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D STRAT HR RESEARCH NOTE RN 08/2003

**ASSESSING INDIVIDUAL WELLNESS IN THE CANADIAN FORCES:
PRESENTATION TO THE CDS ISSUES SEMINAR**

by

Major C. Evans

September 2003

OTTAWA, CANADA



DIRECTORATE STRATEGIC HUMAN RESOURCES

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OTTAWA, ONTARIO

SEPTEMBER 2003

ABSTRACT

In February of 2003, the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) held the CDS Issues Seminar for General and Flag Officers of the Canadian Forces (CF) for the purpose of discussing the major issues facing the CF at that time. Human Resources were identified as one of many areas that held numerous challenges for the CF. One half day was devoted to the subject, with a focus on assessing the “wellness” of the organization. Several briefings were presented covering CF wellness, one of which focused on individual-level factors affecting wellness. This Research Note documents that presentation and makes recommendations regarding future work in this area. The slides used in the presentation are provided, along with an expanded discussion to provide greater detail than was presented at the CDS Issues Seminar.

RÉSUMÉ

En février 2003, le chef d'état-major de la Défense (CEMD) a tenu le Séminaire sur les enjeux du CEMD destiné aux officiers généraux des Forces canadiennes (FC) dans le but de discuter des principaux enjeux auxquels devaient faire face les FC à ce moment. On a déterminé que les Ressources humaines étaient un des multiples domaines comportant de nombreux défis pour les FC. Une demi-journée a été consacrée au sujet, en particulier à l'évaluation du « mieux-être » de l'organisation. Plusieurs séances d'information ont été présentées sur le mieux-être des FC. L'une d'elles s'est attardée aux facteurs individuels qui influent sur le mieux-être. Cette note de recherche documente la présentation et fait des recommandations sur le travail à faire dans ce domaine. Les diapositives utilisées dans la présentation sont fournies avec une discussion élargie visant à donner de plus amples détails sur ce qui a été présenté dans le cadre du Séminaire sur les enjeux du CEMD.

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**ASSESSING INDIVIDUAL WELLNESS IN THE CANADIAN FORCES:
PRESENTATION TO THE CDS ISSUES SEMINAR**

I. INTRODUCTION

Background

1. The Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) Issues Seminar is an annual gathering of Canadian Forces (CF) Generals and Flag Officers to discuss the issues confronting the CF. The objective of the Seminar is to lay the foundation to coordinate efforts to meet the challenges identified. Day One of the 2003 Seminar focused on “wellness”, with the morning session devoted to “Wellness of Ourselves” and the afternoon session on “Wellness of the Organization”. The Director of Strategic Human Resources (D Strat HR) was asked to organize the afternoon session which focused on assessing the wellness of the CF. It was decided that a broad interpretation of wellness would be employed, incorporating both organizational and individual assessments. One of the presentations, which subsequently became the basis for this paper, focused on measures of individual wellness among CF personnel, while other presentations and discussions provided an assessment of “wellness” at the macro, organizational level within the CF.

Aim

2. The aim of this particular presentation was to present a view of wellness of the CF, based on individual factors. The aim of this report is to document the presentation.

Scope

3. The factors presented in this report are intended to provide an indication of the type of measures which can and should be considered when assessing wellness. They are not intended to provide a comprehensive picture of wellness in the CF. The report is constrained, to some degree, by what information was actually available.

4. There are many ways of defining the wellness of the organization, and the definition determines the means of assessment and the type of data collected. This paper focuses on three domains of wellness: morale, health, and operational waivers.

II. MORALE

5. In assessing individual wellness, “morale” is an obvious starting point. Unfortunately, although morale has long been recognized as important, it is not something that has traditionally been measured within the CF. Over the past few years, the Director Human Resources Research and Evaluation (DHRRE) has been developing the Unit Morale Profile, to give Commanding Officers a tool for assessing aspects such as work motivation and satisfaction, and confidence in leadership. So far, the Unit Morale Profile has only been used by units within Land Forces Western Area; however, there may be options for broader use.

6. Recently, approval was given for DHRRE to develop a Continuous Attitude Survey. This will be used to track trends on members’ attitudes to a variety of key issues. Factors currently under consideration for inclusion include organizational commitment and employee engagement, which are both related to morale.

