canada.
- CIMVHR could support networking, training, and mentoring for emerging scholars working on servicewomen and women Veteran issues to help bridge the gap between generations, ensuring lines of research do not end when a researcher retires.
- Interested researchers could consider applying for funding through DND MINDS (Mobilizing Insights in Defence and Security) for a collaborative network grant on military and Veteran women's health and well-being.
- Interested researchers are encouraged to participate in the recently emerged ad hoc Military Women's Health Research Interest Group organized by Dr. Karen Breeck (Women Veterans Research and Engagement Network).

## Limitations

The current study encountered several limitations across four areas:

### 1. Terminology

- Sex and gender are at times used incorrectly or inconsistently in the research, which makes it difficult to always accurately describe the reviewed research.
- The term ‘women’ is rarely defined in the research. We have to assume that the overwhelming majority of research discussed in this study is on cis women and does not include the experiences of trans women.

### 2. Databases

- We were limited to searching electronic databases to which we had access, and identifying additional sources through hand searching and consultation.
- We did not have access to extensive medical research databases and may have therefore missed relevant sources.
- Our searches provided only a partial snapshot in time. Library databases are limited in the time period they cover, so our searches may not have yielded all relevant research despite our large search timeframe of 1885 to 2022.

### 3. Access

- Despite the commitment to open government, there is a lack of transparency when it comes to government data and grey literature, and we were therefore not able to access all relevant grey literature.
- We were not able to consult with all relevant stakeholders.

### 4. Team Expertise

- Members of the research team do not have clinical medical expertise, so the clinical medical research aspects are less developed than the social sciences and general health aspects.
- The French-language search was conducted by a bilingual Anglophone, not a Francophone speaker, which potentially may have affected search results.

Despite these few limitations, this scoping review provides a comprehensive (though not complete) list of Canadian research on servicewomen and women Veterans on which other researchers can build.

## Conclusion

This research describes and explains the current state of research and existing gaps in servicewomen and women Veteran research in Canada. We identified a total of 177 sources of Canadian literature that met our study's inclusion criteria. We also reviewed an additional body of research to contextualize our findings, including international scoping reviews, systematic reviews, literature reviews, and meta-analyses on servicewomen and women Veterans and adjacent and other Canadian literature that is related to the topic of servicewomen and women Veterans, but did not explicitly meet our inclusion criteria.

There are many knowledge gaps that need to be filled when it comes to understanding the experiences, needs, health, and well-being of servicewomen and women Veterans in Canada during and after service and across the life course. The field of Canadian servicewomen and women Veteran research has been historically neglected and undervalued, but is currently experiencing an upswing. However, this new growth is unevenly developed and lacks strategic coordination and interdisciplinary, cross-departmental, and cross-sectoral collaboration.

The international research points to sex- and gender-specific military occupational hazards and life impacts on servicewomen and women Veterans that remain largely unexplored in the Canadian context. These gaps are significant because filling them would help ensure sex- and gender-informed harm prevention and care for service-related injuries and illness, and their sequelae impacts over the lifespan of a woman (work, childbearing, menopause, aging, etc.).

This study identifies key issues and gaps, and presents an analysis of the state of servicewomen and women Veteran research. In addition, based on our review of the literature, we have developed recommendations for future research and best practices for government and the research community as a whole that will help close gaps in knowledge and remove systemic sex and gender biases in servicewomen and women Veteran research in Canada.

Research gaps should be acknowledged, and dedicated government research funding needs to be set aside to address them. Multiple types of research on servicewomen and women Veterans are needed: clinical medical, holistic health and social sciences, longitudinal research, mixed-methods research, and more. Military and Veteran research on women needs to apply (and correctly use) sex, gender, and intersectional analysis, and be consistent with existing trauma-aware, military culture-aware, feminist-informed, and ethical research best practices. It is crucial that researchers (and policymakers) not conflate or make invisible women's experiences in attempts to address the needs of all minority military members and Veterans, for example, through the broad application of inclusion and diversity. There remains a need for separate women's sex- and gender-specific research (and policies, programming, services, and care). There is also a need for separate dedicated research on transgender women's experiences and needs.

To date, individual researchers inside and outside of government have taken the initiative to begin addressing gaps in research on servicewomen and women Veterans in Canada, but individual researchers can only advance this research area in a limited way. There is an urgent need to fill the existing gaps in research knowledge on servicewomen and women Veterans. Academic researchers and government cannot make the necessary progress in this area of

research without leadership, dedicated funding, strategic coordination, and interdisciplinary, cross-departmental, and cross-sectoral collaborations as well as training, mentoring, and networking of emerging scholars working on servicewomen and women Veteran research. Government has an opportunity to leverage existing and newly emerging sources of government data to produce quick wins in the area of population and client-level studies on servicewomen and women Veterans, as well as to make publicly available and accessible all relevant data and research on servicewomen and women Veterans.

