

FEMINIST  
NEWS &  
VIEWS

THE PANDEMIC OF RACISM | SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN THE MILITARY

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# herizons

## DEBBIE PATTERSON

Intimate Acts  
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## IN MY OWN MOCCASINS

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of Resistance

## 25 YEARS OF HONEY JAM

Ebonnie Rowe  
Looks Back



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worried” about the outbreak, compared to 33 percent of men. Furthermore, 37 percent of Canadian men said they were “not worried at all” or “worried only a little” about the outbreak, compared to 25 percent of women. Men also reported that they were less likely to follow the advice of public health officials about staying home and social distancing.

Men who are most likely to have young children, those aged 30 to 44 years old, are most likely to take the virus seriously. Forty percent of men aged 30 to 44 years old said they are “very worried” about the virus, double the number of men aged 18 to 29.

## MORE WOMEN JOIN NYGARD SUIT

The sexual assault lawsuit against Canadian clothing manufacturer mogul Peter Nygard has grown to represent 57 women, 18 of whom are Canadian.

The class action lawsuit filed in New York alleges that Nygard, 78, was involved in sex trafficking, rape and sexual assault over a period of five decades.

“Not only have we spoken to dozens of survivors, but we have also interviewed additional witnesses from the United States, Canada and the Bahamas, who are finally coming forward,” Greg Gutzler, one of the lawyers representing the women, said.

The lawsuit alleges that Nygard lured young women as young as 14 with promises of modelling opportunities, and offered them drugs and alcohol at his mansion in the Bahamas. After the alleged sexual assaults, many of the claimants say Nygard offered them “hush money.”

Nygard’s clothing empire began under the brand name Tan Jay in Winnipeg in the 1970s. Although three former employees filed complaints of harassment to the Manitoba Human Rights Commission more than 20 years ago, none of the cases were adjudicated.

Nygard stepped down as chair of his company in February, after the FBI and the New York Police Department raided the company’s headquarters in New York.

The suit also identifies Nygard employees for their alleged roles in “financing, facilitating and covering up the abuse.”

With between 17 and 30 percent of staff at affected long-term care homes also diagnosed with COVID-19, remaining staff were ill-equipped to care for multiple seriously ill residents. By May, both provinces had taken up the federal government’s offer of military personnel to help care for residents.

In response to the deaths of thousands of nursing home residents from COVID-19, elder advocates, unions and others are calling for a national response, something Prime Minister Justin Trudeau hinted at before the military went in.

“The federal government will be there in the coming months to work with the provinces to develop long-term solutions,” Trudeau said in early May.

The military report documented instances of severe neglect, rotten food and health violations including the re-use of needles. In some facilities COVID-infected residents were

housed in the same room as non-infected residents.

The Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions (CFNU) also supports the call for long-term care facilities to follow the principles of the Canada Health Act.

“Thirty-six years after the passage of the Canada Health Act, long-term care is still not considered a core, publicly funded service and is not governed by federal regulations. As such, it is grossly under-resourced and understaffed, with little to no enforcement of even the most basic standards of care,” said a CFNU statement.

“This pandemic has laid bare the consequences of decades of funding cuts and privatization in the long-term care sector,” said Hassan Yussuff, president of the Canadian Labour Congress, which on May 8 called on Ottawa to place long-term care facilities under the protection of the Canada Health Act. ❀

## Taking Aim at Misconduct

by **CHRISTINE PEETS**

The \$900-million sexual misconduct class action suit against the Canadian government and the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) marks an important step towards addressing sexual harassment, sexual assault and discrimination on the basis of gender, gender identity and sexual orientation in the Canadian military.

First filed in 2016 by seven former members of the military, the suit was classified as a class action by the Federal Court in 2019. The claims period began May 25, 2020 and will end on November 24, 2021.

Kelly Thompson, a former CAF captain, experienced harassment and sexual misconduct during her eight-year military career. She hasn’t decided whether she will join the class action suit.

“For a long time, I had a horrible feeling that, as a woman, my experiences were part and parcel of the [military] experience. I felt that because I hadn’t been raped, I wasn’t entitled to file a



Kelly Thompson wants to help change the culture of the Canadian military. (Photo: Dorian Widling)

claim,” said the former logistics officer who specialized in human resources.

“During an early training exercise, I had one cadet make lewd comments and cup his hand on part of my butt, which left a bruise. I also had incidents where, in the workplace, in the field and even in my home, male soldiers were either nicknaming my breasts, leering at them or groping them.”