7. In the interim, results from the 2001 Quality of Life (QOL) Survey (Dowden, 2001) can be used to gain an indication of morale. This study was conducted for the Quality of Life Project Management Office (PMO QOL) to establish a baseline measure of quality of life of CF members. In February 2001, over 12,000 surveys were mailed out to CF members across the country. A total of 3942 responses were received (35%). There were three parts to the study: a quantitative assessment of QOL, a qualitative section in which respondents were asked to indicate the top three areas that the CF should change, modify, or adjust in order to improve the QOL of members and their families, and an assessment of awareness of and satisfaction with a number of specific QOL initiatives. The survey highlighted a number of different areas which are relevant to an assessment of morale, only a few of which are presented here.

8. The best overall indication of morale from the QOL survey can probably be taken from responses to the general question, “How would you describe your QOL in the CF at this time?” As shown in Figure 1, overall, respondents were mildly positive, with over 50% rating their QOL in the CF as good or very good, for a mean score of 3.38 out of 5. Female respondents rated their QOL significantly more positively than male respondents, and those in Administrative jobs gave significantly higher ratings than those in Operational positions. Corporals and Officer

Cadets gave significantly lower responses than most other rank groups. The QOL survey has only been administered once, in 2001, so there are no trends for comparison.

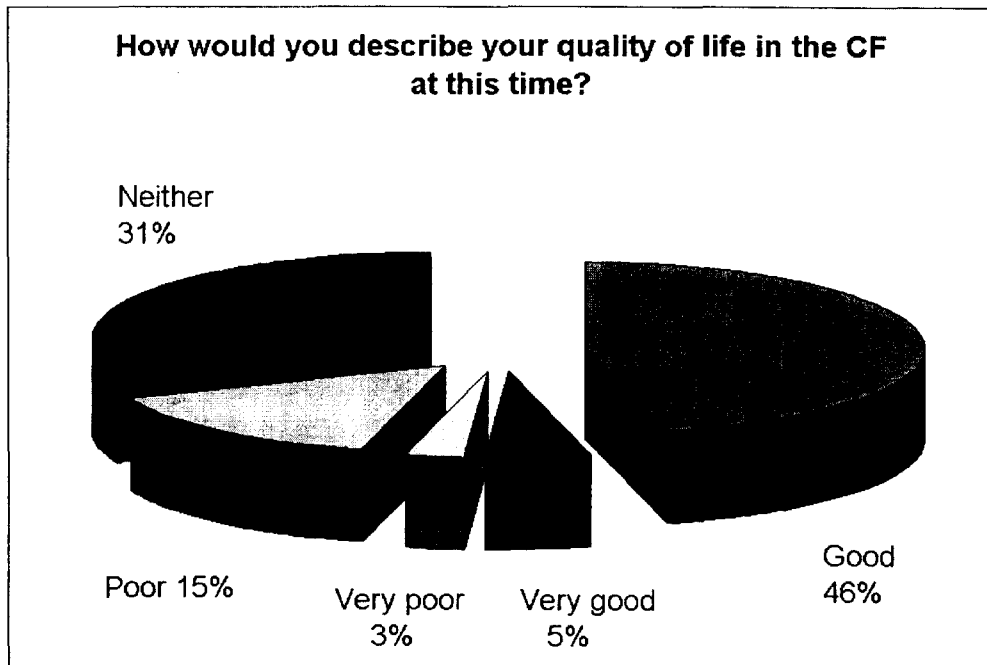


Figure 1. Overall Quality of Life

9. Figure 2 shows overall satisfaction scores, out of 7, for each of the eleven QOL domains assessed in the Survey. It is apparent that the areas with the lowest satisfaction are those which are most closely related to the job itself. "Career" includes the promotion system, promotion prospects, career management, and PERs, all of which received ratings indicating some level of dissatisfaction. Within the "Job" domain, the factor receiving the lowest score was "Leadership-Senior Leaders", for which respondents indicated slight dissatisfaction. It should be noted that the moderately positive rating for "Residence" must be regarded with caution. Members living in PMQs indicated considerable dissatisfaction, but the overall score was brought up by those living off-base.

