

The Specific Needs of Women in Uniform

8 things to remember

- 1 Challenge traditional beliefs about gender roles, especially with respect to uniformed occupations.
- 2 Recognize the multiple roles of women (career, domestic work, family life, etc.).
- 3 Allow women to gather and share their experiences in support of each other.
- 4 Create support programs specifically designed for women (i.e. women's housing, etc.).
- 5 Alleviate gender discrimination, real or perceived, regarding performance by improving communication between team members.
- 6 Value the strength and skills of women beyond the fact of uniformed service.
- 7 Recognize the importance of prevention and education in limiting stigma.
- 8 Create committees that can rule on gender discrimination in uniformed professions.

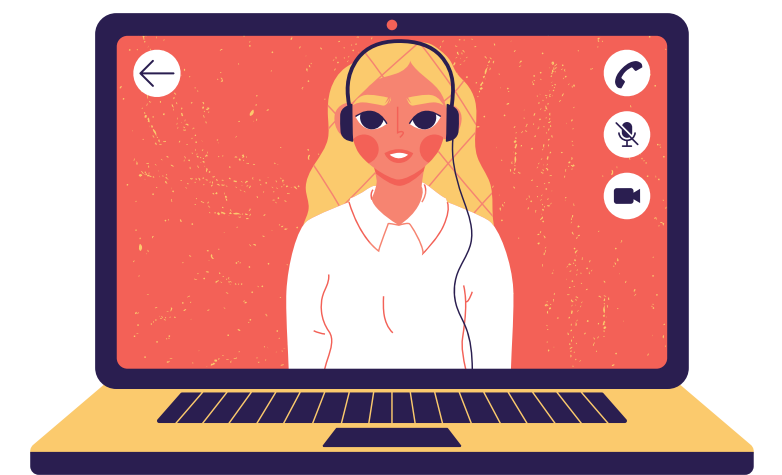
The scope of the testimony

Giving voice to women in uniform or to women working with women in uniform has opened a source of moving and necessary testimony. Through the sharing of experiences, the presentations highlighted various specific challenges or needs of women in uniform.

Each occupation is unique; however, it was possible for us to highlight a number of similarities, demonstrating a concrete reality for women in uniform whether in their careers or in their transition to civilian life.

7 Speakers

- 2 members of the Canadian Armed Forces
- 2 members of paramedical services
- 2 members of support organization
- 1 former member of the CMP



It was a good start, but we need to continue ...

The participant evaluation survey has allowed us to confirm the success of our webinar. Most of the feedback is very positive, and we remain open to advice from participants to continue improving our programs and events.

Several areas of improvement remain. We must, above all, better define the theme of our events. In the future, we will identify specific topics for discussion. This will enable better control of duration while ensuring continuing relevance for our participants.

The Specific Needs of Women in Uniform

3 Francophone Conferences

"Life After a Career in Uniform"

Lieutenant-Colonel (H) Sandra Perron, CD, MSc

The end of a chapter approaches when you hand back your uniform to the quartermaster, perhaps reluctantly, perhaps with jubilation. What is in store for you now? A new career, a stimulating project, an exciting adventure?

Regardless of what lies behind the turning point, many women who have served in uniform face similar challenges: their centre of gravity is about to change radically, and this can be both exhilarating and overwhelming.

Sandra will explore the unique challenges that some women face during the transition from uniform to "civilian life". Most importantly, she will share the most important issues to consider before starting this next chapter of their lives.



Lieutenant-colonel (H) Sandra Perron discussed the place of women in service throughout history. Demonstrating the importance and commitment of these citizens in times of war, she reminded us how women have always served their country, whether under arms or behind the front lines, doing the work of men who were required for battle.

It would seem, however, that the collective memory of this female commitment is fading when considering the place of women in our society. Thanks to her investment through "The Memory Project", Sandra Perron invites us to become aware of the gender differences that still exist today in the cultural imagination of female and male roles.

Reflecting on her own experience as Canada's first female infantry officer, Sandra Perron reminded us of the difficulties faced by many women who, in addition to their careers, must continue to manage domestic tasks, still considered to be predominantly female. She then explained the challenges she meets daily in her work as a mentor and supporter to the veteran population. Women are often overwhelmed by their daily lives, and do not have the opportunity to get together to share experiences so they can realize their situations are no out of the normal. Ms. Perron emphasizes the importance of taking a deliberate approach to evaluating the careers of these women in difficulty who, at the end of their careers, find themselves alone, isolated in their problems.

