

Predators and prey: Canada's military cadets and the sex misconduct problem few talk about

With the rash of criticism on the Forces over sexual misconduct there's a dimension that's largely been overlooked: how often it happens in the cadet program



Chad Gibson/Postmedia Network/File



DOUGLAS QUAN

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Facebook

The stalking began, as it often does, via text.

Ryan Hammermeister, a former corporal in the Canadian Armed Forces, was 28.

She was 13 years old.

Hammermeister had seen two deployments to Afghanistan. He lost a close friend to a roadside bomb and was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder. He suffered from flashbacks and started drinking heavily.

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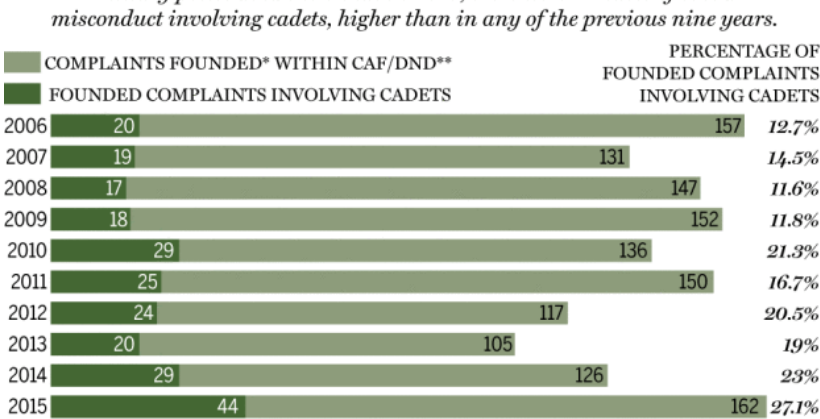
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*According to military police, "Every complaint is assumed to be founded until it is proven otherwise. Therefore 'founded' means any complaint for which the information available suggests an offence was committed. That may very well include cases where there is insufficient evidence to lay a charge. A complaint deemed 'unfounded' is one in which the facts support a conclusion that no offence has been committed. That may include a malicious allegation or a case in which the actions of the accused do not meet the criminal standard of the alleged offence."

**Canadian Armed Forces / Department of National Defence

SOURCE: CAF MILITARY POLICE

NATIONAL POST

According to an agreed statement of facts, Hammermeister began communicating with a female cadet in 2013 using text messages, instant messaging and email.

He ramped up pressure on the girl to engage in sex acts. Many of his texts to the girl were manipulative and degrading. He asked her to send pictures of her breasts. When she told him to wait, he insisted, "No, right now."

One day, Hammermeister convinced the girl to let him come over while her father was at work and they had sex.

The girl, according to the court documents, believed she was in a romantic relationship. It came to an end when the girl's father did a "spot check" on her phone, discovered the messages and called police.

In December, an Alberta provincial court judge sentenced Hammermeister to two years behind bars after he pleaded guilty to sexual interference and internet luring charges.

At Hammermeister's sentencing hearing, the girl had shared a hand-written victim impact statement that expressed the effect he'd had on her.

"I just tend to hide myself," she wrote. "I also have a very hard time with opening up to people. I notice that I have a very hard time trusting men in authority I tend to get angry alot of times."

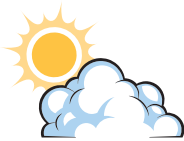
While Hammermeister had not been in a direct position of authority over the girl, the judge found his military past gave him an "enhanced position of respect."

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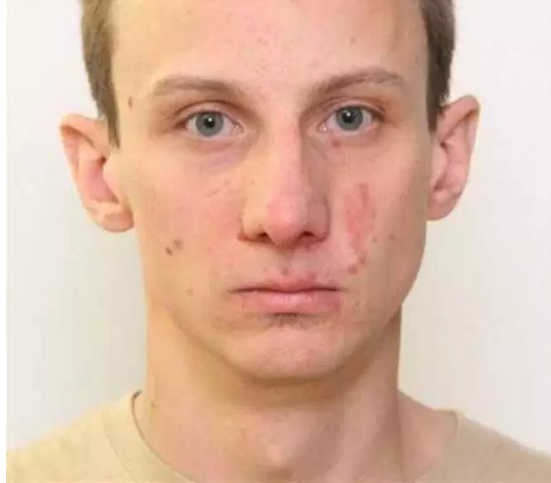
lack of sophistication" shone through, the judge found.