Thompson enlisted in 2003, just after her 18th birthday. She felt pride in doing



## CORONAVIRUS HITS FEMALE-DOMINATED JOBS

The coronavirus pandemic has put workers in many female-dominated sectors at risk, while other female-dominated sectors have seen a disproportionate number of job losses.

According to a UN Women policy brief on the impact of COVID-19 on women, women make up 70 percent of the health workforce globally.

"They are also the majority of health facility service-staff—such as cleaners, laundry, catering—and as such they are more likely to be exposed to the virus," the policy brief says.

In addition to personal support workers in nursing homes, at-risk jobs include flight attendants, cooks, cashiers and food service workers.

As many stores closed or reduced hours, there were layoffs for retail workers, a majority of whom are women. Some economists are calling the anticipated recession a "she-session" as female-dominated occupations are expected to recover last.

Women continue to make up the majority of Canada's minimum-wage workers. Immigrant and racialized women are more likely to be low-income earners and those working in precarious jobs. ❀



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so, becoming the fourth generation in her family to serve in the Canadian military. Thompson also wanted to take advantage of the opportunity to get free university tuition to help her achieve her dream of becoming a writer. She resumed her university studies in 2011, after reluctantly accepting a medical release following a leg injury sustained during a training mission.

Today, Thompson has written two award-winning magazine articles about sexism and abuse in the military and a memoir chronicling her experiences, *Girls Need Not Apply: Field Notes from the Forces*, published in 2019 by McClelland & Stewart. She hopes that sharing these stories will help change the military culture for future generations.

"There have been changes, but they are incremental," Thompson says. "The military has been a male-dominated world for such a long time and generations of sexism don't change overnight."

Thompson says she was belittled, spoken to crudely and ill-treated by some of her male peers and superior officers. She also felt betrayed and, at times, dismayed by a lack of support from unsympathetic female superiors. Believing the pervasive military culture that trains soldiers to be loyal above all else, Thompson kept going and she kept quiet. Ironically, one of the positions she held was harassment advisor, a role that involved advising new recruits about harassment prevention.

In 2015, four years after Thompson left the military, former Supreme Court Justice Marie Deschamps released her external review of sexual misconduct in the military. In her report, she said the military had "an underlying culture hostile to women and LGBTQ members and conducive to more serious incidents of sexual harassment and assault." She also wrote, "Interviewees stated that fear of negative repercussions for career progression, including being removed from the unit, is one of the most important reasons why members do not report such incidents."

Deschamps made 10 recommendations, one of which was to set up a centre outside the military to report and investigate cases of sexual misconduct. In response to her report, former defence chief General Jonathan Vance announced Operation Honour, an initiative that includes a

reporting centre for sexual misconduct and a central database where reported incidents of sexual misconduct are tracked.

Deschamps doesn't think enough has been done. In her testimony before the House of Commons Defence Committee in February 2020 Deschamps said the military complaints process hasn't served victims of sexual aggression well.

"Unfortunately, they've already taken four years and we don't see the colour of the strategy yet," she said.

In 2016, Statistics Canada first surveyed more than 36,000 current and former members of the CAF. The latest survey, *Sexual Misconduct in the Canadian Armed Forces Regular Force, 2018*, was released in May 2019. It found that 4.3 percent of women and 1.1 percent of men said they had been victims of sexual assault.

More than half of the 900 assaults (which included sexual attacks, unwanted sexual touching or sexual activity where the victim was unable to consent) were perpetrated by a peer. Only 25 percent of victims stated that someone in authority knew of the assault, while 57 percent reported that authorities were not aware of the assault.

According to the department of National Defence *2019 Sexual Misconduct Incident Tracking Report*, the number of reported incidents of sexual misconduct has decreased since the original reporting period in 2016–2017. There were 461 reports of sexual misconduct made in 2016–2017, compared to 413 reports in 2017–2018 and 302 in 2018–2019. Despite a drop in reported cases of sexual misconduct, the number of military personnel who have been dismissed, demoted or fined between \$500 to \$2,500 as a result of sexual misconduct has increased.

Thompson says that while she was working on her book no women who were still employed in the military would speak to her, fearing reprisals.

"More female veterans need to speak out. Once female veterans are distanced from the arm of career repercussions, they're able to discuss their experiences in honest detail. Their words could be a powerful tool of change in the next generation of service members," Thompson says.

"There will always be those who resist change, insisting on push back. But change is full of baby steps. We have to start somewhere." ❀