The Specific Needs of Women in Uniform

3 Francophone Conferences

"Experience of Josée Querry"

Josée Querry, RCMP Retiree



Josée Querry proudly wore the RCMP uniform for 20 years, but had to retire unexpectedly for medical reasons due to a diagnosis of work-related post-traumatic stress disorder.

For her, wearing the uniform was the most important thing, even more than asking for help. In November 2015, she hit a wall, and that's when everything fell apart. The uniform was no longer strong enough to keep her standing. The next three years were a nightmare for Josée. With the help of doctors, psychologists, and psychiatrists, Josée was able to rebuild herself and become stronger than ever.

Josée Querry, RCMP retiree, shared her poignant testimony. She looked back on her career as a police officer, explaining how the hardships she experienced led her over time to overcome one of the greatest challenges of her life: the end of her career due to her post-traumatic stress disorder.

Josée was passionate about police work and her role in the police was true vocation that confronted her with fears and extreme violence. Despite the strength she drew from the cohesiveness of the police community and her pride from wearing the uniform, she acquired indomitable courage. Or so she thought. Her career took off as she overcame successive ordeals and challenges, but she never allowed herself the time to truly assimilate them. Unfortunately, all it took was a trigger, an image, for her often-closed "emotional drawer" to burst open and confront her with depression, and later, a diagnosis of post-traumatic stress.

She then shared with us the challenges and emotions so difficult to overcome, especially for a woman who refuses to let her male colleagues see her self-perceived weaknesses and flaws, fearing that they would lose their esteem for her. Her symptoms and medical background confronted her with her greatest fears: the end of her career and the impact on her two daughters, who had to switch roles and "mother" her. She explains how she then took matters into her own hands and agreed to take off her uniform while facing her responsibilities as a single mother. Having too often hid herself behind the strength and courage she associated only with her uniform, she accepted that there was a life after her career.

The Specific Needs of Women in Uniform

3 conférences francophones

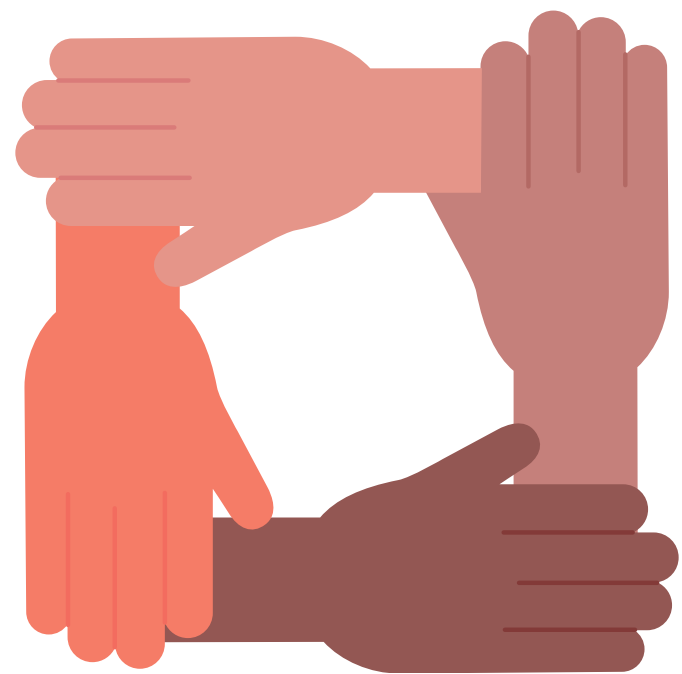
"Direct Involvement with Women in Uniform"

Marion Turmine, Quebec Operations Coordinator (VTN)

Claudine Barette, Psychologist (VTN)

For the past two years, Marion Turmine has been working with the Veterans' Transition Network as an operations coordinator for the province of Quebec. Her role as coordinator led her to become a peer-helper of VTN programs for women. Thus, her direct involvement with women in the programs has allowed her to better understand the challenges and complexities of the issues faced by women who have served in uniform. In addition, her 30 years of experience in international development and humanitarian responses have allowed her to acquire in-depth understanding of gender equality issues and challenges in a variety of contexts.

