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**A QUALITATIVE STUDY EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF UK**  
**MILITARY DEPLOYMENT ON FEMALE SPOUSES AND THEIR**  
**CHILDREN**

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<p><b>Summary of Thesis:</b></p> <p>Due to the current military climate, a large number of military service men and women often experience prolonged and repeated separations from their families due to overseas deployment. This has been shown to have potentially detrimental effects on the family system, spouse relationships and on the child.</p> <p>This study aimed to use qualitative methods to explore the individual experiences of UK mothers who had children living at home when their husbands deployed overseas. It aimed to examine their views on how they believed the deployment experience impacted on their children. This included reports on their experiences of welfare packages offered by the military and related support services. The study also aimed to highlight any personally developed examples of possible good practice.</p> <p>A single method design was used, utilising semi-structured interviews following a discovery spine interview technique. The conducted interviews were recorded, transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis based on Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis and drawing on aspects of Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis approach (2006).</p> <p>From the analysis it was shown that it was felt by mothers that deployment affected children both positively and negatively. For some there were negatively perceived changes in behaviour as well as significant feelings of loss both in terms of relationship and physical presence. There were also descriptions of increased negative emotional states and an ongoing experience of maladaptive life events concurrent with life within a military community.</p> <p>In positive terms, the experience of deployment was described as prompting beneficial behavioural changes as well as enabling them to develop more positive aspects to their character. Their increased thoughtfulness and ability to empathise was seen as a contributing factor to enhancing their relationships both with the deployed parent and with those who remained at home.</p> <p>This study highlights the need for increased attention to military children's well-being in the UK and the under-researched impact of overseas parental deployment on their development and functioning. It also demonstrates the need for improvements to support services and welfare packages to families who currently feel unsupported at times of deployment.</p> <p>It suggests the importance of acknowledging and addressing the concerns of those individuals most closely affected by these procedures and the benefits that sharing their experience with others in similar positions can have.</p>	

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\*\*\*\*\*

*finally, for Edward;  
I told you it was a science.*

*for*  
**Max, Charlotte and Toby**

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## ABSTRACT

Due to the nature of military duty, a large number of military service men and women often experience prolonged and repeated separations from their families due to overseas deployment. This has been shown to have potentially detrimental effects on the family system, spouse relationships and on the child.

This study aimed to use qualitative methods to explore the individual experiences of mothers who had children living at home when their husbands deployed. It aimed to examine their views on how they believed the deployment experience impacted on their children. This included reports on their experiences of welfare packages offered by the military and related support services. The study also aimed to highlight any personally developed examples of possible good practice that participants felt may be useful to share with other members of the military family population in similar positions to themselves.

A single method design was used, utilising semi-structured interviews following a discovery spine interview technique. The conducted interviews were recorded, transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis based on Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis and drawing on aspects of Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis approach (2006).

From the exploratory analysis it was shown that it was felt by the remaining parent that deployment affected children both positively and negatively. For some there were negatively perceived changes in behaviour as well as significant feelings of loss both in terms of relationship and physical presence. There were also descriptions of increased negative emotional states and an ongoing experience of maladaptive life events concurrent with life within a military community.

In positive terms, the experience of deployment was described as prompting beneficial behavioural changes in some children as well as enabling them to develop more positive aspects to their character. Their increased thoughtfulness and ability to empathise was seen as a contributing factor to enhancing their relationships both with the deployed parent and with those who remained at home. The military life events that were described in a negative light by some were also described within a positive context, with some respondents highlighting the support and sense of community that military life offers.

This study highlights the need for increased attention to military children's well-being in the UK and the under-researched impact of overseas parental deployment on their development and functioning. It also suggests the need for improvements to support services and welfare packages to families who currently feel unsupported at times of deployment.

It suggests the importance of acknowledging and addressing the concerns of those individuals most closely affected by these procedures and the benefits that sharing their experience with others in similar positions can have. It both promotes and suggests opportunities for further research in this area.

## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW**

### **Overview of Chapter One**

This chapter begins by briefly examining the role which fathers universally have in the normal development of their child. It then goes on to discuss the impact that being a part of a military community can have on families. More specifically it continues by examining the known impact on military families of one of the most common occurrences for service men and women; that of deployment.

It details the support that is currently offered by the Ministry of Defence (MoD) to these families during this time of separation, and the similarities and differences this has with organisations in other parts of the world. The chapter then proceeds to explore the beneficial impact of these families being able to share examples of possible good practice within their own population, before concluding by summarising the aims and objectives of this particular study.

### **Research Log Summary**

The literature for this study was accessed through a number of forums which will be summarised below.

Due to the sensitive and often confidential nature of some of the military sources, initial searches were done through the military library at Portsmouth HM Naval Base. Using the key words of 'deployment' 'children' and 'negative effect' specific searches were carried out to find relevant material. In addition to this a broader search of 'impact of military on families' was conducted. Due to the specialised services within the library, these searches identified highly relevant and recent material; however it was largely from a US literature base. In order to examine appropriate UK literature the Kings Centre for Military Health Research was contacted and using the same search criteria additional studies were collected.

Following examination of this literature further searches were conducted within more accessible databases to inform the background to the study.

Psychinfo and the Cochrane Library as well as the University of Wales, Cardiff library databases were used to conduct the following searches:

'paternal influence' AND 'child development'

'paternal role' AND 'child development'

'impact' AND 'paternal absence' AND 'child development'

'paternal separation' AND 'attachment'

Understandably these returned high numbers of results. The ten most relevant studies from each search were scrutinised in detail for their relevance to the topic.

Additional literature was obtained from other sources such as other interested military parties and the researcher's own academic and clinical supervisors who were aware of the nature and content of the study.

## **1.1 Paternal Role in Normal Child Development**

In order to explore the effect it may have on a child when their father is absent for regular and prolonged periods of time throughout their lives, it is important to first gain a detailed understanding of the specific role fathers hold in the normal development of a child.

Much investigation into the role of fathers has happened in recent decades. Lamb (1975) highlighted that previous concentration had been on the mother as primary caregiver (and therefore the most important influence on the child), describing fathers as the “*forgotten contributors to child development*”. Since that time the role which fathers play in the development of their children has been more extensively researched and a wealth of evidence produced suggesting that their role was both unique and important. In 2007, Bögels and Phares reviewed this literature and concluded that the most relevant factors to consider are: attachment; play; involvement; and an indirect link on development through the father’s influence on the child’s mother. There is also significant evidence suggesting gender specific implications in regards to gender-based role modelling between fathers and sons.

### **1.1.1 Attachment**

Bowlby’s work (1999) suggested that children use an attachment figure as a “*base*” of security. By using this secure anchor they are able to venture out and explore their surrounding environment content in their ability to return to this familiar and safe source.

According to previous research, the traditional role of fathers within the family setting is one that echoes a more historical ‘hunter/gatherer’ figure (Kotelchuck, 1976). This suggests that the paternal influence could often be absent from home environments for much longer periods of time than the maternal figure; resulting in the belief that fathers were not as involved in the nurture of their offspring, and that their role lay primarily in the teaching of male children essential life skills (Kotelchuck, 1976).

Mothers are still generally seen as a child’s primary attachment figure due to their common role as primary care giver (Brindley, 2009). However modern literature now suggests that the historical claim; that the father-child

attachment relationship is not as important from a nurture perspective, is unsubstantiated. On the contrary, Lamb et al. (1982) showed that a secure father-child attachment is a predictor of the confidence a child has in novel social situations. Even more recently Grossmann et al. (2002) added to this notion, describing the father-child attachment relationship as a predictor of an adolescent's ability to form social relationships with their peers. This suggests a continuing influence of paternal attachment beyond the early years of a child's development.

### **1.1.2 Play**

Previous research suggests that fathers spend a higher percentage of time engaging in play interactions with their children than mothers do (Kotelchuck, 1976). Although it has been suggested that the play style in which fathers engage is more challenging than that of mothers, and has been reported to induce discomfort or anxiety in the child (Labrell, 1996), Bögels & Phares (2007) report that this particular function of play style may have a positive outcome as it works to develop autonomy in the child. There is also evidence that a father's interactive play style can have an effect in later development being linked with cognitive outcomes (Shannon et al., 2002) as well as social skills and peer acceptance (Parke et al., 2004).

### **1.1.3 Paternal involvement**

The involvement of fathers in a child's development has been described in a variety of ways within literature over the course of the past few decades. For the purposes of this study we will be defining this involvement as the "*quality and quantity of the father's interactions with the child/adolescent*" (Brindley, 2009).

Previous literature has linked paternal involvement to the outcomes of child development in numerous areas including social development (Frascaroli, 2004), emotional development and psychological well-being (Harris et al., 1998), cognitive and academic development (Mattanah, 2001), and levels of self-esteem (Cawkill, 2004). Harris et al. (1998) confirms Amato & Rezac's (1994) previous claim that a high paternal involvement and a close father-child relationship can protect the child from emotional distress and behavioural

problems, even allowing for maternal involvement (Amato & Rezac, 1999). This unique contribution made by fathers to their child's development is highlighted further in the review of literature made by Bögels and Phares (2007).

