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Imposed Restriction in the Canadian Armed Forces: The Influence of Geographic Instability on Well-Being

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Amidst rising global conflicts, Canada's military, the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF), is suffering an employment crisis. The well-being of its members is essential for the reconstitution of Canada's fighting force, and therefore there exists a need to explore the effects of well-being determinants relevant to the Canadian military and their intersection with the diverse experiences and backgrounds CAF members bring with them. This leads to the research question: how do CAF members experience and perceive the organization's policies, programs, and supports in relation to their own well-being?

One of the only open-source cross-country CAF studies with a qualitative research component is a tracking study conducted by Earnscliff Strategy Group.[1] While this study focused on civilian perceptions across several areas such as awareness and familiarity

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[1] Earnscliff Strategy Group, "Views of the Canadian Armed Forces 2018 Tracking Study Research Report (Department of National Defence Contract Report W5830-170064/001/CY)," (Department of National Defence, 2018).

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with the CAF, it importantly included inquiry into the care military personnel and their family receive, as well as their attitudes towards recruitment and diversity of the CAF. This study included a two-part mixed-method research program with a qualitative study leading into quantitative work. For their initial study, they conducted focus groups across Canada and found that while awareness and familiarity with the military was very low (near non-existent among youth), most did tend to hold positive views overall of the CAF. Regarding care, while most participants believed that CAF members and their families were overall well cared for, younger participants felt that care was better than older participants, especially surrounding issues of mental health. Overall, participants felt the CAF was a diverse organization, and that while women may be a minority, they should be just as valued as men in the military. Some commentary highlighted that certain cultural groups may be more disinclined to join the CAF due to negative experiences in other countries. Yet the question remains whether those within the organization feel similarly to the public perceptions of quality care surrounding their well-being and issues surrounding diversity and well-being in uniform.

On a smaller scale, Zwicewicz[2] studied open-ended survey responses to questions specifically created to investigate CAF supports to the military family unit. He found that, while CAF members did indeed understand the available support programs to them and their families, that value was seen as incommensurate to the taxing effect of being separated from their families on deployments in international operations, especially regarding financial compensation (in the case of this study, this involved personnel that had been deployed to Kuwait). Additionally, the supports offered to members were seen as being inconsistent depending on the unit the members were employed at. Lastly, it was noted that serving military personnel are often willing to provide very detailed commentary and valuable recommendations that could help the CAF meet the needs of its members. Considering these findings, an investigation is needed from a well-being-informed lens, especially from military members who have been separated from their families not just on international deployments, but also those who are separated due to the needs of military service within Canada.

[2] J. Zwicewicz, "Improving Family Support in the Canadian Armed Forces: A Qualitative Study." *Canadian Military Journal* 19, 1 (2018): pp. 52–57. https://www.journal.forces.gc.ca/Vol19/No1/eng/PDF/CMJ191Ep52.pdf.

While much work has been done internally to examine CAF member and family well-being, less research is publicly available regarding qualitative and mixed-methods studies within the CAF that integrate the human experience into research on well-being.[3] [4] Thus, work is needed to target well-being by garnering detail from the lived experiences of military members' lives, to better understand well-being in the Canadian military community. Contextualizing, in this sense, refers to using the rich, in-depth perspectives gathered directly from participants to give fuller meaning and detail surrounding the research question posited above. These experiences and viewpoints help us better understand the real-world conditions CAF members face. Thus, this study applies a mixed-methods approach, revealing complexities overlooked by purely quantitative or qualitative methods. Additionally, findings can help inform CAF leaders making policy decisions, ensuring that they remain grounded in the realities of the membership they are working to support.

To inform the quantitative portion of this investigation, we first conduct an in-depth analysis of relevant descriptives to aid in understanding the commentary provided by actual CAF service members regarding Imposed Restriction (IR). IR Means "an approved delay in moving dependants, household goods and effects for a specific period of time upon being posted to a new place of duty within Canada".[5] IR is intended to be a form of flexibility extended to a member when they are posted. Yet, the execution may be experienced differently by members, which may lead to a disconnect between intention and consequence of the policy.

Military employment involves significant organizational influences on the lives of its serving members. IR is an exemplar of this—a policy where military members who have to move away from their immediate family due to the needs of the military institution can do so with some financial support. Your Say Survey (YSS) data concerning

[3] E. M. Bernthal, "The Challenges of Undertaking (Qualitative) Research on a Military Population." *Journal of the Royal Army Medical Corps* 161, Suppl 1 (2015): pp. 3–5. https://doi.org/10.1136/jramc-2015-000527.
[4] C. Jones, , L. Smith-MacDonald, & S. Brémault-Phillips, (2021) Conducting Qualitative Inquiry within the Canadian Armed Forces: Addressing Hierarchical Dynamics. *20th Annual Thinking Qualitatively Virtual Conference*.
[5] National Defence. "Imposed Restriction." *Canadian Armed Forces Military Personnel Instruction 01/17*, 2025. https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/policies-standards/canadian-forces-military-personnel-instructions/imposed-restriction-ir.html.

participants on IR provides a unique opportunity to study what happens when someone is subjected to an external force and decides to be separated from their immediate families due to an internal obligation to their employer—this can be treated as an exogenous intervention over which the individual has little to no control given their life circumstances.

Methods

The 'Your Say Survey' (YSS) was used to investigate IR. The YSS is administered to gather the opinions, attitudes, and experiences of CAF members on various personnel-related topics and on special issues sponsored by internal clients (i.e., Army, Navy, Air Force, etc.) for Defence Team leaders to better understand the perceptions CAF members experience. The results help evaluate personnel policies, programs, and overall performance. In the fall 2022 iteration, the survey included a section on IR.