"That she is a child in every sense, and not a young adult, is obvious."

The Canadian Armed Forces have come under scrutiny in the past year after a damning report from retired Supreme Court justice Marie Deschamps uncovered a highly sexualized culture, and large numbers of sexual assaults and incidents of sexual harassment that went unreported.

But critics say there's a dimension of the problem that has largely been overlooked: recurring sexual misconduct within the military's cadet program, geared at 12- to 18-year-olds.

Data provided to the *National Post* by military police show 27 per cent of all sexual misconduct cases across the Canadian Forces in 2015 (44 out of 162 cases) involved cadets, a higher proportion than in any of the previous nine years, when the average was 17 per cent.



Alberta
Justice and
Solicitor General

VICTIM IMPACT STATEMENT
Criminal Code of Canada and Youth Criminal Justice Act

PLEASE DESCRIBE HOW THIS CRIME HAS AFFECTED YOU EMOTIONALLY

By this event happening to me I just tend to help myself, I also have a hard time with opening up to people. I notice that I have a very hard time trusting men in authority. It's harder for me to open up to anyone which leads up to anger and hate towards people.

PLEASE DESCRIBE HOW THIS CRIME HAS AFFECTED YOU PHYSICALLY

PLEASE DESCRIBE THE EFFECT THIS CRIME HAS HAD ON YOUR LIFE

I feel like I can't talk to anyone it takes me more time than it should, I keep my emotions and my feelings to myself, which why I tend to get angry a lot of times.

Additional pages can be attached if you desire. ☐ Yes, the Victim Impact Statement continues on the attached pages.

I UNDERSTAND THE FOLLOWING

- The information in this Victim Impact Statement will be considered only if a charge is laid and the accused person is found guilty.
- After a finding of guilt, a copy of this Victim Impact Statement will be provided to the judge, the Crown prosecutor, the defence lawyer and the offender.
- The judge will consider the Victim Impact Statement at the time the offender is sentenced. The Victim Impact Statement may be opened and read aloud or it may remain unopened (for example, if there is more than one Victim Impact Statement on file and the judge decides to read only one) and still be part of the file.
- If the Victim Impact Statement is read aloud in court, anyone or the judge or become a
- matter of public record. A member of the public or media could apply to the Court to have access to a copy of the Victim Impact Statement.
- If the Victim Impact Statement is not considered by a judge (for example, if the accused is found not guilty), the Victim Impact Statement will remain in the sealed envelope.
- If the offender is sentenced to probation or prison, the Victim Impact Statement will be provided to provincial correctional authorities or the Correctional Service of Canada and Parole Board of Canada.
- If the accused person is found "not criminally responsible on account of mental disorder," the Victim Impact Statement will be provided to the Alberta Review Board. The Board may allow you to present your Victim Impact Statement in person. It can also take steps to protect your identity.

Name of person who prepared this statement: _____ Relationship to victim: _____

You may wish to make a copy of your Victim Impact Statement to keep for your records.

Court Document

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THE CANADIAN PRESS/Sean Kilpatrick

“This is an organization that has yet to fully come to grips with its responsibilities as a youth-serving organization,” said Will Hiscock, a lawyer in St. John’s, Nfld. Hiscock represents two former cadets who allege in separate lawsuits that they were victims of repeated sexual abuse while they were cadets in the 1960s and 1970s in the Atlantic provinces.

The suits allege a failure in the screening of employees and the creation of an environment “which encouraged or fostered silence and obedience” when abuse happened.