#### **1.1.4 Gender based Role Modelling**

From as far back as the evolutionary perspective mentioned previously in this chapter, it can be suggested that there are gender specific implications within a father's role. According to Darwinian Theory it was the son to whom the father passed on his expertise and knowledge of life skills (Kotelchuck, 1976). This description of the father as a teacher to his young male offspring is one that has been developed further in more recent literature. Bögels and Phares (2007) suggests that there is some evidence of particular paternal influence on sons in regards to personality traits such as levels of self confidence and positive social skills. Brindley (2009) supports this and offers the opinion that a father's use of play as a major form of interaction with his children (described further in 1.1.6) is something that generally occurs in higher quantities with male dependents and this cements the suggestion of 'role-model' from an early stage of development.

#### **1.1.5 Indirect Paternal Influence**

In addition to the influences previously described of a father's direct interaction with his children, there is also evidence to suggest that the paternal role can impact indirectly upon child development due to the consequences that paternal absence and the marital relationship can have on the mother-child relationship (Brindley, 2009). For example, Hetherington (1966) suggested that the absence of the paternal figure in a family environment can lead to maternal over-control and increased conflictual relationships between mothers and daughters whilst Pederson (1966) linked the existence of a father within a positive marital relationship with a more positive maternal rearing style, namely an increase in maternal sensitivity to her children.

Lamb (1980) takes this idea further as he describes a number of indirect influences that can be attributed to the father figure. He suggests that the absence of the father within the family structure can impact upon decision

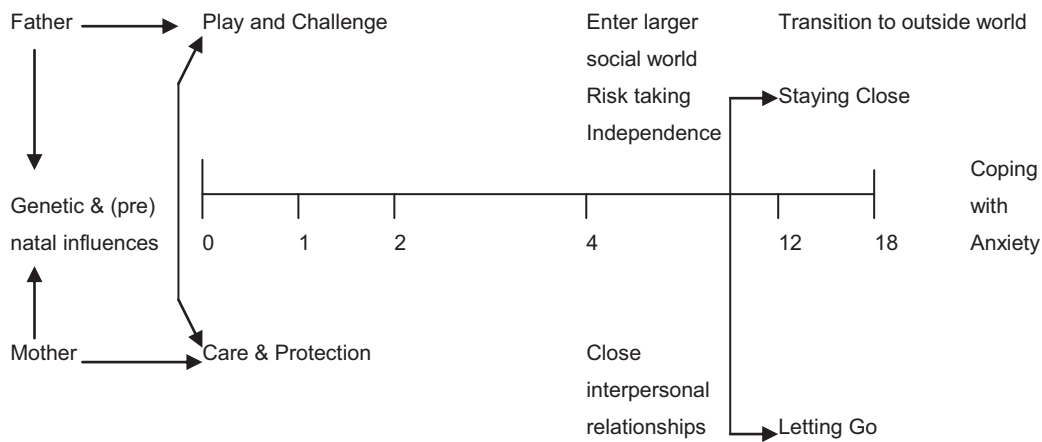


making, family planning, task sharing and even financial aspects of family life. This results in significant differences in the way a family functions on a day-to-day basis as well as in times of increased family stress.

The intimacy and complexity of familial relationships suggests that it is not unreasonable to assume that any shift in any one of these dynamics can result in changed outcomes for the unit as a whole.

### 1.1.6 Paternal Role

According to their review of the literature, Bögels and Phares (2007) propose that a father holds a unique role at different stages of their child's development. Whilst at the beginning of their child's life, the paternal role seems largely to challenge the child through the forum of play, it later extends to encourage the child to explore and discover for themselves their external world. This contribution is described further in the figure shown below.



**Figure 1.1:** Different roles of fathers and mothers in their offspring's infancy, childhood and adolescence.

**Note.** The ages on the horizontal line indicate a developmental perspective from babyhood, infancy, childhood, up to adolescence with different roles for both parents at different stages, and should not be taken literally.

FIGURE AND NOTE TAKEN DIRECTLY FROM BÖGELS AND PHARES (2007).

### 1.1.7 Summary

Despite the comparatively small psychological evidence-base, the reviewed studies of normal child development provide clear evidence that there is an

important and unique role played by fathers. By means of different outlets of interaction to common maternal influences, for example play; fathers are able to encourage their children to develop autonomy and strong relationships with others. In addition to this direct influence, purely by being emotionally and physically present within other familial relationships (i.e. a positive marital relationship), fathers are able to influence positively the quality of the maternal relationship with the child which in turn will affect their development.

This literature supports the idea that as a father's presence is so influential in a child's development, so then the absence of the father during any of these critical periods will have a significant impact upon the child's emotional and psychological development.

It should be noted that some of the issues highlighted within this chapter are not limited solely to those families experiencing military deployment. These difficulties can be faced by any family experiencing a prolonged separation, for example families of prisoners. However, the unique aspects of deployment for example the pattern of jeopardy, repetition and residential components can significantly impact upon its effect. It is these unique characteristics that will now be explored in further detail.

## **1.2 Impact of Military Life on General Functioning of Children**

Choosing a career in the military is more than just an occupational decision for the thousands of men and women who work within our armed forces each year; it is a lifestyle choice. A military career entails a number of unusual and unique features that are foreign concepts to most individuals in civilian life. For example there are very few “nine to five” jobs, with military contracts stating that the enlisted must be available, when required, 24 hours a day seven days a week. Not only can their work commitments be intensive but many members of the armed forces live in specifically designed military communities, meaning that they are either separated from their families over significant periods of time, or their entire family is saturated within a military environment. Although this may offer families beneficial support networks and can lead to an increased sense of community, it is also not without its challenges. Prolonged separations, repeated moves and increased lifestyle restrictions haunt military families throughout their service in addition to the added fears and anxieties that military responsibilities entail. It should be noted that there would be also be some differences between the experiences of personnel and their families dependent on the service in which they serve, for example personnel in the Royal Navy deploy more regularly, and often for longer periods of time than those in the Army or RAF.

There is some research that suggests that there are particular personality traits and characteristics common to members of the military which are perhaps, in part, essential due to the demands it places on the individual. Bögels and Phares (2007) offer the idea that those employed by the military often have increased resilience but are also more likely to be emotionally detached and less empathic. These traits may aid in the individual’s ability to function within the military culture but could undoubtedly have influential repercussions on other aspects of their life.

A little over thirty years ago Lagrone (1978) introduced the concept of a ‘Military Family Syndrome’, as he observed a high incidence in the recorded behavioural disturbances in children attending a military children’s mental health clinic.

Lagrone postulated that this higher rate of detrimental psychopathology could be attributed to certain traits common to military families, such as more rigid parenting styles or frequent relocation (Lagrone, 1978). More recently conducted studies however have challenged this view of a 'syndrome', for example Morrison (1981) found no difference in the percentage of DSM-III diagnoses between a group of 140 military children and 234 civilian children. Jensen et al. (1991) examined both child and teacher reports of military children's functioning using the Child Behaviour Checklist (CBCL) and found that the psychopathology described to be no different to the normative sample. This idea was explored further by Jensen et al. (1995) when, using diagnostic interview schedules, military children (aged six – seventeen years) were compared to children from civilian families reported in epidemiological studies. The levels of psychopathology found in military children were recorded to be the same as, or in some cases, even lower than those of their civilian counterparts. More specifically Ryan-Wenger (2001) has shown that the anxiety levels in eight – eleven year olds in military families are no different to those recorded in children of the same age in civilian families. Ryan-Wenger (2001) also demonstrated that each group of children exhibited equally effective ways of coping in situations they found more challenging.

In addition to the contradictory reports, there is also an evidence base in direct opposition to the idea of a 'Military Family Syndrome' with research reporting that levels of externalising behaviours such as conduct disorder and drug and alcohol misuse are indeed lower in military children (Morrison, 1981; Jensen et al., 1995; Hutchinson, 2006).

Although no empirical evidence exists to confirm these suggestions, some studies have described a number of factors that may work to protect the military child from psychological dysfunction. For example within military families there are lower rates of unemployment and as military families often live within very close-knit communities this provides them with a significant support network containing a higher availability of like-minded people with similar life experiences (Morrison, 1981; Jensen et al., 1991). It is likely that factors such as these may assuage stress within the military family, and in turn shield the child from both behavioural and emotional problems.

Kenny (1967) suggested that there are differing outcomes in military children depending on the rank of the soldier within their family, with children of “other rank” soldiers being less well adjusted than “officers” children. This indicates that when assessing the functioning of military children the family’s socioeconomic status should be considered as a factor (soldiers’ rank is a proxy of socioeconomic status). An explanation for the higher levels of stressors experienced by those in lower ranking positions was offered by Jensen et al. (1986) who suggested this was linked to factors including lower incomes and less control over their geographical postings. The idea that child psychopathology is associated with the families’ socioeconomic status is one that is mirrored within the general population (Solantaus et al., 2004; Clements et al., 2007). Although socioeconomic status is not directly relevant to what this study seeks to investigate, records of the serving personnel rank will be taken from participants in order for future comparisons to be made.

Recent studies have also looked specifically at the academic outcomes of military children, and they suggest that as a student group they are not disadvantaged at school (Marchent & Medway, 1987; Strobino & Salvaterra, 2000). Smrekar et al. (2001) conducted a large multi-national study comparing the overall educational attainments of military children with age-matched general population controls. The study concluded that military children did not achieve at a significantly different standard to the control group.