Quantitative Analysis

A secondary analysis of a series of demographics and questions related to issues surrounding IR was conducted on a representative sample of the CAF overall membership to explore the impacts IR has on military life in the CAF. The YSS utilized stratified random sampling of CAF members in survey sampling. The samples were selected based on 40 strata, defined by four rank groups and five National Defence Headquarters Level One (L1) organizations and CAF commands. The samples were also selected so that gender and years of service in the sample would be proportional to these variables in the CAF population (i.e., implicit stratification). The 2022 YSS was sent to 5,107 Reg F and 3,507 P Res members, of which a total of 1,928 Reg F (for a response rate of 37.8%) and 843 P Res (for a P Res response rate of 24 percent) respondents provided usable data, for an overall response rate of 32.2 percent.

2022 – 2024 cohort comparison

Additionally, internal research byWright[6] that is currently inaccessible publicly without official request to the Director General Military Personnel Research and Analysis

[6] J. C. Wright, "Imposed Restrictions: Results from the 2024 Programs and Policies Your Say Survey," *Director General Military Personnel Research and Analysis Scientific Letter, DRDC-RDDC-2025-L097*. Ottawa, Ontario, Canada: Defence Research and Development Canada, 2025.

(DGMPRA) allowed for cohort comparisons within this study to provide insight into the stability of findings provided here.

Qualitative Analysis

Regular Force (Reg F) and Primary Reserve (P Res) respondents were asked about their IR status, including whether they were on IR, how many times they had been on IR, how frequently they visited dependents while on IR, the reasons for being placed on IR, and their satisfaction with IR benefits and policies. Additionally, Reg F respondents who refused a posting to avoid IR were asked to explain their decision. An open-ended question also invited respondents to share further comments about their IR experiences. As the YSS consist of a diverse group of military members, qualitative investigation is well-suited to bring forward the voices of those within the CAF from multiple perspectives, highlighting the variety of lived experience participants bring based on their backgrounds.

Moreover, purely quantitative measures will not suffice to understand the impacts of IR on member well-being. This is because there exists only a limited pool of CAF members who have directly experienced IR compared to their peers. The IR sample, even with extensively robust weighted sampling strategies, is too small to conduct much more quantitative analysis outside of descriptive statistics ($N = 81$). Due to the small number of respondents on IR, sampling errors of this specific subpopulation were not below the .166 threshold identified by Statistics Canada for a coefficient of variance to be reflective of the overall target population.[7] Thus, any statistical inference made of members on IR must be relegated only to those participating within the survey itself, highlighting a weakness of a solely quantitative approach. A thematic analysis of qualitative responses was conducted to provide additional value to this study.[8, 9]

There is a common trope in CAF research—in that much of it is conducted by civilians. This is not the case here, which can be beneficial in this qualitative work, as the

[7] Statistics Canada. (2009). *Table 5-1 Quality level guidelines*. https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/13f0026m/2007001/table/tab5p1-eng.htm

[8] W. Jackson and N. Verberg, *Methods: Doing Social Research* (Scottsdale, Arizona: Pearson Education Imports, 2007).

[9] V. Braun and V. Clarke, *Thematic Analysis: A Practical Guide* (SAGE, 2022).

primary author holds the experience of being part of the community they are engaging with. From an anthropological sense, they have spent over 20 years living and working as a researcher (amongst other roles) within the world of the CAF. Their internal membership of the CAF environment and community will let them better understand the language their peers use in their discourse. It is here that allowing their knowledge and cultural sensitivity of the CAF aided in their understanding of hidden discourse within respondent commentary as they explored the thoughts and perceptions of CAF members regarding their diverse experiences with IR.[10]

This analysis relied on an abductive approach also known as "inference to the best explanation" (IBE).[11] IBE is a way in which one can arrive at qualitative conclusions via a structured approach by looking backwards from the outcome to the most likely influences. This can help researchers understand how CAF members are representing themselves, or their experiences, to themselves and to others, which also comes under the umbrella of social constructionism (how individuals see and interpret the world around them is based on their interactions with others). This effort enabled the primary researcher of this study to glean insights into how, and even why, some topics or ideas were being presented, allowing additional meaning to be derived from participant text that those external to the CAF may not be able to recognize. To reduce the potential of the primary authors' own beliefs and internal bias overpowering the words of participants, and to integrate CAF external perspectives to help question their own biases, subject matter experts in qualitative analysis reviewed coding of participant commentary.

The text of the open-ended qualitative responses was analyzed using the guidelines established by Jackson and Verberg (2007). First, initial coding was done in a way to narrow down the qualitative data for a more focused analysis (Level 1). This coding helped identify data most relevant to the research question posited at the outset of this study. Following this, data was further refined, concentrating on assessing relevant codes to develop categories (Level 2). Building upon the gathered content, data was thematically coded by merging categories to create superordinate themes as applicable (Level 3). To help facilitate this, manually created charts were used to help

[10] J. P. Gee, review of *Discourse, small d, big D*, in *The International Encyclopedia of Language and Social Interaction* (John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2015), pp. 1–5, https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118611463.wbielsi016.
[11] G. H. Harman, The Inference to the Best Explanation. *The Philosophical Review*, *74* 1 (1965); pp. 88–95. https://doi.org/10.2307/2183532

encapsulate themes within an Excel filing system to help identify 'patterns of meaning' in the data.[12] Essentially, a cell was created for each theme that includes the commentary from the open-ended questions to provide a frame of reference and consistency in coding, as well as a separate table that includes the main themes and any potential sub-themes.

Results

Given the mixed methods approach of this study, the quantitative and qualitative results are separated.

Quantitative Results[13, 14]

In the fall 2022 YSS, *N* = 81 Regular Force (Reg F) respondents (4.2 percent) reported being on IR. Presented here are the unweighted results from the items in the IR section of the fall 2022 YSS.[15] Unweighted results represent the respondents who answered this section of the YSS and are not representative of the entire CAF population. Only one respondent on IR reported being a P Res member who was therefore removed from analysis.

