



Report Information from ProQuest

29 March 2016 03:56

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Ill-paid soldiers prone to spousal abuse: report

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Full text: Poorly paid soldiers and sailors forced to moonlight or line up at food banks are among those most prone to family violence, according to a Defence Department study.

"Financial strain may result in feelings of frustration, low self-esteem and the lack of time to nurture family relationships," said the November 1996 report. "Although abuse occurs across the rank hierarchy, studies indicate that the higher (the rank), the lower the rate of abuse."

Military wages were frozen in 1991. Since then, there have been reports of privates and ordinary seamen relying on welfare and charity to make ends meet.

There were 2,242 cases of family violence or violence against women reported to military police between 1991 and 1994. Most victims were female and under the age of 30. About 95 per cent of the abusers were men.

During that period, reported cases of domestic violence more than tripled, to 20 per cent in 1994 from 6 per cent in 1991.

"Consistently throughout the four years, the majority of perpetrators were junior, non-commissioned members, most often attached to Land Forces Command," said the study, obtained under the Access to Information Act. But an independent researcher said abuse "runs across all ranks in the military." Deborah Harrison, head of the Fredericton-based Muriel McQueen Fergusson Centre for Family Violence, said many wives of officers told her they would never report spousal abuse because of what it might do to their husband's career.

After years of belt-tightening, the Liberal government gave non-commissioned officers a 2.2-per-cent pay increase in April last year. That was followed this spring with a 1.5-per-cent hike for all members of the armed forces.

But critics inside and outside the military said that wasn't enough to make up for the erosion in the standard of living faced by many in uniform.

The basic salary for a newly minted recruit in the Canadian Forces is \$15,708 a year. After four years, a private can earn as much as \$26,916.

Corporals, by far the largest group of non-commissioned officers, earn \$33,996 a year.

About 25,500 troops fall into those two ranks, out of a total force of 68,000 members.

The study also said that frequent transfers, overseas assignments and the danger that can go with the job are all factors in family violence.

It noted that alcoholism runs 50-per-cent higher in the military community than among civilians.

*** Infomart-Online ***

Credit: CP

Publication title: The Gazette

Pages: A.10

Number of pages: 0

Publication year: 1997

Publication date: Aug 5, 1997

Year: 1997

Dateline: HALIFAX

Section: NEWS

Publisher: Infomart, a division of Postmedia Network Inc.

Place of publication: Montreal, Que.

Country of publication: Canada

Publication subject: General Interest Periodicals--Canada

ISSN: 03841294

Source type: Newspapers

Language of publication: English

Document type: NEWSPAPER

ProQuest document ID: 433216601

Document URL: <http://search.proquest.com/docview/433216601?accountid=5705>

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Last updated: 2014-12-07

Database: Canadian Newsstand Complete

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