Finally, in May 2019, she was invited by Veterans Affairs Canada to participate in the first-ever forum for women veterans in Charlottetown. This event allowed her to gather a lot of information about the key issues facing female veterans.



Marion Turmine and Claudine Barette shared the perspective of women supporting women in uniformed service. Drawing on their experiences with Veterans' Transition Network, they discussed the development of women-specific programs. As a result, they emphasized the importance of not only accepting women in programs created for men, but of producing tools dedicated to women.

By recognizing the specificity of the background of women in uniform, it is possible to see how, like a minority group, women tend to adjust to the majority, that of men. However, the difficulties, violence, and perceptions of experiences are gender specific. VTN is now engaged in the research and creation of program offerings for non-mixed groups to adapt to the realities of all. Training their professionals on gender-specific issues, their testimonies have allowed us, in concrete terms, to see how much recognition of minority groups is needed in support programs. By this testimony alone, we are confronted with the dangers of programs that are not adapted to the particular clientele of women in uniform. We must therefore continue prevention so that all those in need have access to well adapted services and in which they can evolve and become fully committed.

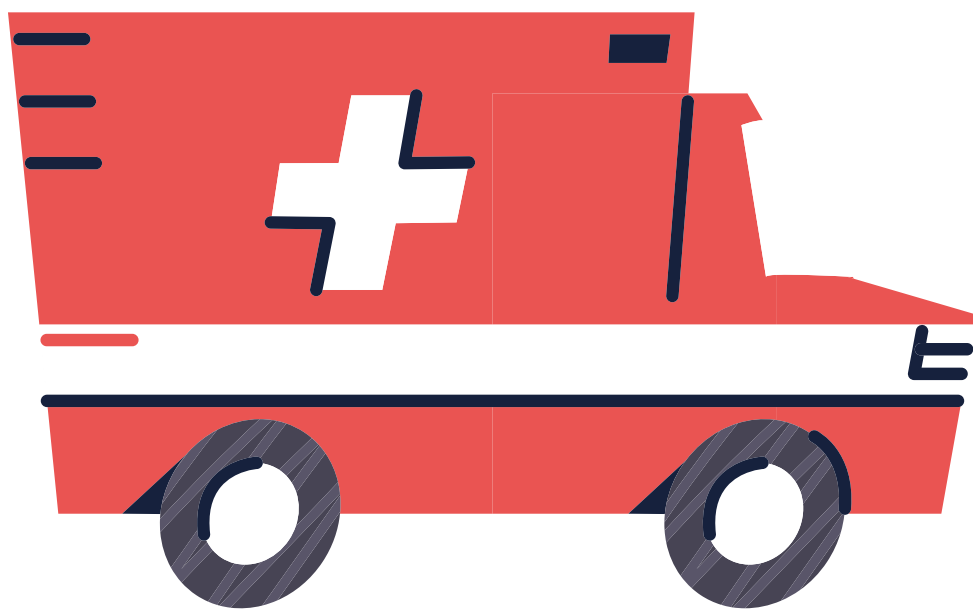
The Specific Needs of Women in Uniform

3 Anglophone Conference

"20 years in EMS"

Denise Beard, OSI-CAN & Respect Forum

As a woman who spent over 20 years working in a uniformed EMS service, I have experienced the highs and lows of the job. During this time, I also worked a second job, took care of my family and my home. Our second child, our son James, was born in 1987 with multiple disabilities, James has 2 sisters, one 3 years older and the other, 3 years younger. In May 2001, just before 9/11, my husband was diagnosed with Pulmonary Fibrosis, a terminal lung disease.



The lack of recognition for what I was going through and what was expected of me was not due to a lack of caring. It was due to ignorance. Some of this was lack of education. Back then in 1991, we did not really talk about PTSI, we did not understand what the true threat to our safety was. There was also an aspect of gender inequality. Women were expected to work, take care of the kids, care for the house, cook, clean, be a taxi driver and be charitable in the community.

I believe that the one thing we can do to help both men and women is education. You cannot solve a problem if you do not understand it. Today, many organizations are taking steps to give a baseline understanding of the possibilities of acquiring an OSI/PTSI. While they may not be providing you with all the tools that you need to battle these mental injuries, at least they are acknowledging that there is a toolbox.