Despite a lack of evidence showing widespread dysfunction in military families some recently conducted studies have shown that there are two particular occurrences exclusive to military families that do predicate poorer outcomes for their children. Firstly, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in military parents is shown to have a negative impact in several areas of family life including marital relationships, family cohesion, parenting satisfaction and both the functioning and emotional security of children (Galovski & Lyons, 2004; Taft et al., 2008; Brindley, 2009). However, Brindley (2009) did suggest that whilst paternal PTSD suggested an association with childhood emotional

and behavioural difficulties, it also suggested that these parents were more likely to seek help/advice regarding their child's difficulties. It is important to note however that these studies did not adequately take into account other possible influential factors such as alcohol consumption and drug misuse. Most relevant to this current research however, is the second precursor; the impact that the deployment of military parents has on family outcomes. Studies have indicated that longer deployment length is related to poorer interpersonal relationships, spousal stress, divorce, poorer functioning of the family unit, child maltreatment, violence and behavioural problems among children (Angrist & Johnson, 2000; Rentz et al., 2007; Chartrand et al., 2008).

So the literature examined above has suggested that in terms of psychopathology rates, military children show no difference to children within the general population and in fact have shown increased adaptability and resilience in spite of the stresses they face. However, an important factor to consider when examining all of the previously described literature is that the majority of the studies with the exception of Brindley (2009) have been taken from a US literature base. Currently very little research has occurred exploring the general functioning of UK military families. It must be remembered that there are numerous differences in practical aspects of UK and US military life, for example combat experiences, average deployment length, support systems and health care. These substantial variations mean that the generalisation of US results to UK military families is difficult.

For the purpose of this study it is important to now move on from looking at the general influences of military life on children and begin to examine the most specific risk factor believed to affect their functioning and development, namely deployment.

### **1.3 Deployment within Military Families**

Considering the fact that family separations are an inherent part of life for military families, there has been very little research to date examining the exact extent to which families and children are affected, or how family members perceive the impact of the deployment on the child. In order for the military system to adequately support these families and meet their individual needs, it is vital to understand the experience these families have during times of deployment. This section will review the current literature addressing the stressors that deployment places on military families; the impact on service members, on their partners (and the marital relationship) and finally on the mental health outcomes of the child.

#### **1.3.1 Deployment**

In contrast to the usual eighteen month deployment served by US troops, the average length of deployment for a soldier in the UK forces is six months. The government also recommends in their 'Harmony Guidelines' (National Audit Office, 2006) that no soldier should be deployed for longer than thirteen months within a three year period. However these are merely guidelines and in reality the figures of deployment are somewhat different. As of September 2007, 10, 100 Army personnel (representing 10.3% of the trained strength of the Army) had exceeded this guideline and been away from their families for well over one year out of three (House of Lords debate, January 2008).

The experience of deployment results in a number of stressors for members of the armed forces that are not reserved purely to the conditions they experience when away; there are also challenges to be faced on their return home. When deployed, in addition to being separated from their friends and family, military personnel may encounter a number of challenging situations from arduous training routines, intense working hours and exposure to danger to sparse living conditions with a distinct and prolonged lack of privacy. Furthermore, current warfare means that many of those deployed will experience extreme trauma including witnessing the deaths of comrades and civilians, explosions and hand-to-hand combat (Hoge et al., 2004). Often this exposure to life threatening experiences is prolonged and frequent in nature

providing sufficient contributing factors for significant maladaptive effect. Of those who do return home, some will have experienced significant physical, psychological or cognitive injuries (Hoge et al., 2004; Milliken et al., 2007; Sammons & Batten, 2008) such as PTSD, Depression and Traumatic Brain Injuries (TBI). These difficulties will understandably hinder the soldier's transition back to 'normal' life, and many individuals struggle with alcohol and drug misuse in addition to other psychiatric disorders (Brindley, 2009). As a possible way of easing this transition, the military have incorporated a short period of respite in Cyprus at the end of deployments. Following completion of their overseas tour, personnel spend three to four days attending debrief lectures and taking time to acclimatise themselves to life outside of a combat zone surrounded by the necessary professionals and within the supportive structure of their unit. It is hoped that this will enable a smoother return to their families in the UK.

### ***1.3.2 Impact of Deployment on Family Life***

Much of the research conducted on the impact of deployment on military spouses and children has focussed on previous US military deployments, particularly those in the Vietnam and initial Gulf Wars. From the very earliest recorded studies, evidence has indicated that deployment has a negative impact on different aspects of family life.

Jensen et al (1996) made comparisons using the Centre for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CES-D) exploring the mental health of the spouses of service men deployed to Operation Desert Storm and the spouses of service men who remained on the military base. Even after allowing for pre-existing stress-levels, higher levels of depression were found in spouses of those who had been deployed.

Rohall et al (1999) assessed family adjustment in two groups of US soldiers deployed to South Korea; a 'high operational tempo' group who were deployed for nineteen months and a 'low operational tempo' group who were deployed for seven months. Both in terms of the soldiers' perception of their families ability to adjust to Army life and their concern for different aspects of family life, the low operational tempo group was found to have better family



adjustment, suggesting that the length of deployment has a proportional impact on a family's ability to adjust.

As well as being once again solely based on US service families, the studies described above consisted of cumulative samples of 383 and 532 participants respectively so could not realistically be generalised across the entire military population.

McCarroll et al (2000) conducted a larger scale study gathering data across a four year period from almost 27 000 participants in relation to marital conflict following deployment. The study suggested that deployment contributes a significant but small increase to the probability of self-reported spousal aggression.

At times of deployment there are obviously practical changes that occur within family life which can themselves be disruptive to the family system, for example changes in family routines, responsibilities and the roles of family members. Findings have suggested that the changes resulting from deployment can lead to reduced family cohesiveness and nurturance (Kelley, 1994).

All of the studies described so far in this chapter in addition to being taken from US literature, are of a quantitative nature. Only one recent qualitative study has been conducted in the UK which asked fathers, mothers and children (aged between seven and seventeen) about their personal experiences of deployment. These participants were recruited through the serving member of personnel (in this case the father) and family members were involved through this initial permission. This study highlighted three super-ordinate themes of 'loss', 'behaviour' and 'emotion' (Brindley, 2009) and suggested that the families felt there may be some loss of closeness in their relationships and in some cases that this damage was irreparable. In terms of behaviour, the family responses suggested that the father's absence appeared to have had a negative affect on the behaviour of their child as well as their emotional stability (this will be examined further in section 1.3.3) (Brindley, 2009). It must be noted that most of the information gathered for this study was done using e-surveys meaning that the richness of data gathered varied considerably, and further clarification on short or ambiguous answers could not be followed up. In addition to this, the mothers and

children were recruited through the initial agreement of the father and this may lead to unintentional biases within the data. The research also included a large quantitative aspect and this could have shifted focus from the importance of the qualitative responses.

What must also be taken into account when examining these studies is that not all research controls for pre-deployment factors, so it is feasible to hypothesise that rather than causing difficulties, deployment simply exacerbates pre-existing problems making it difficult to draw concrete conclusions regarding cause and effect.

### ***1.3.3 Impact of Deployment on the Child***

Similar to the studies examined in 1.3.2, the majority of research conducted into the impact of deployment specifically on children has occurred in the US and has used quantitative methods of data collection. A large proportion of this research also focuses on levels of anxiety and depression in children rather than a more generic investigation.

Jensen et al. (1989) compared the rates of anxiety and depression in two groups of children aged between six and eleven and three quarters years whose US officer and senior personnel fathers had been away for more than one month or less than one month in the previous year. Those children with fathers away for more than one month showed higher levels of self-reported depressive and anxiety symptoms and length of absence was correlated with symptoms within the child (Jensen et al., 1989). Jensen et al (1996) later repeated a similar study with children (aged four to seventeen) whose fathers were deployed in Operation Desert Storm and concluded that depression is more common in those children whose fathers have deployed, and is more likely to occur in boys than in girls (Jensen et al., 1996).

Also examining those families involved in Operation Desert Storm, Rosen et al (1993) obtained psychological symptom profiles of the children of deployed service personnel from the parent who stayed at home. This study suggested that those children with deployed parents had higher levels of internalising behaviours (such as anxiety, depression or other mood based disorders) compared to those children whose parents had remained at home. Chartrand et al (2008) examined rates of externalising behaviours (such as conduct

disorder and behavioural changes) in two groups of children aged from one and a half to five years of age. It was concluded that children aged three to five years with a deployed parent had significantly higher externalising scores (reported by parent and teacher) even after controlling for non-deployed parents and symptoms of stress and depression (Chartrand et al., 2008).

Each of these studies compared groups of children within military life either with or without a currently deployed parent. Barnes et al (2007) also included a civilian child control group in their research as they measured heart rate and perceived stress in adolescents. This suggested that adolescents with a deployed parent had higher heart rates and perceived stress than military children without a deployed parent or their civilian counterparts (Barnes et al., 2007).