Only one Primary Reserve (P Res) respondent reported being on IR who was serving on a Class C contract; that response was removed from the analysis. Because there were so few respondents on IR, the weighted data produced unreliable estimates for the CAF population that are on IR. As a result, findings are based on unweighted responses and do not necessarily reflect the views of the larger CAF population. 43.9 percent of respondents on IR reported being on it for six months or less, making this the most common duration (see Table 1).

[12] V. Braun, and V. Clarke, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology." *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, 2 (2006): 7pp. 7–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa.
[13] W. F. S. Van Veen, "Fall 2022 Programs and Policies Your Say Survey: Imposed Restriction Results (Director General Military Personnel Research and Analysis Scientific Letter DRDC-RDDC-2024-L181)." Defence Research and Development Canada, 2024
[14] W. F. S. Van Veen and K. Daugherty, "Fall 2022 Your Say Survey: Imposed Restriction Results," *85th Annual National Convention of the Canadian Psychology Association* (Ottawa, Ontario, 22 June 2024).
[15] All tabulation was processed accounting for missing participant data by their removal from the total count. Overall percentage differences did not vary more than 1 percent regardless of inclusion or exclusion.

Table 1

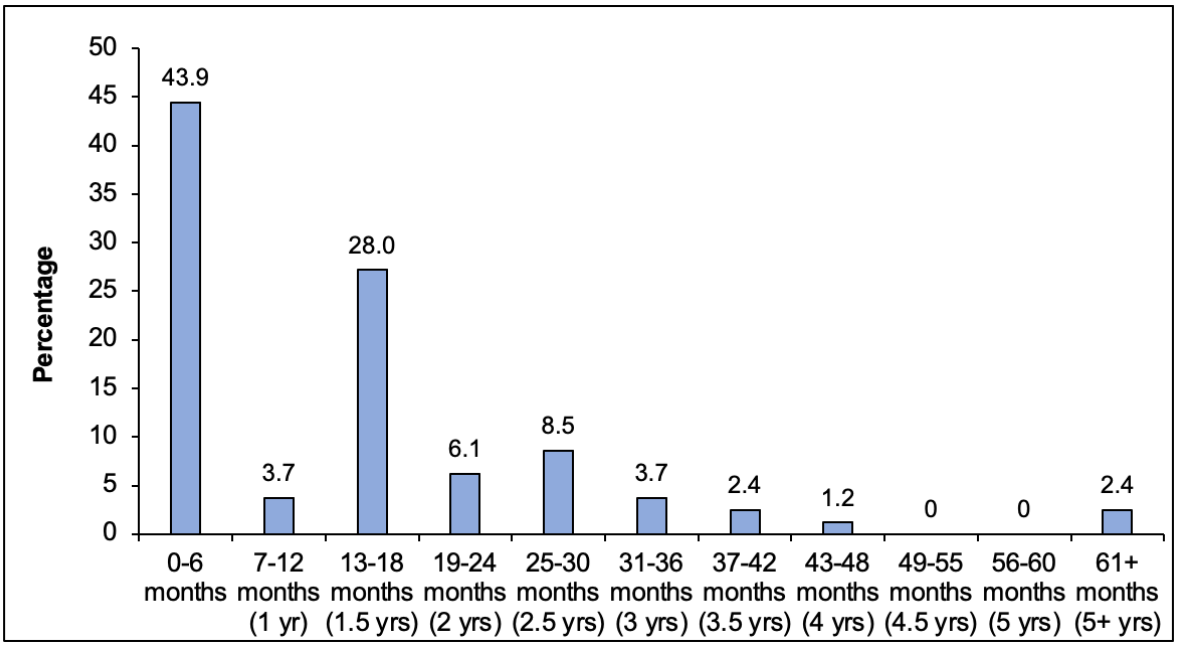
How long have you currently been on IR?

	Unweighted Count	Unweighted (%)
0-6 months	36	43.9%
7-12 months (1 yr)	3	3.7%
13-18 months (1.5yrs)	22	28.0%
19-24 months (2 yrs)	5	6.1%
25-30 months (2.5 yrs)	7	8.5%
31-36 months (3 yrs)	3	3.7%
37-42 months (3.5 yrs)	2	2.4%
43-48 months (4 yrs)	1	1.2%
49-55 months (4.5 yrs)	0	--
56-60 months (5 yrs)	0	--
61+ months (+5 yrs)	2	2.4%

In contrast, only 3.7 percent reported being on IR for seven to twelve months, while nearly 28.0 percent indicated they had been on IR for 13 to 18 months.

Figure 1

Time (in months) on IR



In 2022, 56.8 percent of respondents reported that they had been on IR only once during their careers, 29.6 percent reported two occurrences, 9.9 percent reported three occurrences, and 3.7 percent reported more than three times. Among those currently on IR, 56.1 percent visited their dependents weekly, 7.3 percent biweekly, 4.9 percent monthly, 12.2 percent quarterly, 6.1 percent visited every six months, 4.9 percent annually, and 8.5 percent selected *other* (see Table 2).

Table 2

How often do you visit with your dependents while on IR?