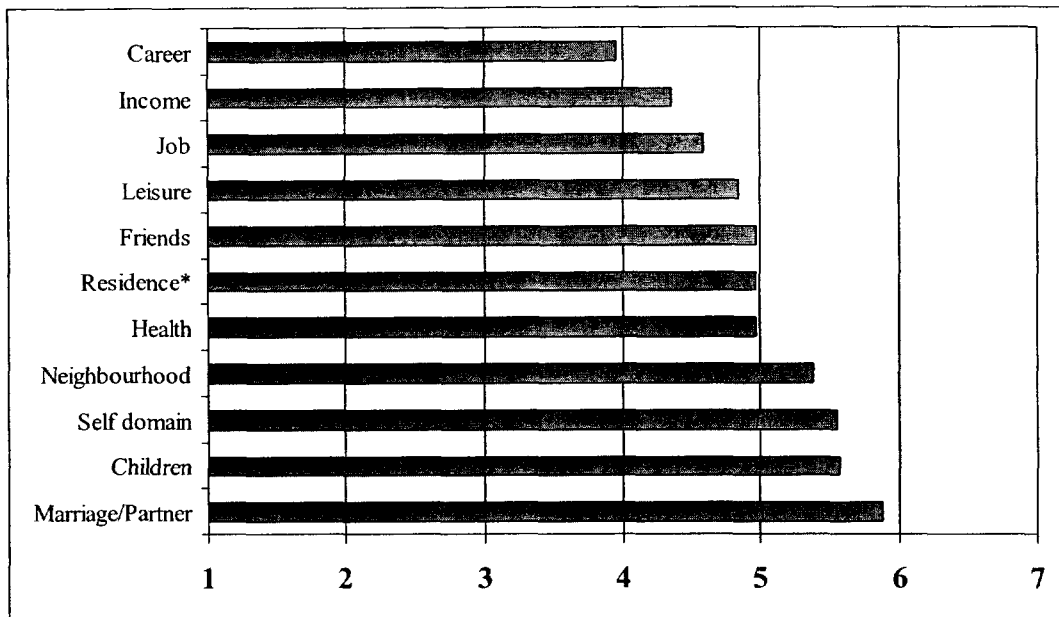


Figure 2. Quality of Life – Domains

10. In addition to the QOL Survey, some indications of morale can be extracted from the results of focus groups which were conducted in 2001 to gather information on members' reasons for leaving or thinking of leaving the CF. Between May 2001 and January 2002, 517 regular force members participated in focus groups and were asked to identify reasons why they were leaving or thinking of leaving the CF. The purpose was to revise the CF Attrition Information Questionnaire. Although a large number and wide range of members participated, results should not be considered representative of the CF as a whole. Dunn and Morrow (2002) provide an analysis of the information gathered during the focus groups.

11. The main finding from the attrition focus groups was that issues which cause members to consider leaving the CF are highly inter-related. For example, workload, deployments, and postings all have a negative impact on the family, in addition to being factors on their own. A posting can cause the member's spouse to lose employment. A promotion can be seen as a punishment, if it leads to an undesirable posting, or an increase in workload.

12. The authors concluded that members do not leave the CF because of one single issue. Instead, members are reconsidering their careers as a result of general frustration with numerous issues. Much of the frustration stems from a lack of resources and personnel, which results in heavy workloads and more frequent deployments, which negatively impact the family.

13. The main factors which members identified are shown in Table 1. To elaborate on some of the factors, “Training Problems” included too much pre-deployment training, not enough regular training, and training being cancelled due to workload or lack of resources. Promotion was a factor in that members don’t want to be promoted out of a job they love, but they need the extra salary. Under “Recruiting Issues”, members still feel there is inadequate and/or inaccurate information being provided at Recruiting Centres, which leads to subsequent dissatisfaction when expectations are not met. “Quality of Life” issues included balancing work and family, and the frequently expressed sentiment that family considerations outweigh career progression, leading some personnel to choose release. “Loss of a sense of family” refers to a perception of too much individualism, careerism by officers, and a feeling that a career in the CF is becoming “just a job”.