Huebner et al (2007) conducted a qualitative study with focus groups of US adolescents (aged twelve to eighteen years) with a parent deployed to Iraq/Afghanistan. Using semi-structured focus group interviews the research reported feelings of loss, uncertainty, emotional outbursts, and manifestations of depression and anxiety in the adolescents (Huebner et al., 2007). Although unique in its method of data collection, the quality of information gathered within these interviews may have been affected by the environment in which it was received, and differences may have been observed had the interviews been undertaken individually.

As mentioned in 1.3.2. Brindley (2009) garnered information using qualitative responses from UK military families suggesting that the negative impact of deployment on a child can be categorised into the three areas detailed below: *Loss*; with all family members commenting that the father-child relationship has been damaged, in some cases irreparably, by the father's absence, *Behaviour*; suggesting that the absence of a parent can often add to reports of non-compliance in the child and also suggests that the returning parent may have difficulty in successfully disciplining the child. There was also some evidence to suggest that incidences of self-harm in children increased when a parent was deployed.

*Emotion*; most frequently issues of worry and anxiety were described although some felt angry, sad, irritable, frightened and described missing their deployed

parent. High levels of anxiety were reported to culminate in an increase of anxiety-related behaviours such as interrupted sleep.

Brindley (2009) also highlighted the reported positive outcomes that having a deployed parent had on children. Reports suggested that some familial relationships were enhanced in this absence with family units becoming closer and stronger, both with those still at home, and with those deployed as more attention was given to communicating effectively with them. An increased sense of pride and respect for their deployed parent was also described and an increased knowledge and awareness of what is happening in the world. Finally aspects of the child's personality were reported to be positively impacted on with many speaking of an enhanced sense of independence and maturity. It was also suggested that the children of deployed parents seemed to exhibit greater strength and resilience whilst also demonstrating an increase in empathy for those around them (Brindley, 2009).

Some research suggests that in addition to the impact of the deployment itself, there is some evidence that long or repeated deployments may place the child at increased risk of maltreatment or neglect from the parent who remains at home (Gibbs et al., 2007; Rentz et al., 2007).

Mediating factors have also been examined as often research studies do not allow for pre-existing difficulties. Pedersen (1966) showed that the emotional and behavioural difficulties of children with a deployed parent were increased by poor maternal mental health as a result of separation and more recently Hiew (1992) found that in primary school children, difficulties caused by paternal deployment were exacerbated by maternal factors such as their perceived lack of social support.

Although not empirically tested, military psychiatrists have developed a framework that seeks to understand the various hurdles faced by military children. It is suggested they go through an 'emotional cycle' experiencing challenges at five stages in the deployment process; pre-deployment, deployment, sustainment, redeployment and post-deployment (Pincus et al., 2001). The model suggests that in *pre-deployment* there may be anticipatory fears or a heightened anticipation of loss; in the early *deployment* phase children may often have difficulty adjusting to the absence and suffer sleeping

difficulties and a range of emotions; the *sustainment* stage occurs from one month following deployment until one month prior to return and it is here that new routines and resources for support are developed; *redeployment* (the month prior to return) is often a time of anticipation and conflicting emotions of excitement and apprehension; the *post-deployment* stage brings with it the challenges of re-establishing old routines and adjusting back to a previous way of life (Pincus et al., 2001).

#### **1.3.4 Attachment Theory**

As discussed briefly in section 1.1.1, attachment plays a crucial role in the understanding of the impact of deployment. According to attachment theory, throughout the development of healthy attachment relationships, 'breaks' occur (Hughes, 2004). These breaks could be emotional, physical or due to separation and whilst some of these may be unpreventable and are entirely normal; for example telling a child off (emotional) or playing with peers (separation), there are some, more extreme examples that have further reaching consequences. Hughes describes breaks as necessary in forming healthy attachments and highlights the reconnection phase as the most crucial aspect as it is here the child learns that their relationships will survive any stumbling blocks. Without this knowledge the child will learn that relationships will falter when faced with adverse situations. Fonagy et al (2002) suggests that prolonged separation such as deployment can have a significant impact on the child's ability to develop healthy relationships both as an infant and into adulthood due to the impact this can have on their mentalisation and sense of self. Increased amounts of separation within critical development phases and ineffective reconnection periods can lead to a negative self-concept and may result in insecure or disorganised attachment styles.

Another factor that could affect attachment within a separation period is the maternal figure overcompensating for paternal absence. Hughes (2009) suggests the notion that when a significant parental figure is absent the remaining parent may try to overcompensate. This however will not always have positive results, as the predictability and consistency necessary to form a secure base has been tampered with.

No current literature exists linking theories of attachment directly to the experiences of deployment but studies investigating similarly long periods of paternal separation; such as prison sentences, serious illness and oil rig workers have suggested that there can be significant and long-lasting impacts on the child if sufficient protective measures are not taken (Kark Heinz Brisch, 2009)

### ***1.3.5 Highlighted Gaps in Previous Research***

Whilst much important research has been conducted on the impact of deployment for military families, it appears that there are some questions that have remained unexplored. For example relatively little is still known about the impact of more recent deployments on the child and the family and it is crucial to investigate whether previous findings would be replicated with the significant differences that contemporary deployments have (e.g. available methods of communication, political changes, differences in military structure, wider society's view on war and those engaged in it, and the changing nature of warfare). There is also a distinct lack of detailed qualitative research with UK families.

The current study seeks to gather qualitative information from the parent remaining home with the child(ren) whilst the other parent is deployed. Previous research has taken steps to describe the difficulties that are common amongst children of deployed parents and whilst this will be reiterated within the current study further questions will be addressed. Participants will be asked for their views on the impact they feel deployment has on their children and what they believe would have helped them pre, during and post deployment. In addition to this they will be encouraged to explore and share any ideas or examples of practice they are currently undertaking themselves that they feel may be or may have benefited their children. Previous research has generally included families in which the paternal figure is the role lost through deployment and the maternal figure remains home. Whilst not specifying that this must be the case within the inclusion criteria, it is predicted that this will also be the case within this research project.

No current research investigates the family experiences of currently offered welfare packages and how effective they find these at protecting their children

from the impact of deployment. By recording and analysing the experiences of those who live through these challenging situations this study will hopefully place the military one step closer to utilising the wealth of experience at their fingertips with the aim of providing effective support to the many families in similar positions. The collation of possible examples of good practice should also do much to identify aspects of and pathways to resilience that does not necessarily rely on external support.

### **1.3.6 Summary**

Military service men and women may often experience prolonged and repeated separations from their families due to deployment and this has been shown to have potentially detrimental effects on the family system, spouse relationships and on the child. Children are described as facing significant emotional challenges at each stage of the deployment process and their ability to cope with this impact is thought to be influenced by a number of factors including the wellbeing of their remaining parent.

Attachment theory seems to play an important role in exploring the impact of deployment and this has not been sufficiently examined within current literature. The reconnection phase; meaning the return from deployment, seems to have particular relevance in the suggestibility of long-lasting consequences for the child.

Most studies have employed quantitative research to examine these questions and with the exception of Brindley (2009) described above, no qualitative data has been gathered from UK military families exploring their views on deployment. The aforementioned study did not explore in significant depth the impact that the remaining parent feels deployment has on their child, or how they feel life changes when their partner is away. It also did not address how families currently try to protect their children from this impact and what they have found to be successful. If military policy and support programmes are to progress then these questions must be explored and the results shared with the population.

## **1.4 Current Support Offered**

For as long as there has been military forces there have been soldiers deployed away from their homes and loved ones. These deployments are most often across great distances and can be for extended periods of time. Current deployments within our military forces have been described in section 1.3.1 and this section will look at the existing support that is offered to the families of deployed personnel by the MoD and other related support systems.

### **1.4.1 Ministry of Defence**

The MoD provides deployed families with a range of information and support that is summarised in a booklet which is both distributed through military units and available online or via their website (Appendix I). Although the majority of the guidance and advice offered to families through this booklet is in reference to more practical aspects of deployment; such as financial advice, legal guidance and information regarding services linked to issues such as housing and debt relief, there are some sections that seek to offer advice on how to deal with more emotional and psychological aspects of deployment.

Entitled the 'Guide for the Families of Deployed Regular Army Personnel' (Ministry of Defence, April 2009) it contains sections addressing challenges that may be faced from a psychological perspective at different stages of the deployment process; 'Preparing Children' for the impending loss of a parent, 'Looking after your Family' whilst the deployed parent is away, and the 'Reunion' aspect when the deployed parent returns. Whilst the booklet does also offer advice for couples, this section will be focussing on the guidance offered to families in regards to their children.

When talking about preparing children for one of their parents deploying, the booklet emphasises the importance of talking the situation through with each child as much as is possible for their developmental stage. It stresses the need to be as truthful as possible when explaining to them what will be happening over the course of the deployment. During the time of their parent's deployment, it offers advice suggesting that the child's routine be kept as normal as possible and suggests perhaps beginning a new activity or hobby to help occupy the child a little more over the coming months. It also



emphasises the importance of seeking professional help if the child's behaviour or mental health is significantly altered.

When the booklet addresses the impact of reunion it breaks down advice into different developmental stages, for example; under two years old, two to four year olds and so on. This advice again offers practical assistance on how to prepare children, speaking of allowing enough time for them to re-bond with their absent parent and taking time out of normal family schedules to allow for some quality time together. It also includes information of other related support services that military families may find to be useful resources.