	Unweighted Count	Unweighted (%)
Weekly	46	56.1%
Biweekly	6	7.3%

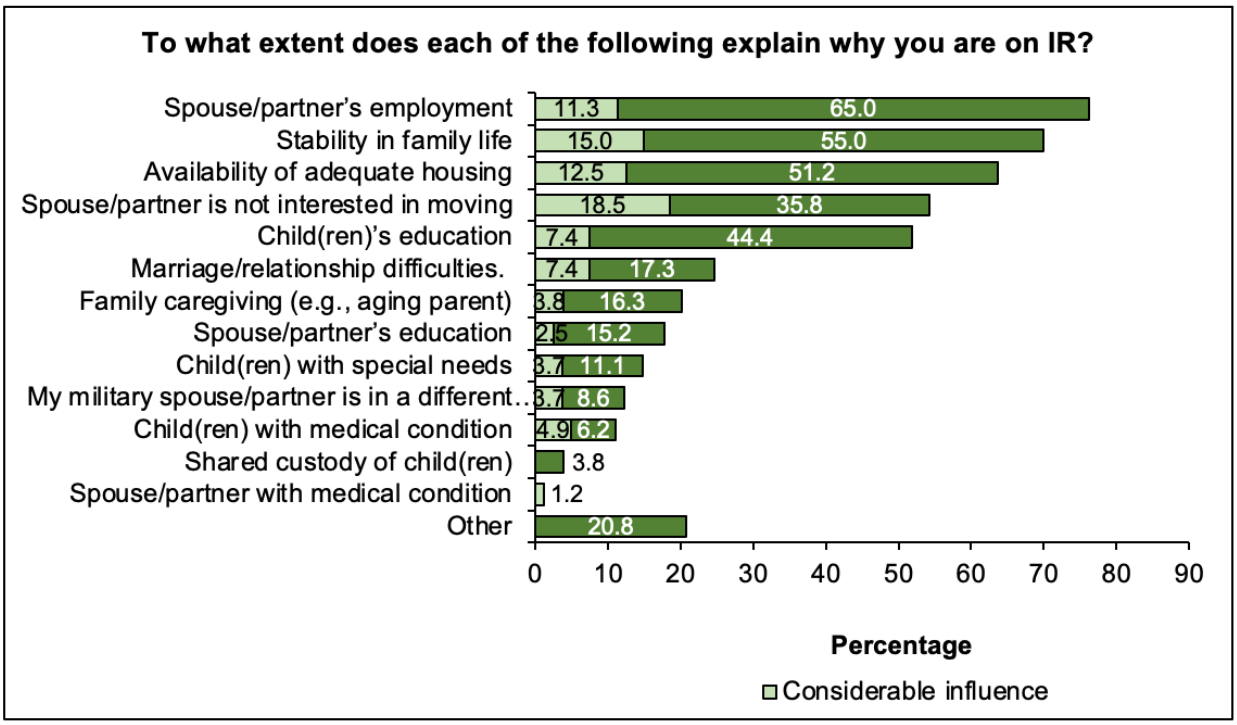
Monthly	4	4.9%
Quarterly	10	12.2%
Every six months	5	6.1%
Annually	4	4.9%
Other	7	8.5%

Note: Other (please specify response; n = 7) consisted of: "Every three months"; "every 6 to 9 weeks"; "approximately once every 2 months"; "Just starting IR now but plan quarterly visits"; "The relationship between my spouse and I ended. Only on IR because the house hasn't sold." *OUTCAN, donc non considéré comme RI selon les politiques des FAC.*; and "Not enough space to explain the antiquated rules, I work from home is the best answer but still IR."

Figure 2 highlights the key factors influencing the decision to be on IR. The top reasons were the spouse/partner's employment (76.3 percent), family stability (70.0 percent), adequate housing availability (64.6 percent), and children's education (51.8 percent). Notably, only 12.3 percent cited having a military spouse/partner in a different posting.

Figure 2

Regular Force respondents' reasons for being on IR



The least common reasons were shared custody of children (3.8 percent) and having a spouse/partner with a medical condition (1.2 percent). In the *other* category (20.8 percent), respondents mentioned a range of factors, including family issues (e.g., language barriers, service couples, medical situations), housing challenges (e.g., inability to sell, lack of interest in selling, realizing financial losses), insufficient funding or services (e.g., special needs, medical care), personal education, health concerns, and career-related intentions (such as receiving a short posting, a posting near retirement, or a promotion). See Table 3 for more detailed responses. [16]

[16] There was a "*not applicable*" option for reasons for being on IR which was removed from the current analysis.

Table 3

Please rate the extent to which the following items influence why you are on IR.

	No influence	Slight influence	Moderate influence	Considerable influence	Very considerable influence
Spouse/partner's employment	8.8%	1.3%	6.3%	11.3%	65.0%
Stability in family life	11.3%	3.8%	10.0%	15.0%	55.0%
Child(ren)'s education	16.0%	--	9.9%	7.4%	44.4%
Spouse/partner is not interested in moving	18.5%	6.2%	7.4%	18.5%	35.8%
Spouse/partner's education	31.6%	2.5%	3.8%	2.5%	15.2%
Family caregiving (e.g., aging parent)	32.5%	6.3%	5.0%	3.8%	16.3%
My military spouse/partner is in a different posting location from me	22.2%	--	1.2%	3.7%	8.6%
Availability of adequate housing	13.8%	3.8%	8.8%	12.5%	51.2%
Marriage/relationship difficulties	40.7%	6.2%	6.2%	7.4%	17.3%
Child(ren) with medical condition	33.3%	3.7%	--	4.9%	6.2%

	No influence	Slight influence	Moderate influence	Considerable influence	Very considerable influence
Child(ren) with special needs	27.2%	2.5%	3.7%	3.7%	11.1%
Shared custody of child(ren)	36.3%	--	--	--	3.8%
Spouse/partner with medical condition	34.6%	7.4%	2.5%	1.2%	--
Other (please specify)	20.8%	--	--	--	20.8%

Note: all unspecified percentile remainder was captured within 'not applicable'

Other (please specify):

	***n* = 35**
Family factors (e.g., spouse's employment, language barriers, service couple, children's education, custody arrangements, medical situation etc.)	14
Housing (e.g., inability to sell, financial loss, renovations in progress)	7
Member's career (e.g., short posting, near retirement, promotion, etc.)	11
Lack of funding or services (e.g., special need, medical care, etc.)	2
Member's education/health	1

Note: A total of 35 respondents provided a comment to expand on their other response selection. Of these responses, four were coded under multiple themes. The total above reflects the number of comments that expressed the given theme.