Denise Beard's testimony made us aware of the importance of prevention and education in the face of operational stress injuries. Demonstrating how her career in uniform was far from the only challenge of her life, her experience shows how we must acknowledge the different facets of a woman's life. Career, domestic work, family responsibilities, and the general vagaries of life weigh heavily on the shoulders of women in uniform. Moreover, they must continually witness and come to terms with the results of violence in the practice of their occupation.

Far from being a lack of care, it is mainly the lack of knowledge and recognition that marked Denise. She then reminded us how important it was to ignore the prejudices and taboos that, unfortunately, still exist today in the face of OSIs. Testimonials such as hers are essential to better knowledge of mental health issues in order to address stigma. Now involved in several organizations, Denise also reminded us of the importance of taking the time to stop and listen to each other. Going against the reflexes of many women in uniform, who want to be always available to help others, Denise reminded us that to support others you must first support yourself.



The Specific Needs of Women in Uniform

3 Anglophone Conferences

"Experiences of an Infantry Soldier"

*Lucie**

In my experience as a female infantry soldier within the Canadian Armed Forces, I'm finding that while the CAF organization, as a whole, does put effort into incorporating women and valuing diversity, on paper, at the end of the day, this organization is made up of individuals, many of whom still don't take females as seriously as men in combat trades.

When it comes time for public affairs, women are strategically placed at the forefront, for the purpose of showcasing diversity, but when it comes time to sending people on their leadership courses, choosing who should be up for promotion, choosing who they want leading a section in a platoon attack, I feel that a woman has to jump through hoops to get the same career advancement opportunities as men who just show up and don't perform at as high a level.

I have personally been bypassed for opportunities by people who were indisputably less deserving than me. I think it is important to highlight this sort of injustice so that it can be addressed. Perhaps a possible solution for this could be to incorporate a decision-making process for these opportunities that is less open to bias and more based on measured performance, so that merit cannot be disputed.



Lucie was our second Anglophone speaker. She is a young infantry soldier in the Canadian Armed Forces. Her experience in the armed forces pits her passion for her profession with the obstacles arising from her gender. Discussing the place of women in this male dominated environment, *Lucie* expressed frustration in talking about how the mere fact of being a woman negatively influences her career progression. It turns out that even today she has to justify her abilities in order to prove that she is just as capable as men, or even more effective than some. As a result, women in uniform still face gender stigma that identifies them as weaker and more fragile than their male teammates. She then questions the audience about whether tools exist today to support women who are discriminated against because of their gender. She also wonders if there are solutions to this situation.

Her testimony illustrates a reality that is still present in views of the supportive comments that followed her presentation. Several women in the audience took the floor to shed light on the existing supports to deal with this situation. There have been institutional changes, but there is still a long way to go.

*The speaker wishes to remain anonymous. *Lucie* is a pseudonym



The Specific Needs of Women in Uniform

3 Anglophone Conferences

"Experiences in EMS as a Woman"

Acting Deputy Chief Mechelle Murphy

I have worked in EMS for 30+ years. Beginning my career at 21, I was shy and not very confident. At that time, the workforce looked nothing like me. I was surrounded by older men who believed that women should not be doing this kind of work. It was also difficult to navigate the women who were already working; they were difficult to break into, having to almost prove yourself with them as well.

I think the women had a tough time and the last thing they wanted was to have a woman come into the job and quickly dismantle all that they had built to that point. There was a fear about lifting and carrying patients, that we were not strong enough to handle the demands of the job and the fear they we would somehow injure them. It was a time where if you gave the slightest hint that a call bothered you at all, you were told to get out if you could not handle it.



Deputy Chief Mechelle Murphy's testimony concluded our conference program on a positive note. She illustrates the difficult relationships that women in uniform must face in order to evolve in their work environment. Marked by the importance of collaboration and cohesion, uniformed professions are often synonymous with teamwork. However, women are frequently confronted with the looks of their male and female partners. Indeed, men tend to question their abilities, while women tend to watch each other to ensure that all meet the challenges of their professions so they don't harm their image.