“I’m sure the people that are currently there are well-intentioned and want to make sure this is a safe environment for children” Hiscock says. “My ultimate concern, I suppose, is that I don’t think they’ve ever had to live up to or truly face the mistakes of the past.”

With a \$250 million annual budget, the Canadian Cadet Organizations — informally known as Cadets Canada and encompassing the air, army and sea cadets — boast more than 50,000 members across Canada. While the program receives the bulk of its funding from the Department of National Defence and exposes young people to different facets of the Forces — naval communications, survival skills, aircraft maintenance, navigation — it’s not intended to be a pipeline for future military recruits. Instead, the emphasis is on developing leadership and life skills, physical fitness and self-discipline.

The program does take measures to protect its young charges.

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camp commanding officers ahead of the busy summer season. Military police are also playing an increasing role in prevention.

“I will not tolerate inappropriate behaviour involving cadets, their instructors or anyone involved in the cadet program. There’s no grace period,” he said.



Dept. National Defence

Woiden said the increase in misconduct cases last year likely was the result of higher visibility of the issue and greater emphasis on reporting misbehaviour. Complaints are also reported and dealt with through a more “centralized control and command” structure, he said.

All cadet instructors, whether Canadian Forces members or civilians, are required to go through background checks.

Beginning in the 1990s, the cadets also introduced a mandatory “Cadet Harassment and Abuse Prevention” program aimed at cadets and instructors that included a series of videos.

In one dramatization, a group of cadets is huddled around a campfire. A supervisor takes a swig of alcohol and passes it around.

“Now we can have some fun,” he says.

Later, the supervisor puts his arm around a female cadet.

Cadets are taught to identify harassment or criminal behaviour and where to go for help. Instructors are taught how to manage conflicts and told to never be alone with cadets and to avoid touching them.

“If you have to touch, ask the cadet if it is okay first and restrict touching to ‘safe’ areas of the body,” the manual says.

Despite these prevention efforts, critics say more systemic changes are still needed, pointing out that abuse within the program is a problem that goes back decades.

Robert Gibbens, a Vancouver lawyer, filed a class-action lawsuit more than a decade ago on behalf of a group of former sea cadets who said they suffered sexual abuse and misconduct from 1964 to 1980 at the HMCS Discovery naval base.



A settlement was reached in 2006 in which the federal government agreed to pay \$8 million to 35 former sea cadets and another \$1.8 million to victims who had not yet come forward.

Gibbens said expert opinion at the time suggested certain programs, such as the cadets, attracted abusers because they brought them closer to children. The command-and-control structure — having to obey the dictates of commanding officers — also allowed the problem to persist.

“Finally, the collegial nature of the (program) seemed to foster an inability for any whistleblower to emerge.”

In Australia, news reports indicate that a royal commission will begin hearings next month into allegations of widespread abuse of cadets by officers in the Australian Defence Force since the 1960s.

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court).

Military officials insist they move swiftly when allegations of sexual misconduct are brought to their attention. However, internal emails suggest there has often been confusion within the Forces over how to handle such misconduct.

On Feb. 6, 2012, the Canadian Forces National Investigation Service, the investigative arm of the military police, announced that a B.C. cadet instructor, Capt. Daniel Moriarty, had been charged with sexual offences against cadets in Victoria and Vernon.

Prior to the announcement, senior cadet officials were bracing for the public relations fallout and talking points were drawn up to emphasize the “Cadet Program is a safer organization than ever before in our history.”

“I briefed DGRC (Director General Reserves & Cadets) who reminded us to ‘think like a parent’ in order to maintain stakeholder confidence in the Program,” wrote Maj. Dan Thomas, a senior public affairs officer.

“Would appreciate an update (with respect to) parental involvement/awareness of this. If they aren’t aware, they should be made aware soon,” wrote Col. Craig Fletcher, director cadets and junior rangers.

But parents only learned about the charges after the story came out in the press.

They expressed their dismay a few days later during a meeting with Stan Bates, the commanding officer of the Regimental Cadet Support Unit (Pacific).

Bates later told his colleagues in an email he had been in “damage control for 48 hours.”