It is important to note that Regular Force respondents have been largely dissatisfied with IR benefits and policies since 2012.[17] Dissatisfaction with IR benefits was 64.7%, in terms of satisfaction, 26.8 percent were satisfied with IR benefits in 2022. Similarly, dissatisfaction with IR policies was 61.3 percent, whereas satisfaction with IR policies was 25.3 percent. See Table 4 for details.[18]

Table 4

How satisfied are you with the …

	Completely dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Neither satisfied / dissatisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Satisfied	Completely satisfied	Not familiar
Benefits regarding IR	29.3%	18.3%	17.1%	4.9%	14.6%	9.8%	2.4%	3.7%
Policies regarding IR	28.0%	20.0%	13.3%	12.0%	13.3%	10.7%	1.3%	1.3%

Note: This question was asked only to respondents who reported currently being on IR.

All Regular Force respondents were asked if they had ever declined a posting to avoid IR. Among them, 142 respondents (7.4 percent) reported that they had refused a posting for this reason. In other words, 92.6 percent have never refused a posting.

The top reasons for Reg F members avoiding IR were keeping the family together (86.6%), maintaining the spouse/partner relationship (56.3 percent), and the spouses'/partners' employment pursuits, with 52.8 percent (see Figure 4). Although avoiding a negative impact on children's education held a very similar estimate (50.0 percent). Additionally, only 18.3 percent of respondents indicated that shared custody of children played a role in their decision to turn down IR. Respondents also cited other reasons (14.5 percent) for declining an IR posting, including the geographic location of the posting (e.g., isolated area, long commute, or a different country), family

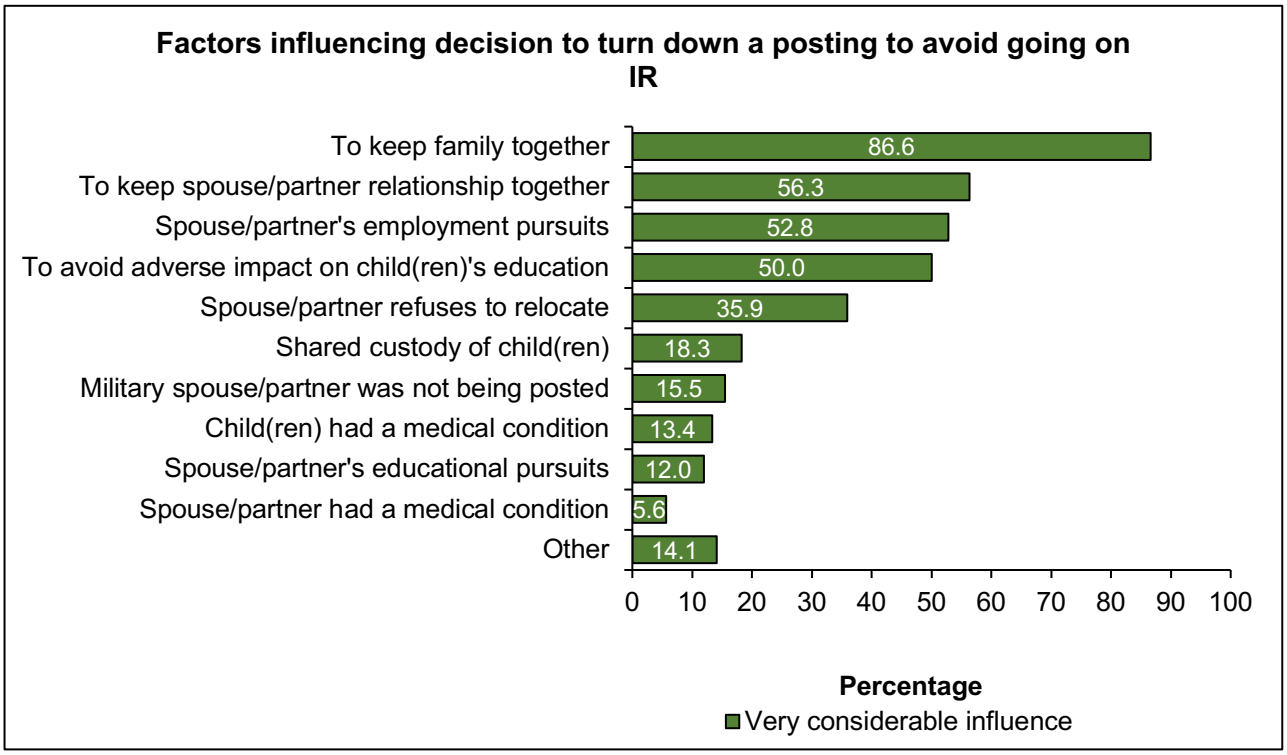
[17] Note that analysis of this trend is descriptive; differences in attitudes between YSS administrations should be interpreted with caution.

[18] Satisfaction was calculated by combining the *somewhat satisfied*, *satisfied* and *completely satisfied* response categories.

requirements, children accompanying the member, financial concerns, and frustration with IR policies (see Figure 3).

Figure 3

Factors influencing decision to turn down IR



Other (please specify):

	***n* = 20**
Family factors (e.g., spouse's employment, language barriers, service couple, children's education, custody arrangements, medical situation, etc.)	5
Housing (e.g., inability to sell, financial loss, renovations in progress)	4
Member's education/health	2
Member's career (e.g., short posting, near retirement, promotion, etc.)	8

Lack of funding or services (e.g., special need, medical care, etc.)	1

Note. A total of 20 respondents provided a comment to expand on their *other* response selection. Of these responses, one was flagged for inattentiveness, and three were coded under two themes. The total above reflects the number of comments that expressed the given theme.

Having reviewed the quantitative aspects of the YSS, analysis now turns towards qualitative inquiry.

2024 Cohort Comparison

Reinforcing the replicability of quantitative results and transferability of qualitative findings, Wright[19] replicated mixed-method analysis on the 2024 cohort, which was sent to 4,020 Reg F members, with a response rate of 35.4 percent (N = 1423), where n = 53 Reg F respondents (3.7 percent) reported that they were currently on IR.