Table 1. Reasons why Members are Thinking of Leaving

• Workload	• Training Problems
• PERSTEMPO	• Promotion Problems
• Frequency/length of deployments	• Recruiting Issues
• Family disruptions	• Quality of Life Issues
• Postings and moves	• Loss of a sense of family within the CF
• Poor leadership	

III. HEALTH

14. The Surgeon General reviews personnel medical files in cases of employment limitations and the assignment of medical categories. In 2002, an analysis was done of a proportion of files from the previous three years in order to determine the relative percentages which fall into different medical categories. The results are shown in Figure 3. Over the three year period for which files were analysed, there was a three-fold increase in the number of mental health related cases reviewed by the Surgeon General's office. This result is representative of the types of cases seen at the unit medical level; that is, problems with mental health issues are increasing. However, Muscular-skeletal (MSK) injuries consistently represented the largest portion of medical problems across the three years. It should be noted that this type of injury is often related to training and equipment. "General Medical" (Gen Med) refers to all medical causes other than mental health or muscular-skeletal injuries.

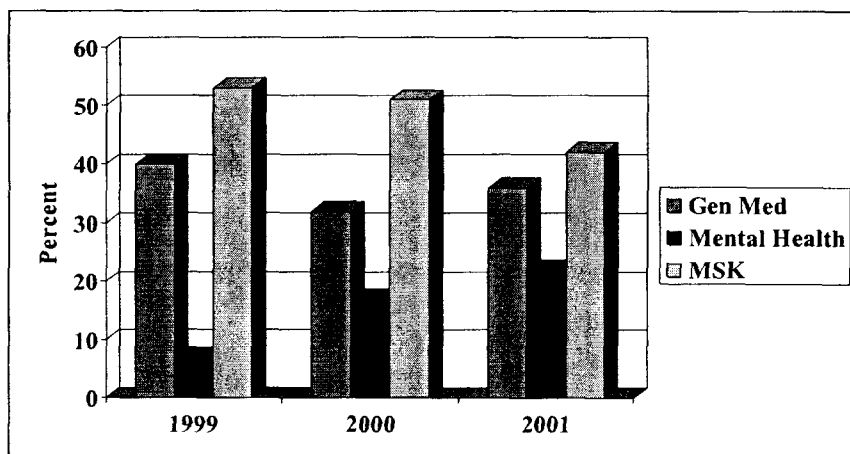


Figure 3. Surgeon General Medical Reviews

15. The Service Personnel Holding List (SPHL) is a non-effective strength list to which medically unfit members are posted until they are either fit to return to duty or released. It facilitates support to injured or ill members, while assisting Commanding Officers in maintaining the operational readiness of their units. CANFORGEN 100/00 specifies three categories under which personnel may be placed on the SPHL:

- a. when a member is on retirement leave and requires hospitalization or sick leave;
- b. when a member has been assigned significant medical employment limitations for six months or more; or
- c. when a member has a pending medical release, and has been authorized to participate in full-time vocational rehabilitation under SISIP.

16. The data shown in Figure 4 were obtained by the Director Military Careers Administration and Resource Management (DMCARM) from the Human Resources Management Information System (Peoplesoft). The bars for each of the years show the number of personnel who were placed on the SPHL during that year, and they show a steady increase in numbers over the period. The final column shows the cumulative total of all personnel who were still on the SPHL when the data was extracted (Feb 03), regardless of when they started.