All of the advice offered within the booklet is very practical and is a useful source for families of deployed service personnel; however there are a few limitations to the potential effectiveness of the guidance. Whilst the booklet does suggest some specific strategies for families to employ that may aid the impact of the separation, for example beginning a new activity, or recording the deployed parents voice reading bedtime stories for younger children; there appears to be a lack of information or support addressing specific areas of concern for children's well-being that has been highlighted in previous research. The booklet does not talk about the potential difficulties that the child of a deployed parent may face, for example, issues with loss or with increased anxiety or depression. Whilst it is understandable that the MoD would not want to be seen to be negative in its approach to the impact of deployment, it is important that families are made aware of potential risk factors and be prepared, not only for the impact that this may have on their lives, but also to recognise the warning signs that may be observed in their own children.

The booklet also does not at any point make suggestions regarding how these potential emotional and psychological difficulties may be pre-empted. Whilst highlighting the importance of seeking professional help if there are concerns, it does not offer suggestions as to how families may work to minimise the impact of these changes for their child. Beyond some basic practical suggestions there are no examples from the population of good practice in regards to supporting children through this experience, no information about what has worked for other families in the same situation, or what they have found most beneficial when facing similar difficulties.

The MoD recognises the importance of providing support for the families and children of military personnel, and has recently begun a research project to investigate the impact of military life in an attempt to better improve their support services. This project however focuses largely on measured impacts on families (using quantitative methods of data collection) and is not yet investigating the personal experiences and current coping strategies of those most affected by military life.

In comparison to this, the US state department issues specific guidelines to be followed by military units when their soldiers deploy and these are regulated by an in-house welfare team. Official support and social network groups are formed and help and advice given to aid military units in developing and maintaining their own welfare systems. Well managed forums also allow the dissemination of information between military families and allow the opportunity to share examples of best practice. It must be highlighted however that the experience of deployment is significantly different in the US with families being without their service personnel for longer and more regular periods of time meaning that there is an increased need for support for families. There also appears to be an increased amount of resources available in the US from both public and private arenas which may in part be due to the historically higher public support for troops.

#### ***1.4.2 Other Support Agencies***

In addition to the support that families receive directly from the MoD there are also other related networks available that offer assistance to the families of deployed service men and women both in the UK and in military populations overseas.

Every army base and in fact military camps of all service denominations have onsite community and welfare services that provide advice and support to those living within its boundaries. Welfare services are typically manned by ex service personnel with a wealth of knowledge and experience of life in the military and in addition to co-ordinating the continuous community aspects of military life, they also manage the specific welfare packages linked to deployment. These packages vary within each of the services and even from base to base as no universal policy exists stating precise guidelines that must

be followed. The level of support offered can often depend on the main function of the military institution; for example regimental camps would typically provide a more thorough welfare package than perhaps a largely training and development facility due to the increased number of deployed that reside there. Aspects of these packages can include family events, regular contact with families of the deployed, advice services, information about available support and help with practical difficulties such as housing issues.

In addition to welfare services there are also other military led ventures that provide more specific support to serving personnel and their families, namely social services, family services and departments of community mental health. These more specialised services contain both military and civilian professionals from psychiatrists, clinical psychologists and mental health nurses to social workers and counsellors who provide therapeutic interventions when necessary. It is important to point out however that these services, at least within the UK, exist solely for the use of military personnel and any family involvement only occurs if it is specifically linked to their difficulties. Families of personnel are expected to access services provided from the usual sources i.e. government structures (NHS). When military families are resident overseas for example in Germany, Cyprus and Belize the MoD provides all necessary services for both the serving personnel and their families using military and civilian professionals from the UK. As well as mental health support these services offer family counselling, parenting advice and provide information and advice on practical issues such as housing, education, health and employment (these services are particularly beneficial for families beginning the transition from military to civilian life).

Other support opportunities that are available to families inside military communities are those developed and maintained by the families themselves. Many communities have 'wives committees' that encourage regular activities and social gatherings that aim to promote feelings of camaraderie between those facing similar difficult circumstances. This networking is generally done at a social level though and is not based on any structured theoretical support model.

Many independent agencies also exist offering support, advice and practical assistance for military families. There are too many agencies in existence to realistically describe each of them sufficiently within this forum so examples will be used to illustrate a cross-section of the facilities available.

Charity organisations such as 'Help for Heroes', The Royal Navy Benevolent Fund and The Soldiers' Charity, alongside raising valuable funds for military men and women, also promote initiatives that offer specific help where they feel it is most needed. Some of this includes practical and emotional support for veterans, wounded soldiers and their relations, and those families who have lost a loved one. Specific support for children is offered within this and many organise events and even holidays for children enduring these difficult circumstances. These organisations also seek to organise support groups and encourage members of the military community to manage their own groups in their geographical area. It is often through organisations such as these rather than MoD initiatives that military families are able to contact those in similar positions to themselves.

Some independent groups directly linked to the forces strive to forge closer links between the families and the system. For example the Army Families Federation (AFF) in addition to offering help and advice to families has conducted relevant research; gathering evidence from British military families across the globe it is hoped can be used to inform and adapt policy.

So there are a lot of support networks that already exist for military families suggesting that the issue to be addressed is to discover what aspects of these work, which aspects don't, and why that is the case. Then, to move on to how to replicate elsewhere what has been identified as working well in some situations. It is hoped that this current research will do just that, and through the experiences of those directly affected will highlight where the strengths and limitations of the current system lie.

## 1.5 Good Practice

There are around three hundred thousand individuals in the UK who are either serving, or living with someone who is serving, in her Majesty's Armed Forces and a large proportion of these are eligible to deploy overseas for tours of duty that are typically between three and twelve months. Deployment is not a new phenomenon and records exist going back over two hundred years of military personnel being separated from their loved ones for significant periods of time (MoD, April 2009), and in fact this practice almost certainly dates back to the times of the Vikings. However, within this time there has been no empirical evidence gathered or any officially sponsored initiatives to share the benefits of previous military families with the next generation.

There is a wealth of evidence-base (some of which has been detailed within this current study) that examines the impact that deployment can have on those left behind. These individuals come from a range of social, cultural and economic backgrounds and have supported children of each gender and across a range of ages meaning that there is a vast wealth of knowledge and experience within the current and past military communities regarding what works, and perhaps more importantly, what does not.

Although aspects of family life and indeed society's structure have evolved over time, the emotional and psychological responses to challenging situations are as concentrated as ever. When faced with such difficulties, evidence has shown that the most resilient of individuals are those who are able to employ protective strategies to defend against the more maladaptive challenges (Jensen et al., 1986).

By sharing possible examples of good practice amongst the population, not only are those who are new to the situation able to utilise the wisdom of those who have gone before and perhaps ease their transition; but also the method of doing so could in itself be therapeutically beneficial. By sharing advice and ideas, members of the community may find an increased social support network. This in turn could lead to improved feelings of self-confidence and a

sense of belonging that has been shown to be influential as a coping strategy when faced with times of extended separation from loved ones (Kelley, 1994).

It is hoped that this current study, by providing an initial forum in which possible examples of good practice can be shared, will open the door to policy review and additional research.

## **1.6 Aims and Objectives**

The central aim of this research study is to explore the response that mothers have to the perceived impact they feel their partner's deployment has on the development of their child and how they in turn have responded to this. The study will use qualitative methods to examine this effect.

More specific aims and objectives are described below

- 1) To use qualitative methods to explore maternal views on how their husband's deployment has an effect on their child, namely which areas of their child's functioning (both positive and negative) they feel are affected by paternal absence.
  
- 2) To use qualitative methods to investigate what proactive measures mothers take to protect their children from this perceived impact i.e. collate and disseminate possible examples of good practice to the military population
  
- 3) To use qualitative measures to gather views on current welfare packages offered by the military; to highlight what additional strategies could be employed to help the family throughout the deployment process and minimise the negative impact.
  
- 4) To use the evidence gathered from the military families to inform military policy, support programmes and further research.

## **CHAPTER TWO: METHOD**

### **Overview of Chapter Two**

This chapter begins by giving an account of the selection, recruitment and methodological procedures used within the current study. The use of the Discovery Spine Interview Technique within a semi-structured interview is then described in detail and both ethical and issues of risk management are discussed. Finally the qualitative analytical methods that were used within the study are described.

### **2.1 Design**

This is single method design gathering qualitative data from a participant group using semi-structured interviews, to explore their experiences of deployment and the impact they feel it is having/has had on their child(ren). Qualitative design is used to gather information from the participants regarding any possible examples of good practice they have that could be of benefit if shared with the rest of the military family population.

### **2.2 Participants**

#### ***2.2.1 Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria***

The inclusion criteria developed for participation in the study were as follows:

- All participants must be the current partner of a serving member of the regular or reserve military.
- The partner of each participant must have previously been deployed on at least one occasion for a minimum period of six months on any tour of operation in Iraq or Afghanistan (known respectively as Operations Teliq and Herrick). NB. There were no restrictions on the involved military unit or nature of these tours



- All participants must have had one or more children under the age of sixteen living at home whilst their partner was deployed (no minimum age limit was specified).
- Due to the exploratory nature of the study it was decided that the included participants would be female, and the serving military personnel would be male. It was felt that further familial combinations would be likely to complicate the interpretation of the findings of this study.
- All participants must be able to speak and understand fluent English.