Results on IR were consistent across cohorts, where the 2024 cohort responded similarly with the top reasons cited to go on IR included: wanting to keep their family together (83.3 percent); to keep their spouse/partner relationship together (62.5 percent); to accommodate their spouse/partner's employment (55.2 percent); and, to avoid adverse impact on their children's education (52.1 percent). Whereas the most influential reasons to avoid IR were similar: stability in family life (78.8 percent), spouse/partner's employment (73.1 percent), spouse/partner is not interested in moving (59.6 percent), children's education (58.8 percent), and availability of adequate housing (56.9 percent). Roughly half (44.2 percent) were dissatisfied with IR benefits, with most indicating they have only been on IR one time (61.5 percent) or two times.

Qualitative Results

All respondents who participated in the fall 2022 YSS were asked for comments related to IR policy or benefits. Of the 2,771 who provided usable data in 2022, 482 respondents provided comments; of the 482 responses, 449 were substantive (16.2 percent

[19] J. C Wright, "Imposed Restrictions: Results from the 2024 Programs and Policies Your Say Survey," *Director General Military Personnel Research and Analysis Scientific Letter, DRDC-RDDC-2025-L097*. Ottawa, Ontario, Canada: Defence Research and Development Canada, 2025

response rate).[20] Despite this relatively low-to-moderate response rate, respondents provided feedback and opinions on a range of topics, and the comments generally supported the quantitative findings. Overall, eight major categories were identified to classify themes within the comments.[21] Excel was used as a filing system to facilitate the creation of superordinate themes, as shown in Table 5.

Table 5

Fall 2022 YSS IR qualitative response findings.

Qualitative Category	***n***	**%**
Policies	144	32.1%
Individualized considerations	36	8.0%
Geography/distance from family	31	6.9%
Remote work	21	4.7%
Modernization (e.g., economy, family dynamics)	17	3.8%
Other suggestions (i.e., flexibility)	39	8.7 %
Financial burden	140	31.2%
Pre-2012 IR benefits versus current benefits	38	7.1%
Member/family well-being	106	23.6%
Housing	66	14.7%
Perceived misuse of IR benefits	33	7.4%
Lack of knowledge of IR policies/benefits	39	8.7%
IR exposure	31	6.9%

[20] Comments such as *N/A, nil, no comment* or comments on the survey structure were determined to be insubstantial and were removed from the qualitative analysis. There was also one comment that had insufficient description to categorize it under any of the themes.

[21] For each theme, an exemplar comment is provided to provide contextual detail.

Note. There were 292 comments that had two or more themes in each. The percentage totals above reflect the number of comments (out of 449 respondents) that expressed the given themes.

Policies

A third of the respondents' comments were focused on IR policies and how they can be improved. These comments were further categorized into five sub-categories: individualized consideration, geography/distance from family, remote work, modernization, and other suggestions (i.e., flexibility).

Individualized Consideration. A number of respondents said IR policies were inflexible and did not provide individualized support to CAF members. These members indicated that IR policies needed to be more flexible, and members' needs should be assessed on a case-by-case basis so that individual needs can be accommodated, and benefits can be adjusted based on their unique circumstances. One respondent wrote,

> I was posted at the start of Covid and told to go home and figure out how to work, though I had already procured an apartment and maintained it until it no longer made sense. I then requested removal of IR and permission to work from home (work from home initially was due to the Covid shutdown). CoC [chain of command] approved work from home, but the policy for work from home says that it cannot be backdated / must be requested with the new posting. As I was already on IR and working from home, cancelling IR is not within the policy (direction from CM [career manager]). Now I am using up the 5yr IR timeframe, claiming no benefits and still working from home, chipping away at the 5 years. My expectation is a position again within HQ Ottawa with only 1yr remaining of IR, thus forced to release; all this because a blanket statement in a policy that does not look at the realistic/logical situation.

Geography/distance from family. Some respondents noted that IR policies should consider the geographic region of the member's posting and how far away members are posted from their families. Several respondents noted IR policies needed to be updated to include these elements and reduce the burden on CAF members when they are posted

in a location with a high cost of living or when they are posted at a greater distance from their families:

> *"Politique peu flexible. Aucune distinction entre les RI géographiques proches (ex: Qc-Mtl) et les RI géographiques loin (ex: QC-Victoria). Les avantages connexes devraient tenir compte de la géographie, donc des réalités différentes entre les deux types de RI (ex: possibilité d'aller visiter la conjointe ou le conjoint les weekend)."*

Remote Work. Several members commented on the rationale for remote work permitting a reduction in the necessity for IR postings:

> Remote work is an option that should be employed much more liberally to enable geographic stability and loss of members due to spousal career implications.

Modernization (e.g., Economy, Family Dynamics). Several respondents believed that the IR policies were outdated and needed to be re-evaluated to incorporate modern needs and challenges. Respondents suggested that the necessity and frequency of postings should be revised and that modern family arrangements need to be considered (e.g., spouses with professional careers, complicated custody arrangements). One respondent wrote,

> I am a recent CT [component transfer] from P Res to Reg Force. IR is not currently available to P Res members unless they are serving on a Class C contract. I was serving a long-term Class B (3 years) that included a cost move but could not go on IR even though I went unaccompanied for the contract. With a spouse employed full time and children in school, moving them to the place of employment did not make sense for a Class B that can be cancelled with 30 days' notice regardless of contract length. This resulted in paying full living expenses in two locations while on contract. At the very least, if a cost move is authorized, then there should be some consideration allowed for IR for members that may need it.