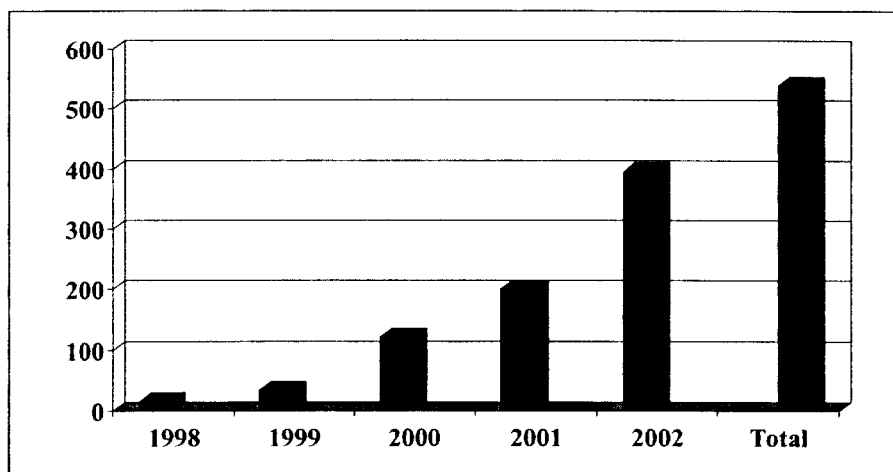


Figure 4. Service Personnel Holding List

17. Operational Stress Injuries (OSI) have been the focus of much attention recently. In the summer of 2002, Director General Health Services (DGHS) began maintaining a database which will be able to provide more detailed information about the source of the injury and outcomes. Currently, available data are still very limited. Figure 5 shows the number of (new) reported cases for each of the past three years. Note that increases in diagnosis may be at least partly due to an increased awareness and

acceptance of OSIs as being an injury and not a sign of weakness. The Operational Trauma and Stress Support Centres, and the peer support Operational Stress Injury Support Service are instrumental in this.

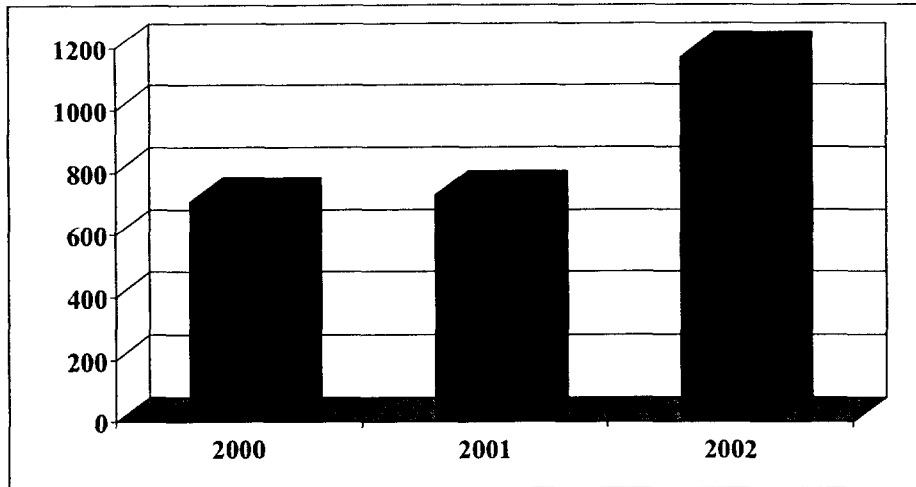


Figure 5. Operational Stress Injuries

IV. OPERATIONAL WAIVERS

18. Concern has been expressed recently regarding the frequency of operational deployments and the potential impact on personnel. One way of measuring the frequency of personnel deployments is by means of the number of operational waivers. CFAO 20-50 states that:

A member shall not normally be posted to a post outside Canada or isolated post to which dependants are not authorized to proceed at public expense, within one year after returning to Canada from another such unaccompanied tour.

In cases where this one-year period cannot be met, a waiver is required. Figure 6 shows the number of operational waivers which have been approved over the last several years. (Figure 6 does *not* refer to waivers for the 60-day respite period following a DCDS operation.)