The lack of Canadian research-based evidence to inform policies, programs, care, and supports means that we must assume that sex- and gender-specific harm and inequities are currently being perpetuated. Canada could be leading the way on servicewomen and women Veteran research considering that it has had women working in non-traditional military roles for over thirty years. Instead, Canadian research is lagging behind internationally and not serving women's best interests. This could change rapidly with government leadership and the allotment of targeted funds and resources to produce a more strategic and coordinated approach to research in this important area. What is required to move forward is a whole of government and whole of research community effort.

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## Appendix A: Literature Search Strategy

Item/Task	Description
Research questions	<p><u>RQ #1</u>: What is the state of research on servicewomen and women Veterans in Canada?</p> <p><u>RQ #2</u>: What does research tell us about servicewomen and women Veterans in Canada? How has it addressed Canadian servicewomen’s and women Veterans’ experiences, needs, health, and well-being?</p> <p><u>RQ #3</u>: What are the most significant research gaps in relation to knowledge about the experiences, needs, health, and well-being of servicewomen and women Veterans in Canada?</p> <p><u>RQ#4</u>: What conceptual and ethical considerations should inform Canadian research on servicewomen and women Veterans?</p>
Search sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Electronic university library databases<sup>1</sup>: Mount St. Vincent University, Dalhousie University, University of Waterloo, University of Alberta</li> <li>• Google Scholar</li> <li>• Hand searching key reference lists</li> <li>• Literature identified and provided by advisory group (8 collaborators)</li> </ul>
Search terms  (applied combinations of search terms within each cluster to electronic databases)	<p><u>Existing reviews</u><sup>2</sup>:</p> <p><i>Canadian reviews search terms:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Canada women Veteran AND review</li> <li>• Women “Canadian Armed Forces” AND review</li> <li>• women Veteran AND review</li> </ul> <p><i>International reviews search terms:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women Veteran review</li> <li>• Women serving review</li> <li>• Women armed forces review</li> </ul> <p><u>Historic and contemporary research:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Canada OR Canadian (Canad*)</li> <li>• Canadian Armed Forces, military, veteran, ex-military, military personnel, military member, military service member, ex-army, ex-navy, ex-air force, armed forces</li> <li>• Royal Canadian Mounted Police OR RCMP</li> <li>• Women, female, transgender, sex, gender, LGBT*, woman</li> <li>• Nursing sister, military nurse</li> </ul> <p><u>Other general searches to fill in any gaps:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peacekeeper women Canada</li> <li>• “Royal Canadian Navy” women</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> University libraries were searched based on those available to team members through academic affiliation.

<sup>2</sup> Includes scoping reviews, systematic reviews, literature reviews, and meta-analyses.

Item/Task	Description
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Royal Canadian Air Force" women</li> <li>• Wrens Canada CAF</li> </ul>
Inclusion criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• English and French language sources</li> <li>• Peer-reviewed articles</li> <li>• Published research-based books and chapters (whether peer-reviewed or not)</li> <li>• Master's theses and doctoral dissertations</li> <li>• Government-led or government-contracted research that was based on original research or made original insights</li> </ul>
Exclusion criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research that was not about the Canadian context, only mentions women in passing, does not offer a sex- or gender- based analysis, or if the topic related to women but does not focus on Canadian servicewomen and women Veterans (e.g. focus is on military culture broadly or military sexual trauma in general, without a focus on women)</li> <li>• Grey literature, such as government reports, that were subsequently published in peer-reviewed venues (i.e., included/analyzed with the academic literature)</li> <li>• Memoirs or memoir type literature such as collections of letters and historic government grey literature</li> <li>• Canadian Forces College student papers</li> <li>• We excluded think-pieces and first-hand accounts because our focus was on the state of Canadian <i>research</i> about serving and Veteran women</li> </ul>
Search timeframe	<p><u>1885-2022:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Canadian and international reviews published on servicewomen and women Veterans</li> <li>• Historic research on servicewomen and women Veterans published between 1885-1989</li> <li>• Contemporary research on servicewomen and women Veterans published between 1990-2022</li> </ul>
Geographic search parameters	<p>Prime focus: Canada</p> <p>International comparison: United States, Australia, United Kingdom, New Zealand</p>

## Appendix B: Reference List of Canadian Research on Servicewomen and Women Veterans

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