Other (i.e., Suggestions, Flexibility). Some members provided suggestions to make IR policies more flexible, so they do not separate members from their families, which affects their well-being. These respondents suggested that it would be better to

find ways to keep families together, which would improve CAF members' work performance and well-being:

> *Cette politique devrait donner plus de flexibilité aux membres qui désirent s'en prévaloir pour la simple raison qu'ils veulent continuer à servir mais dont la famille n'est pas d'accord pour déménager. Le processus devrait être simplifié.*

Financial Burden

In almost a third of the comments, financial burden was identified as a stressor on CAF members on IR and their families. Respondents mostly suggested they were not compensated enough on IR to support themselves and their families:

> I have spent 3 years on IR. While it's the member's choice, the cost of living in many locations makes movement of F&E [furniture and effects] unrealistic without the member incurring debt. The IR policy needs to be revisited, and per diem needs to be returned in some form to better assist members who select to go IR. While in the past, members may have held onto IR to pocket the extra cash, in this day and age with cost of living and other expenses incurred on IR, this will reduce the strain on the member's budget and allow them to concentrate on the job.

Pre-2012 IR Benefits Versus Current Benefits

Further to the financial burden and policy, some respondents unfavourably compared current benefits with benefits prior to 2012:

> Done it three times, each with different financial impacts... first time got a huge amount of food money; second time it was cut off, then somewhat restarted; third time no food coin. Now it is always zero food. Considering that even though the economy is crap, the GoC [Government of Canada] has zero actual policy or interest in supporting spousal job support when CAF members are posted, I expect IR will continue to be used a lot.

Some respondents wanted the benefits prior to 2012 reinstated because they found current benefits to be insufficient:

> A lot of benefits were cut over the years; they should come back.

Member/Family Well-being

Members reported that the stress related to IR has a negative impact on their own and their family's well-being, especially when they were posted far away from their families:

> IR is unhealthy for family and member well-being.

Housing

Members raised concerns about housing while being on IR. The most common complaint was the inability to find adequate and affordable housing when posted to cities without base housing:

> The disproportion between locations, for example, in Ottawa compared to Edmonton and Trenton. Ottawa has full apartments at Les Suites and another established location as opposed to the other locations that just provide a very small room in the quarters without the ability to cook meals or have any semblance to normalcy. Funds provided to obtain a "single room" in the market are out of reach with the current rates.

Some members criticized the conditions of the housing on the base:

> Since I am on IR, I know they have not updated accommodations: the buildings are old (and it shows); 9x9 floor tiles (asbestos is a concern, especially if broken and disturbed); old broken Corcan furniture; bed (that does not get sanitized prior to a new occupant moving in), speaking from experience. No WIFI access (unless you are lucky enough to purchase from an overpriced local provider) or even basic cable (recent contract expired). You cannot control the heating/cooling system. In the summer it's 45 degrees in the rooms as the heat is still on in July; it is turned back on in November.

Another common problem discussed was the challenge associated with selling a house when posted on IR:

> I couldn't sell in Halifax and came to Ottawa initially IR. It was a horrible experience being here IR for 5 months waiting for house to sell; the

> benefits aren't there. You have to buy groceries for your family back home and at your place as well. So double cost. Benefits are horrible if IR is going to continue; we need to include food allowance and incidentals for members. Shouldn't cost members money to go to work.

Together, these comments suggest that the financial burden related to housing is stressful for CAF members. It appears that it is important to improve IR policies related to housing and provide additional support to members to reduce their level of stress when posted on IR.

Perceived Misuse of IR Benefits

Some respondents believed that individuals on IR took advantage of the benefits for personal financial gain:

> Certain cities, companies, or individuals familiar with CAF IR policies use these to their own financial gain and artificially increase general rental rates within the area. If all bases had appropriate IR housing, this would prevent this clear abuse of IR benefits and discourage the large rental markets in locations where IR is more common.

In contrast, some respondents believed that changes to IR benefits made in 2012 had limited members' ability to take advantage of the IR benefits as members did prior to this time:

> IR benefits should be structured in such a way as to ensure that any member falling into this category is not negatively impacted financially. Current benefits related to IR do not fully cover costs. I understand that IR benefits have been abused in the past, but instead of addressing the particular circumstance, policy is changed. As opposed to presuming that 99 percent of the CAF would not abuse benefits, policy is changed to address the 1 percent who do.

Yet other members believed that career managers relied on IR too strongly and, thus, misused this program:

> IR is a useful tool for those who wish to exercise it. However, I believe it is an abused tool by career managers who wish to put institutional priorities

> over the well-being of their members. Often, I was pressured to relocate from my military spouse on IR while many career/advancement opportunities in the area followed my career progression. Ultimately, I was posted with my spouse but placed in a position well above my career progression, which also had similar impacts on my spouse's progression as well. We are now both in senior positions that we are not prepared for.

Lack of Knowledge of IR Policies/Benefits

Some members noted that they had insufficient knowledge of IR policies and benefits:

> I didn't even know what Imposed Restriction was until the survey question clarified what it meant.

A few respondents indicated in their comments that additional education about IR policies would benefit CAF members:

> I have done IR before. The BGRS website/app has almost no information with regard to the policies about an IR posting. I had to check with people who had done an IR posting before in order to gather the information that I needed. Given the current housing market, more and more people are looking into an IR posting, and there needs to be more information easily available.

These comments showed that individuals on IR can benefit from receiving more information about IR policy and benefits. Better understanding of the IR policies can help members make informed decisions about whether to go on IR or to avoid IR. Members can become more aware of how they can maximize the benefits of IR based on their circumstances, which in turn can help improve their perception of IR.

IR Exposure

Finally, some members noted that they had experience with IR without mentioning any details beyond their own exposure to this aspect of military employment. While such comments provided limited details on experiences with IR, the fact that these

respondents were compelled to mention their exposure to IR was seen as noteworthy. It was therefore decided to code these comments under this separate theme.

"While I have only been on IR once, my spouse has been twice."