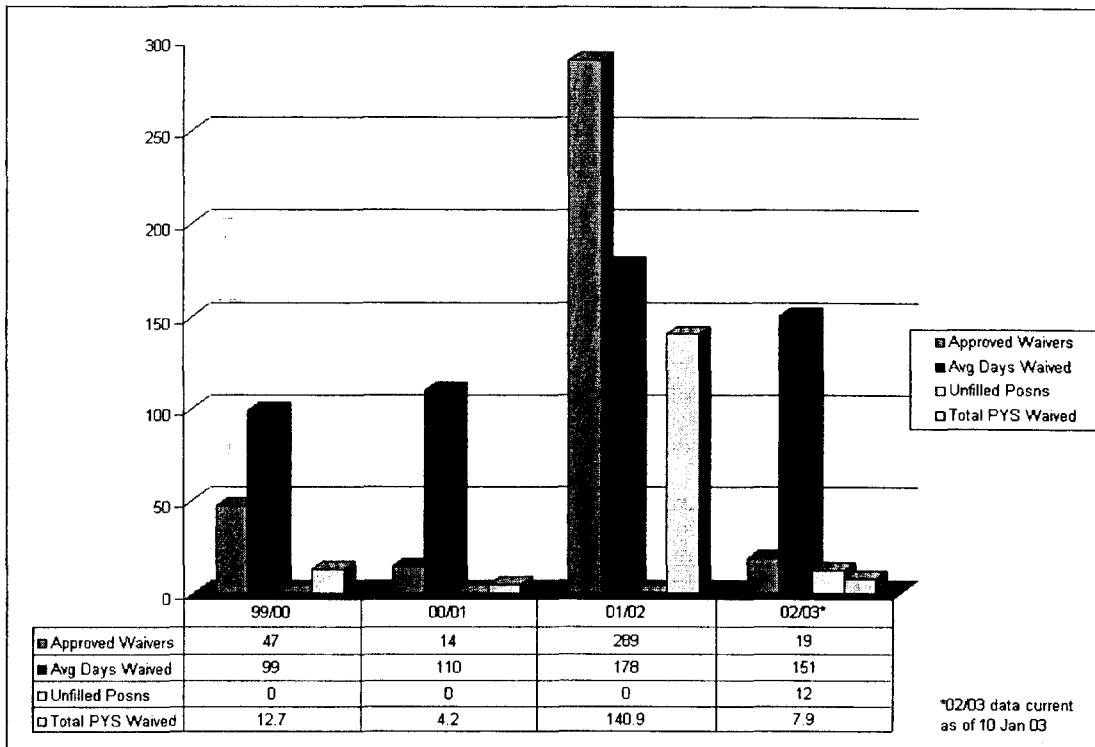


Figure 6. Approved Operational Waivers

19. In Figure 6, “Total PYs Waived” was calculated by adding up the total number of days waived for the FY, and dividing by 365. The extremely high figure of 140 PYs in FY 01/02 was due to Op Apollo, when, for instance, waivers were required for almost one entire ship’s company. Data shown for FY 02/03 were current as of 10 Jan 03. It should be noted that the 12 unfilled positions for FY 02/03 were Priority One positions. In the future, data from the Human Dimensions of Deployment Study (“PERSTEMPO” study) being conducted by the Director Quality of Life (DQOL) will provide more detailed data on the frequency of deployments and the impact on personnel.

V. SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

20. The data provided in this paper, while valuable, barely scratch the surface in terms of providing a comprehensive view of organizational wellness. Furthermore, as noted, in many cases it is only recently that directorates have started tracking the information. As a result, there are few trends or standards for comparison. Without ongoing, systematic monitoring, it is very difficult to know if the CF as an organization is “well” or not, in terms of individual factors.

21. The concept of wellness has been increasing in importance to organizations, from the perspectives of both productivity and retention of valued employees. Improved organizational wellness can reduce costs to the organization as well as contributing to the quality of work life of employees. This suggests that there is a need to more carefully define what “wellness” should mean in the CF context, determine what information is needed in order to assess the wellness of the organization, and then systematically monitor and track that information. It is recommended that this work be undertaken, and that the resulting information be folded into the Performance Measurement Framework for Human Resources.

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Dunn, J. & Morrow, R. (2002). Should I stay or should I go: Attrition questionnaire revision project – Phase 1 findings. Ottawa: Director Human Resources Research and Evaluation.

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In February of 2003, the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) held the CDS Issues Seminar for General and Flag Officers of the Canadian Forces (CF) for the purpose of discussing the major issues facing the CF at that time. Human Resources were identified as one of many areas that held numerous challenges for the CF. One half day was devoted to the subject, with a focus on assessing the "wellness" of the organization. Several briefings were presented covering CF wellness, one of which focused on individual-level factors affecting wellness. This Research Note documents that presentation and makes recommendations regarding future work in this area. The slides used in the presentation are provided, along with an expanded discussion to provide greater detail than was presented at the CDS Issues Seminar.

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