Like a minority population, women carry all the weight of their gender on their shoulders, which sometimes makes professional cohabitation difficult. However, Mechelle explains that communication is often the key and that there are many women, but also many men, for whom gender is simply not a major issue. It is therefore important to contextualize the fears of arising from bad experiences of women in uniform to open the discussion and, through her experience, demonstrate all her work abilities. This is how it is possible to meet men who will become mentors to women, and vice versa, erasing gender distinctions in the workplace. The specific experience of women in uniform should therefore not be the only perspective to be grasped in the career of emergency professions. Woman or man, certain situations and relationships reject this reality to give way to cohesion and teamwork. Regardless of gender, it IS possible to overcome stigma and bias to build cohesiveness and teamwork.

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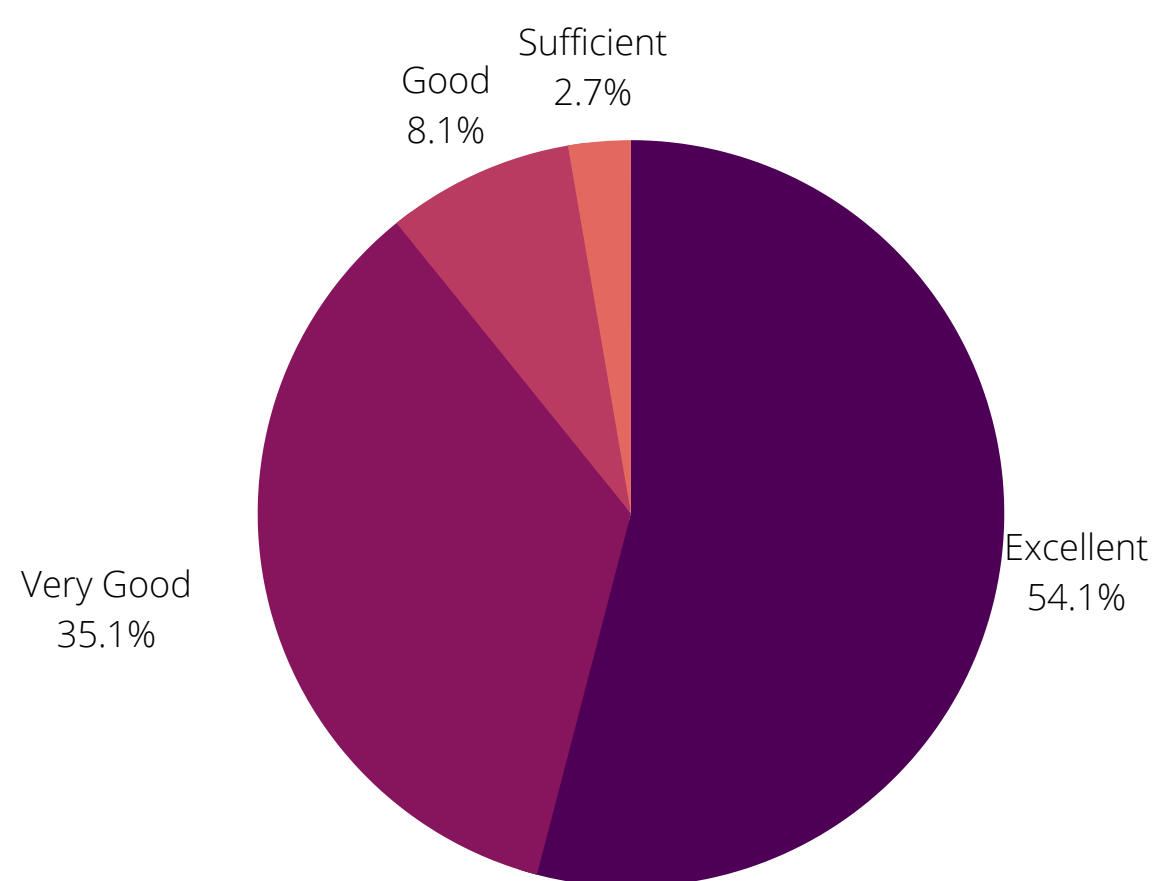
These six testimonies allowed a sharing with all the participants who were able to express themselves on their lived experiences, confirming the difficulties mentioned and underlining the strengths of each. It is interesting to note that all, without prior preparation, shared similar views. Highlighting the women-specific challenges of working-family management, the recognition of women's minority place, the need to always prove their legitimacy, or loneliness and isolation from the challenges they face at the end of their careers, all these women have found strength and solutions to overcome their problems.