Summary of Thematic Analysis

Overall, qualitative findings aligned with the quantitative data, indicating a general dissatisfaction among respondents with IR policies and benefits, although several comments expressed satisfaction with specific aspects. Initial qualitative analysis identified eight primary themes: policies (including five subthemes—individualized considerations, geography/distance from family, remote work, modernization, and other), comparison of pre-2012 IR benefits to current benefits, financial burden, member and family well-being, housing, misuse of IR benefits, lack of knowledge regarding IR policies and benefits, and exposure to IR. This analysis was based on responses from 449 respondents, of whom three identified as reservists, and 121 responses addressed two or more themes.

Approximately one-third of responses focused on IR policies, related issues, and suggested improvements. Many respondents felt that IR benefits were inadequate, advocating enhancements to better address financial burdens experienced during IR postings. Some respondents highlighted that current policies were outdated and required reassessment to align with modern realities, such as the well-being of the member and their family, housing needs, and remote work opportunities. Greater flexibility and individualized consideration were recommended to meet members' unique circumstances. Several respondents argued that the changes implemented in 2012 have limited members' ability to fully utilize IR benefits.

Respondents highlighted the need for increased flexibility in IR policies to better support family cohesion. They emphasized that existing policies frequently lead to family separation, negatively affecting family well-being. Recommendations included providing compensation that adequately addresses the impact of IR on family life and prioritizing policies that keep families together. Respondents frequently highlighted financial challenges related to IR, such as the expense of maintaining two households, significant travel costs, and additional expenses for food and utilities that are not adequately covered under the current benefit structure. Some respondents identified

significant challenges related to housing, especially in securing suitable and affordable accommodations in areas lacking military-provided housing on the base.

Some commentary also touched on recent changes to IR policies that were aimed at reducing misuse. Nevertheless, concerns persisted about individuals exploiting IR benefits for personal gain. Respondents also perceived that the chain of command and career managers excessively relied on IR, potentially resulting in inappropriate use of the policy.

Several respondents expressed insufficient knowledge regarding IR policies, which impeded their ability to make informed decisions about IR postings. Some respondents mentioned personal or indirect experiences with IR without providing extensive commentary. These participants either expressed having personally been on IR or having heard about IR through others' experiences. These comments, while limited in detail, were frequently made and thus included due to their relevance.

Qualitative analysis of open-ended responses and were also largely consistent in the 2024 cohort,[22] indicating high transferability of findings given a separate civilian researcher coded and assessed the data and found similar themes. Primary themes included affordability of housing, cost of living, spouse/partner's employment/income, medical needs, short-term posting, dependent education, and language barriers. Most prominent were suggestions that current IR benefits are inadequate. Familial disruptions, spousal employment, family mental health and well-being were all cited as reasons to go on IR. Much like the 2022 cohort, these similar issues to both go on IR and avoid it highlight the diverse and complex needs of CAF members engaging with it.

Discussion

Overall, feedback from members highlights the IR policy is a topic that generates diverse and complex perspectives within the CAF, often skewing negative. Comments suggest potential areas for improvement, notably policy modernization, enhanced

[22] J. C. Wright, "Imposed Restrictions: Results from the 2024 Programs and Policies Your Say Survey," *Director General Military Personnel Research and Analysis Scientific Letter, DRDC-RDDC-2025-L097*. Ottawa, Ontario, Canada: Defence Research and Development Canada, 2025.

education about IR policies, and increased flexibility to better support individual members and their family's well-being.

Few Reg F members reported being on IR, and those who were on IR reported significant family-related concerns (e.g., spouse/partner's employment, children's education, stability in family life). While too few survey respondents were on IR to generalize these findings to the CAF IR population, the most influential reasons for going on IR or avoiding IR were related to member and family well-being.

Qualitative analysis of open-ended comments by members regarding IR offers some insight into their satisfaction and dissatisfaction and may reveal where IR policy falls short and where it excels. Nonetheless, the number of respondents was small. Given the potential of self-selection bias, the results should be interpreted with caution. Of note, some members noted a lack of knowledge of IR policies/benefits. Improving their understanding could help members make better use of IR benefits and, in turn, improve their perception of the program. Moreover, the quantitative findings were largely replicated with the 2024 cohort, and similarly so with open-ended comments indicating high transferability.

Future Research

As outlined in the introduction, there appears to be a disconnect in the public perception of supports to CAF members counter to the reported views many actual CAF members hold regarding support programs. Additionally, the CAF population appears to be very willing to impart their perspectives to research efforts in hopes of providing recommendations to improve the support provided to themselves and their families. Moreover, less is known regarding the diversity of viewpoints from CAF members across the country. Indeed, it has been stated that further research is specifically needed to investigate the impacts of CAF policies, and to better understand organizational culture change geared towards improving the diversity of the CAF, especially related to gender.[23]

Importantly, as of the writing of this article, the Canadian government has released a historic funding package for the CAF. This compensation envelope is the

[23] B. T. Waruszynski, K. H., MacEachern, S. Raby, M. Straver, and E. Ouellet, "Desire to Serve: Insights from Canadian Defence Studies on the Factors That Influence Women to Pursue a Military Career," *Journal of Military, Veteran and Family Health* 8, 1 (2022): pp. 75–84. https://doi.org/10.3138/jmvfh-2021-0089.

largest single investment into CAF pay and benefits ever, which includes a significant increase in IR funding.[24] Because of these recent changes, continued investigation into the perceptions of IR by the CAF population will be key to understanding how these new benefits are being received.

Conclusion

This study provides clear information directly from CAF members' on their experiences with IR, including the number of times they have been on IR, time spent on IR, frequency of visits with dependents, level of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with IR policies and benefits, and reasons for being on IR, as well as their reasons for avoiding IR much of which directly or indirectly relates to the well-being of themselves and their families. Thus, continued surveillance of the effects of IR on CAF members and their families is needed to support those serving in the Canadian Military.

[24] National Defence, "Chapter 208 – Relocation Benefits - Canada.Ca," Canada.ca, 2026, https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/policies-standards/compensation-benefits-instructions/chapter-208-relocation-benefits.html#sec-pp. 208-997.