Parents felt we should have met them when charges were laid rather than 3 days after it became public knowledge

“Parents felt we should have met them when charges were laid rather than 3 days after it became public knowledge,” he wrote.

He also wrote he could not find standard operating procedures that covered the steps to be taken when allegations become public.

“We need a more explicit, step by step National SOP” that covers calls to be made, rights of the accused and accusers, and dealing with media.

(The emails were obtained through an access-to-information request by an advocate trying to raise awareness of the issue but who requested anonymity.)

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— over four years, she sent him at least 30 photos or videos in which she was partially or fully naked; they also had sex on three occasions — and one count of sexual assault and one count of sexual touching involving a boy.

A military judge sentenced Moriarty, then 26, in December 2012 to a year in jail, demoted him to second-lieutenant and banished him from the Forces.

The female victim has filed a lawsuit in Federal Court alleging the government “provided no proactive disclosure to cadets or their parents that the cadet programme has an extensive history of sexual abuse, including an extensive recent history of such incidents.”

The lawsuit, which seeks more than \$1 million in damages, also accuses the government of failing to supervise and monitor Moriarty.

The government denies it was negligent or breached any duty and says Moriarty should be held “personally accountable” for his conduct.

Another Federal Court case highlights how cadet parents are sometimes afraid to report a problem.

In March 2011, a mother in Saskatchewan wrote cadet leaders to notify them her 16-year-old son, a cadet at 40 Snowbird Royal Canadian Air Cadet Squadron in Moose Jaw, admitted he had been given alcohol at the home of an instructor.

The mother wrote she did not initially report the incident because the instructor was a family friend and she didn’t want him to lose his job. But she changed her mind when the instructor took a group of cadets swimming even though a parents committee had told him not to.

“These parents voiced some other concerns to me, but they were not ready to step up, as they don’t want to cause problems for the squadron,” the mother wrote. “So I guess after speaking with them, I decided that I needed to step forward My fear is someone’s cadet is going to get injured or worse.”

In August 2011, the instructor was suspended. He immediately filed a grievance, alleging harassment and abuse of authority, but the suspension was upheld.

My fear is someone’s cadet is going to get injured or worse

According to court documents, the instructor had previously been warned by the commanding officer private relationships with cadets — going for coffee, exchanging emails and social networking — was not allowed.

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However, personal relationships between staff and cadets are not permitted, “full stop.”

Even in cases where no criminal acts occurred, disciplinary measures can be taken right up to dismissal, he added.

Eight days after the girl submitted her victim impact statement at Ryan Hammermeister’s sentencing hearing last July, the cadets program was dealt another blow.

Military authorities announced charges against Lt.-Col. Mason Stalker in relation to a series of sex-related offences against a boy in the army cadets. The offences were alleged to have taken place from 1998 through 2007 while Stalker served as a mentor in the program.

At the time the charges were announced, Stalker, 40, was commanding officer of the 1st Battalion, Princess Patricia’s Canadian Light Infantry in Edmonton. He was also a two-time recipient of the Governor General’s Meritorious Service Medal, including once for his “leadership and tactical acumen” while in Afghanistan.

The allegations have not been proven in court, but if true, they follow an all-too-familiar pattern — an ex-soldier in an “enhanced position of respect,” a vulnerable young victim.



THE CANADIAN PRESS/Bill Graveland

Woiden, who spent five years in the army cadets before joining the Canadian Armed Forces, maintains the cadets are “one of the best youth programs we have in Canada.”

one of these incidents occurs,” he said.

Feist was an air cadet himself for seven years. He later built and managed Saskatchewan’s largest army cadet corps. He doesn’t have children, but if he did, he says, he’d have to think “long and hard” before enrolling them in cadets.

“Parents don’t know when they’re putting children into the program that there’s a sexual abuse history,” he said. “Often the reporting procedures are difficult and confusing, the response procedures can have lag time, and the response procedures only seem to focus on punishing the offender, as opposed to changing the system to make it safer.”

National Post

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