They emphasized the importance of prevention, collaboration and sharing so that everyone could find attentive and understanding listening. Recognizing the value and pride of their service, whether in uniformed service or those supporting them, we recognize in everyone the desire and passion for service to others. If only by their presence at this event, the participants expressed their desire and commitment to help others and to "pass the torch" so that through various occupations, experiences, and generations, all recognize their importance, strength, and courage.



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Evaluation of the event

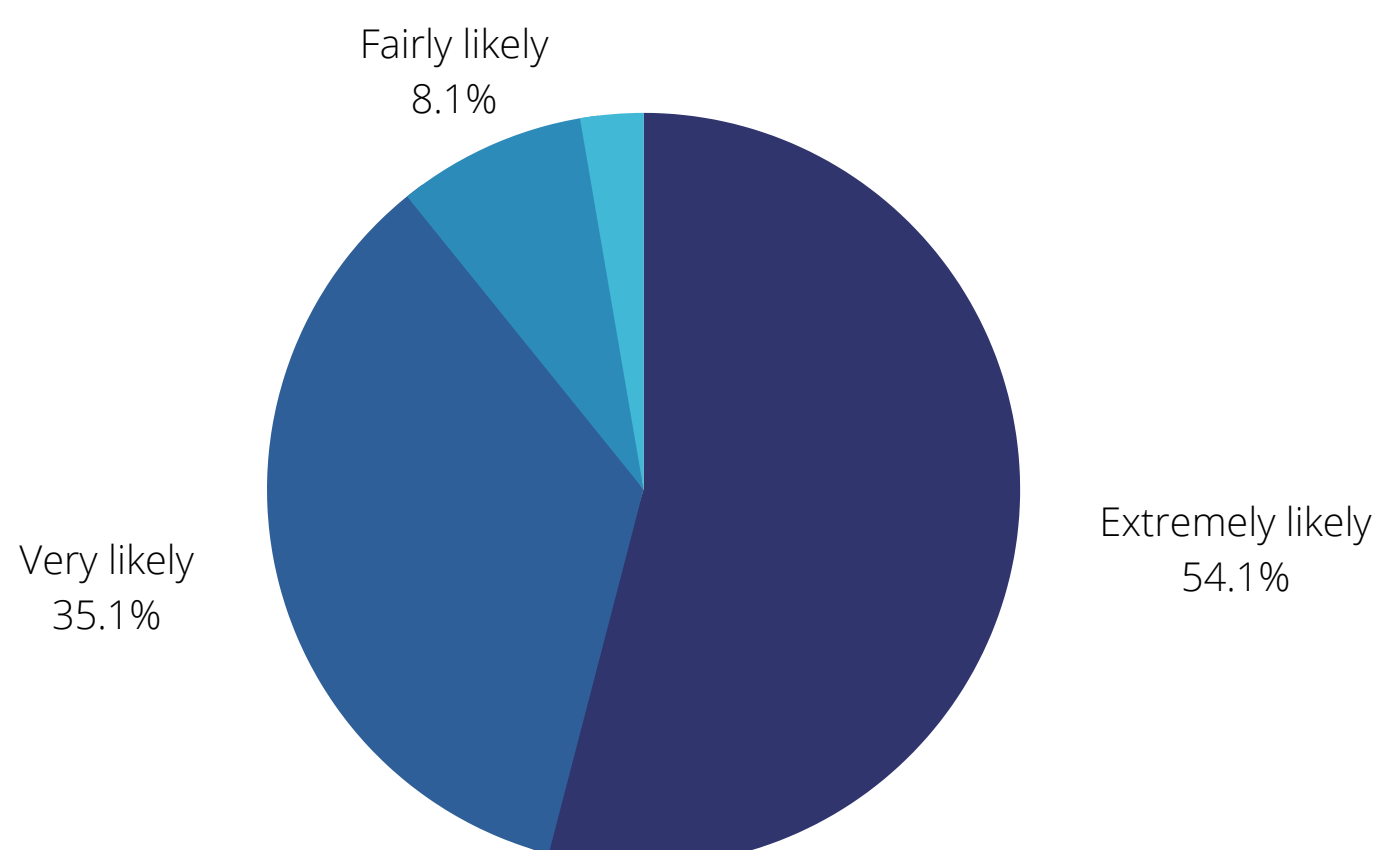
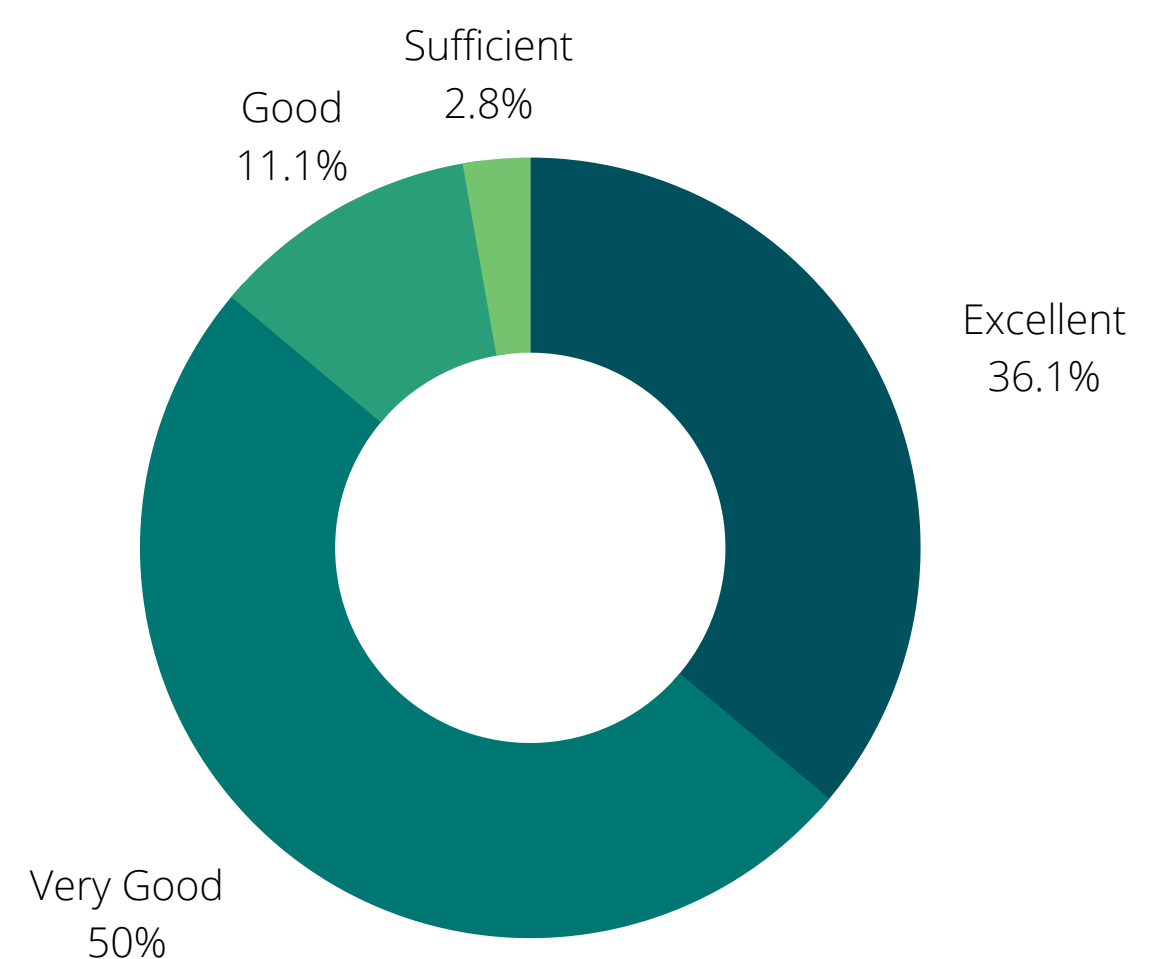


Overall, how would you rate the meeting?

We are pleased to note that most respondents rated the meeting very positively.

How would you rate the quality of the presentations?

According to the results, the presentations were very well received by the participants, most of whom found them to be very good or excellent.



Will you participate in other Women's Outreach event from the Respect Forum?

We are very pleased to note that most respondents will be pleased to participate in our future events.

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Thank you all for your participation !

And thank you to our partner, True Patriot Love, represented by Sarah Dentry and Natalie Forcier



For more information or to keep you informed of our future events:



http://respectcanada.org/pages/forums_fr.html



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