Some exclusion criteria were identified to protect those involved in the study:

- No participant should currently be receiving or awaiting formal treatment from Mental Health professionals.
- No member of the participant's immediate family (i.e. partner or children) should be receiving or awaiting formal Mental Health treatment.

These exclusion criteria were articulated as it was felt that the potentially emotive nature of this study's content could have an adverse effect on those individuals already receiving treatment for mental health difficulties.

It was also felt that if any member of the participant's family was currently undergoing treatment then this could have a significant impact on the experience that was described by the participant.

For the purpose of this investigation it was felt this may have complicated the data analysis and therefore affected the efficacy of the results

### **2.2.2 Research Sample**

Initially participants for the study were to be drawn from an existing randomly selected military cohort from whom three waves of data collection had already been completed (Hotopf et al, 2006; Kings Centre for Military Health Research, 2009; Brindley, 2009). However it was felt by the researcher that due to the sensitive and highly personal nature of the data that would be collected within this study it would be more beneficial for the sample to be approached directly rather than through their military partner. The researcher

felt that being approached via more official military channels could in some way influence the information offered or withheld during the interview stage. For this reason, it was planned to initially approach participants by less official routes with requests for participation placed in more informal forums, many of which were described in chapter one. Due to their regular effort to further policies directly affecting military families, it was decided to place adverts in both the Army Families Federation (AFF) magazine which is distributed nationally to all army families as well as in local publications for all tri-service military camps within the South West of England. It was also planned to approach social 'wives groups' within military camps to request volunteers for participation. Although this covered a large geographical area, the opportunity of a more diverse participant sample was felt to be beneficial and the researcher was able to accommodate interviews across a range of locations. The advert developed, described briefly the aims of the study and what would be involved in participation (Appendix II). All volunteers would then be asked to either e-mail or contact the researcher by phone with their contact details to register their interest. It should be noted that this has not previously been a widely used form of recruitment for military studies. However it was felt, due to the nature of the study, and the previous success of these social magazines in encouraging families to offer their opinions in topical matters, that this could be the most effective way of gathering participants. Each of the individuals who responded would be sent a questionnaire (Appendix III) requesting further information that would determine whether or not they met the inclusion/exclusion criteria set for the study. However, the researcher received a high amount of interest from appropriate respondents (over 100) even before any adverts were placed. It was felt that this was a result of word of mouth, and meant that it was to these individuals that the previously described questionnaire was given. The final sample was determined using the selection of random numbers, one of which had previously been assigned to each eligible potential participant. This method was used so that each volunteer had an equal chance of selection. Every individual who approached the researcher was offered the option of receiving a copy of the study's results and the opportunity to attend a feedback session

once the research was complete, regardless of whether or not they were selected as a participant.

### **2.2.3 Sample Size**

Due to the qualitative nature of the study the sample size was decided on in relation to the appropriate number of participants necessary to ensure significant results from the analysis process. The thematic analysis within this study was generated based on Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) but also drew on aspects of Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach to thematic analysis in psychology. This methodology will be discussed later in this chapter.

Whilst IPA typically uses a lower number of participants due to its focus on detailed case-by-case analysis, the nature of the study, its influence from other analytical sources and the volume of individuals within the focus population, resulted in the belief that a sample of 12 participants was required. This would provide a sufficient representation of the examined population and was deemed a feasible number of participants to include when considering the practical aspects of the study; for example time and resource considerations (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

## **2.3 Procedure**

### **2.3.1 Recruitment and Consent**

Following their selection, participants chosen to be included in the study were sent a letter informing them of their selection accompanied by a question and answer sheet (Appendix IV) explaining the study in detail and once again reiterating the researcher's contact details should they require any further information. They were also provided with a consent form (Appendix V) to sign which they were asked to return to the researcher in the pre-paid envelope provided. Once these forms were returned the participants were contacted by telephone in order to arrange a time and date convenient for them to conduct the interview.

The identified non-respondent procedure was as follows. If participants had not returned their consent form within a two week period, they would be contacted by telephone to determine whether they still wished to participate in the study; at which point they would be given the opportunity to raise further questions or queries. If they then agreed to continue to participate they would be reminded of the details of the study and an interview date arranged. Three phone call attempts would be made by the researcher to contact those who had not replied before they would be defined as a non-responder and an alternative participant selected in their place.

### **2.3.2 Participation Procedure**

Before the interview began, participants were given a brief introduction to the study and the confidential nature of the study was emphasised. Participants were reminded that the interviews were to be recorded and asked to confirm their consent to continue. All participants were advised that they were not obliged to answer any questions they did not wish to, and that they were free to terminate the interview at any point and withdraw from the study without the need for further explanation. This was achieved with the researcher including a set paragraph that was repeated verbatim at the beginning of each interview:

*“Hi, before we start I just wanted to go over a few of the general points of the interview. Thanks so much for agreeing to take part, I wanted to*

*reassure you that, like it was explained to you on the information sheet, everything you say today will be recorded totally anonymously; so your name won't appear anywhere in the project. Also you don't have to answer any of the questions if you don't want to, some of the things we talk about may be a little bit difficult for you and I wanted to be sure that you knew that you can stop the interview at any time if you're no longer comfortable. Also, just to remind you I will be taping our session today so that I can type up everything that is said later and just focus on you during this time rather than taking lots of notes. Is all of that ok? Do you have any questions before we begin?"*

It was advised that the time taken to complete the interview would be approximately one hour. The interviews took place at a location of the participant's own choice which was, without exception, within their home environment. The only people present in the interview room were the participant and the researcher and care was taken to ensure that this was a quiet and uninterrupted space that was felt to be safe by the participant.

Following the introduction described above, the participants were given a brief summary of what the interview would consist of; namely that there would be three areas of exploration; pre-deployment, during deployment and post deployment. The participants were informed that they would be asked about their experiences during each of these time periods. More specifically regarding their opinions of the welfare packages offered at each stage, how they felt their children were affected by occurrences at that time, what they felt would have been useful by way of offered support and if they had tried anything themselves that they thought may be beneficial for other families in a similar position to try. The participants were informed that the researcher would help guide them through the process and if necessary would articulate when they were going to move on to the next time period.

After completion of the interview participants were asked if they would like to be invited to a feedback session on completion of the project and their verbal consent was gained to contact them one week later to ensure that they had experienced no adverse response to the interview process. Once again this was done using a repeated phrase:

*“I also wanted to remind you that once this research is completed I will be offering everyone who has participated the opportunity to come to a sort of group ‘meet’ where I will feed back all of the results and the recommendations that I have gathered. If anyone would prefer do that separately then that’s fine too. There will be written copies of the anonymised final study available as well. Is it ok for me to contact you to invite you along to that?”*

*I’d also like to give you a quick ring this time next week just to make sure that you are alright with everything we have talked about. Would it be alright with you if I do that?”*

Should an adverse reaction from the participant be noted within the interview procedure, a risk management protocol would have been followed which is described in section 2.7 of this chapter.

Following its completion, each interview was transcribed by the researcher.

### **2.3.3 Participant Follow-Up**

One week following the interview each participant was contacted by telephone to ensure that they had not been adversely affected by their involvement in the study. All participants, regardless of whether they felt they had increased difficulties due to the research were then offered the contact details of support agencies and organisations which offer help and advice to service personnel and their families who are facing difficulties. The participants were advised to access these sources should they feel they were struggling in the future.

Once the research project was completed and written up, each participant was once again contacted by telephone and personally invited to a group feedback session where the outcomes of the study would be explained and the intended service implications of the results described. If the participant did not wish to attend the group session they were offered an individual feedback session with the researcher. Each participant was also provided with a written copy of the results.

Those potential participants who had reported that they would like to be included in the feedback session and receive copies of the results were also contacted and invited to attend.

## **2.4 Demographics and Participant Information**

Although no statistical analysis of this information was to be conducted within this particular study; basic demographic and background information was collected from each participant (see Figure 2.1) in order to inform the qualitative analysis and to guide further research development. This information included; the military service and unit to which the serving military personnel belonged; the frequency of their deployments; and the age range of their dependents during their absence.

All of the participants came from the Army perhaps due to the proportionally higher number of Army camps in the geographical area in which the researcher advertised. Of these four were from the Royal Signals, three came from both the Infantry and from the UK Special Forces Group (SFG) and the remaining two came from the parachute regiment. The most common number of deployments experienced by each participant was three (ranging between 1 and five). They had between 1 and 6 children and the age range of these dependents was from three months to sixteen years old.

**Figure 2.1**

	<b>Age</b>	<b>Ethnic Origin</b>	<b>Service &amp; Unit of Serving Military Personnel</b>	<b>Rank of Serving Military Personnel</b>	<b>Number of Dependants</b>	<b>Number of Deployments</b>	<b>Age range of Children during Deployment</b>
<b>Participant 1</b>	46	White British	ARMY - Signals	Warrant Officer II (Sergeant Major)	2	3	2 - 11 years
<b>Participant 2</b>	29	White British	ARMY - UK SFG	NCO (Corporal)	1	2	3 months - 3 years
<b>Participant 3</b>	34	White British	ARMY - Signals	NCO (Staff Sergeant)	2	4	8 months -12 years
<b>Participant 4</b>	35	White British	ARMY - Parachute Regiment	Officer (Captain)	2	3	4 - 15 years
<b>Participant 5</b>	42	Black British	ARMY - Infantry	Warrant Officer I	6	4	5 months –16 years
<b>Participant 6</b>	29	White British	ARMY - UK SFG	Officer (Major)	3	1	2 – 8 years
<b>Participant 7</b>	36	Black British	ARMY - UK SFG	Warrant Officer II	5	2	3 – 14 years
<b>Participant 8</b>	48	White British	ARMY - Signals	Officer (Captain)	3	3	6 – 15 years
<b>Participant 9</b>	24	Ghurkha	ARMY - Signals	NCO (Corporal)	2	1	4 – 6 years
<b>Participant 10</b>	19	White British	ARMY - Infantry	Officer (Major)	3	1	9 – 15 years
<b>Participant 11</b>	49	White British	ARMY - Parachute Regiment	Officer (Lt. Colonel)	4	5	2 – 16 years
<b>Participant 12</b>	37	White British	ARMY - Infantry	Officer (Major)	3	3	2 – 13 years



## **2.5 Qualitative Measures**

The participants in the study were asked a series of questions presented within the context of a semi-structured interview. An audio recording of each interview was taken and the participant's responses were transcribed verbatim.

This section goes on to describe the justification and procedure of development for the measures used within this research.

### **2.5.1 Pilot Phase**

The structure and content of the participant semi-structured interview used within the main research was determined using an initial piloting of an open interview with a married couple of whom the father was a currently serving member of the armed forces, and who had children still living at home. The couple were chosen as part of the pilot phase in order to address any difference in concerns that may be highlighted between those who were deployed and those who remained at home, ensuring that the researcher conducted interviews with the best possible participant. It was hoped to identify the most beneficial structure to extort the most relevant information needed to answer the research questions.

The researcher spoke with the couple about each of their experiences of the deployment process and the impact that they felt this had had on their children. No specific questions were initially used, instead the couple were simply asked to describe their experiences using Pincus et al's (2001) five stage of deployment model (described earlier in chapter one). They were then asked to talk in detail about how they felt their children had been affected during these times and what they felt would have been most useful to be offered by way of support. The key areas of concern that were spoken about; for example the father-child relationship, increased anxiety and general family roles and relationships were used to guide development of more specific questions for the semi-structured interview as well as highlighting potential prompts that may be necessary within future interviews.

Within the initial pilot interview it became apparent that the areas for concern could be separated into three distinct stages of the deployment process; pre

deployment (in the weeks leading up to the parent leaving), during deployment (whilst the parent is away on tour) and post-deployment (when the parent returns and the weeks that follow). The pilot interview supported, in part, the previously described idea from Pincus et al (2001) regarding the emotional cycles within each 'stage' of the deployment process. Although the questions regarding the perceived impact would be similar for each stage, the researcher decided that this implied that the most appropriate way to construct the semi-structured interview would be by the use of a discovery spine technique (Pandiani, Summer 2001). This would ensure that the most imperative information from each stage could be extracted within analysis whilst still allowing for the benefits of a more spontaneous report from the participant. The spine would also enable easier development of recommendations from the data to determine the most appropriate and effective service response.

It was in response to this pilot procedure that the researcher chose to interview initially, solely the parent who remained at home during the deployment process. It was felt, based on the evidence from pilot interview, that they would be the individual best able to report the information most useful to the aims and objectives of this study. It also encouraged the inclusion exclusively of mothers as participants as these constitute the largest proportion of military family structures. The procedure guided the decision not to include a lower age limit on the dependents involved as the pilot couple highlighted the importance of information being gathered from across the age range.

Only one pilot procedure was undertaken by the researcher. This was largely due to the time restraints that were present on the research and the availability of suitable families in the geographical vicinity to the researcher. However, it was also felt that in addition to the thorough background literature that was gathered for the research from a variety of sources, the pilot interview provided sufficient information to develop a comprehensive and effective interview spine that was relevant for the research at hand. To have conducted an increasing amount of pilot procedures may have presented the

researcher with an overwhelming amount of data that could have proved difficult to organise into a useful interview schedule.

The data obtained within the pilot phase was not included in the analysis.

### **2.5.2 *Semi-structured Interviews: Discovery Spine Technique***

The aim of IPA (the influential model on which this methodology is based) is to explore in detail how an individual makes sense of their personal world, and the meaning that particular events and experiences have for them. The process involves detailed examination of the participant's world, and is interested in each individual's perception of this rather than an objective view. In order to gather such a detailed account, a flexible data collection tool is essential. Smith and Osborn (2003) suggest that the best way to collect data within an IPA study is using semi-structured interviews. This allows the researcher and participant to engage in dialogue where initial questions can be modified in response to the participant's experience of the interview, and the researcher is able to further explore areas that seem important.

Semi-structured interviews are based on an interview schedule developed by the researcher, but the interview is guided by this schedule rather than dictated by it. This means that it is easier to establish a rapport between the researcher and participant; essential when addressing potentially emotive topics. In addition to this the researcher does not have to worry about a specific order of questions and can follow the participant's lead in their interests or concerns and probe into the more crucial areas that they feel arise. Although this idea suggests that the schedule takes less of lead in the interview process, it is still important to develop the schedule prior to the interview as it guides the researcher in thinking explicitly about the areas they wish to cover. Having articulated this prior to conducting the interview, the researcher is able to concentrate more thoroughly and confidently on what the participant is actually saying and therefore highlight those areas of increased interest (Smith & Osborn, 2003).

The Discovery spine technique is one approach considered appropriate when conducting semi-structured interviews exploring individual experiences of a specific life event or series of events. It was considered of particular value in

this current study as it is deemed increasingly useful when clinical or other practice based service teams wish to learn directly about an individual's *needs* during a specific experience (Pandiani, Summer 2001). This is due to the fact that it enables them to use the participant's understanding of an experience to stimulate improvement ideas that they will then be able to try out within their own service.

Discovery spines provide the opportunity for individuals to directly tell their story using a basic framework (or 'spine') that guides them through the key stages of their experience. Due to the nature of discovery spine interviews and the opportunity for specific detail it provides, it was felt that this would be particularly effective as a methodological tool within this research study. The study would be dealing with a relatively small participant sample who would be describing the impact of life experience that falls into well-defined stages; pre, during and post-deployment.

The discovery spine technique would provide the individual with the opportunity to report on their own actions as well as those of involved services throughout the experience meaning that the technique could be beneficial in sharing examples of good practice, as well as highlighting gaps in welfare support offered currently.

Occasionally the initial question developed in the discovery spine can be a little too general or vague to elicit substantial or relevant information from the participant, and for that reason prompts are often constructed to encourage the participant to explore deeper into their experiences

It was hoped that the spine developed would serve as a trigger for significant memories and occurrences for the individual, but these can often evoke strong emotions that may be difficult for the individual to experience (Pandiani, Summer 2001). It is therefore essential that the interviewer possesses skills in encouraging the participant whilst providing appropriate support and recognising any signs that the participant is becoming distressed.

Despite these challenges, clinical team members have highlighted the positive response that simply hearing personal reports of such experiences within such an environment can have on their own individual clinical practice even when it does not lead to specific service improvements (NHS, May 2003).

The nature of IPA and the use of semi-structured interviews meant that following development of the final interview discovery spine (Appendix VII) minor adjustments could be made throughout the interview process to the questions and prompts within the spine, both in order to improve clarity and understanding and to explore additional areas of experience that may have been highlighted as important by previous participants.

## **2.6 Ethical Considerations**

Ethical approval was initially sought for this research through the Ministry of Defence Research ethics committee as a substantial amendment query (0732/117) to existing ethical approval due to the recruitment of participants from their previously gathered military cohort. Approval was also received from the University of Wales, Cardiff Research and Development Committee (project ID: 10/MEH/4916).

However due to the ultimate circumstances of recruitment in which the researcher was approached by individuals wishing to participate *prior* to any official recruitment procedures, further advice was taken from the University of Wales, Cardiff and Cardiff and Vale NHS Trust ethics committee. They confirmed that further ethical approval was not required due to the voluntary inclusion of participants and the fact that they were not currently patients within the NHS.

Due to the sensitivity of the topic both written and verbal consent to participate was recorded from each participant in the study.

## **2.7 Risk Management**

Prior to recruitment a risk management protocol concerning participants of the study was devised and approved by the ethics committee.

An NHS Adult Mental Health Consultant Clinical Psychologist (Dr. Neil Roberts) as well as the researcher's clinical supervisor (Dr. Susanne McGowan) and the Defence Head of Clinical Psychology (Dr. Jamie Hacker-Hughes) were also available to address any unanticipated difficulties concerning risk to participants. Should a participant appear upset or significantly distressed in any way during the interview they would be offered immediate support from a clinician and should further intervention be required the appropriate referral channels would be followed.

## **2.8 Data Management**

Each of the participants in the study was assigned a unique participation number which was used to identify their demographic information, consent and interview. Use of these identifiers ensured complete confidentiality for the participants whilst enabling linkage between information during analysis. All of the data was stored in compliance with the 1998 Data Protection Act and with the additional security requirements recommended for good practice by the MoD.

Care was taken to develop measures that would enable any specific identifiers that were present in material taken directly from the interviews (i.e. quotes) to be anonymised. For example, any names used would be represented by letters, and likewise for any individual military operations.

## 2.9 Qualitative Analytical Methods

The aims and objectives of this study were such that it was felt by the researcher that the most beneficial method of data gathering and analysis would be within a qualitative rather than a quantitative research model. Previous research in this area had focussed primarily on a quantitative evidence-base and the researcher felt that whilst this offered an essential and highly beneficial depiction of the impact of aspects of military life, it omitted the richness of data that could be gathered using a qualitative perspective.

The methodology of the study highlights the research focus on each participant's *individual* experience of deployment and the uncovering of their thoughts and beliefs regarding certain specific aspects of these times in their life. The importance of addressing each participant as a separate entity and therefore analysing each interview in turn meant that interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) provided a much more appropriate foundation for analysis than other qualitative approaches such as Grounded Theory.

When using IPA as a form of analysis, it is assumed that the researcher is interested in learning something about the personal psychological world of each participant (Smith & Osborn, 2003). The aim is to understand the content and complexity of the meanings of the participant's experiences, rather than measure the frequency with which they occur. This is not something that is easily done and as Smith and Osborn (2003) suggest it is something that comes only with complete and sustained engagement with the text. Once the text has been read repeatedly it is annotated to highlight any interesting or significant aspects of the data (these can be added to with each additional reading). This commentary is not prescribed and is guided simply by the researcher's own interpretation. Once this has been completed the annotation is examined to extract any emergent themes. These preliminary themes are then examined to highlight any connections and therefore encapsulate each pertinent issue extracted from the text; the transcript is then checked with these cumulative themes to ensure inclusion and continuity.

Each participant's transcript is approached in the same way, although the superordinate list of themes from previous interviews can be used to inform



the analysis. This results in a final list of superordinate themes to be commented on within the results.

This analysis procedure is similar to that of Braun and Clarke's six-phase approach to thematic analysis (2006). This approach involves becoming familiar with all of the data by:

- 1) repeated reading and listening to the transcribed interviews;
- 2) generating initial codes to systemically code all of the interesting features of the data;
- 3) searching for any key themes present in the data and collating the previously derived codes into potential themes;
- 4) reviewing the original themes in relation to the codes and the rest of the data
- 5) defining and naming the ultimate themes by identifying the essence of what each of the individual themes represents, and refining the overall analytic narrative
- 6) producing the final data analysis report.

One of the benefits of IPA is that the analysis procedure is by no means prescriptive (Smith & Osborn, 2003) and due to the amount of participants used and the objectives of the study it was felt that the result presentation suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006) would be more beneficial. Their analysis promotes the inclusion of direct quotes from within the research in order to illustrate the type of data that each individual theme is classifying. This use of participant quote was previously advocated by Breakwell (1995) as he suggested that this would add depth and understanding to the analysis.

Both the emergent themes from each individual transcript and the superordinate themes were reviewed by a third party researcher uninvolved in this study. It was felt that this would provide external validation of the analysis and ensure that all of the themes defined were represented in the source material.

The researcher decided to incorporate both IPA and Braun and Clarke's (2006) model within the data analysis in this particular study as it was felt that this would best support the aims and objectives of the research. It would allow appropriate attention to be given to each participant's unique experience and the specific issues they felt it important to raise, in addition to recognising any similarities or differences between the experiences of the participant cohort. Highlighting any "common ground" would help to guide the development of effective recommendations for improved service delivery. These models also provide an appropriate forum to gather effectively the participant's possible examples of good practice drawn from their personal experiences. These can then be collated for dissemination amongst the military family population.

When analysing the data the researcher did not employ the use of any computer software programmes. These options were explored in depth by the researcher but it was felt that due to the highlighted importance of complete and sustained engagement with the raw material, that analysing the data using a more traditional 'hands-on' method would be more beneficial to the results of the study. Whilst a computer programme may have increased the efficiency of the coding procedure, the researcher felt that this may have led to a detrimental detachment from the emotionally driven material provided by each participant. By conducting the analysis using a more consuming method the researcher felt that an increased attachment was formed with the raw data.

## 2.10 Researcher Position

Due to the qualitative nature of this study it is appropriate to consider the position of the researcher within its structure and content. The researcher held what could be interpreted as a range of different roles within the study. As well as inhabiting the position of sole researcher, she was also a practising trainee clinical psychologist within a military environment in addition to her personal position within the military community as the wife of a serving soldier. The researcher took the decision to complete a reflective journal whilst conducting this study in order to highlight any conflicts or process issues that were encountered.

The researcher initially believed that her personal connection to the individuals within the population she was researching would give a more beneficial connection to the participants that would allow them to feel more comfortable in sharing their experiences with her;

**“I think that being an army wife will be beneficial to the whole process. What sense of community there seems to be within the military population is most certainly directed towards those within their own circle; people they consider to be ‘one of us’. There seems to be a distinct suspicion of civilian professionals as individuals who don’t know what it’s really like to live within the military community. The fact that I can cross both boundaries could be a really positive consideration to the study allowing them to talk freely about their experiences with someone they consider to understand and be sympathetic towards their situation.”**

**Researcher Reflective Journal (p.15)**

However further reflection found the researcher considering that this emotional connection to both the individuals and content of the study needed to be taken into account at each stage of the research process;

**“Although I have considered the positive aspects of being an army wife in addition to the researcher, I think it is important to note the other impact that this could have on the various stages of the research. The**

**content of this study could have personal importance and connotations for me and my future and I feel it is important to be aware of the influence this could have throughout the process. During the interview process this may effect the questions and areas which are discussed with participants and may also affect the way in which the data is interpreted.”**

**Researcher Reflective Journal (p.22)**

The researcher took the decision to inform each of the participants of her position as a member of the military community due to the positive impact she felt this may have, however remaining consciously aware of any further influence this personal connection may result in.

Finally, the researcher felt that the personal connection to the subject matter would ultimately be beneficial due to the motivating quality it may create in regards to the aims of the study;

**“I do feel that my current position is a strong motivating factor for the study. The potential ramifications of the research could have a positive outcome on my own future experiences.”**

**Researcher reflective Journal (p.28)**

## **CHAPTER THREE: RESULTS**

### **Overview of Chapter**

This chapter will present the results gathered within this investigation. The sections of the chapter are divided based on the main question areas of the study and further separated out based on the key events articulated in the discovery spine within the semi-structured interviews. The first section describes the primary emergent themes that were highlighted during the initial analysis of each interview, and section two explains how the subsequent results are presented within this report. Section three goes on to describe the superordinate themes that have been developed from the primary themes and draws further from each individual's experiences (using examples taken from the raw data) examining the specific impact they feel that deployment has had on their children and family. Sections four to six cover the three main time periods used within the interview spine; pre-deployment, during deployment and post deployment. They present the participant's views about what could have been done to help their family further and recount possible examples of good practice they have to share with others within the population.

### **3.1 Preliminary Emergent Themes**

In accordance with the approach suggested within IPA, once the researcher had become familiar with each individual interview, all areas of specific interest within the transcript were noted and a list of emergent themes developed. This initial list was produced following analysis of the first interview and was added to as subsequent interviews were analysed and additional themes of importance highlighted. This process differs slightly from that set out by Braun and Clarke (2006), who suggest that initial codes are generated following the transcription of *all* of the participant interviews, covering every interesting feature held within the data. The researcher has previously described the importance within this study of examining each participant's interview individually to encourage a more detailed understanding

of their experience and ensuring that no valuable aspects of the material was excluded. It is for this reason that the more intricate method of individual interview analysis was employed.

The preliminary emergent themes that were developed throughout the subsequent analysis of the transcribed participant interviews were as follows (in no particular order):

- Anxiety within child regarding outcome of deployment (e.g. injury / death)
- Loss of father-child relationship
- Loss of spousal relationship
- Missing of significant events / milestones
- Uncertainty regarding disclosure of information to children (regarding deployment)
- Unhelpful advice offered by military
- Support offered by military welfare services not effective
- Insufficient support received from military community / environment
- Negative behaviour change displayed in child
- Positive behaviour change displayed in child
- Increased maturity seen in child
- Ability of child to cope improved (increased resilience)
- Increased communication with child
- Increased independence of child
- Improved sibling relationships
- Complications due to aspects of military life (e.g. long hours / increased mobility)
- Pre-deployment training impact
- Impact of rest and recuperation (R&R) leave
- Previous work related absences
- Adaptation of daily routine
- Inclusion of other people / activities
- Emotional difficulties in child (increased crying / clinginess)
- Improved father-child relationship
- Improved spousal relationship
- Improved skills of familial communication

These primary themes were highlighted as each interview was completed. Previously articulated themes were noted within each new transcript and any additional themes identified were incorporated into the analysis. Following the completion of all of the interviews the transcripts were further analysed following continued reading and listening, to ensure that all appropriate themes had been identified.

These preliminary emergent themes were reviewed alongside the raw data by a third party researcher who was uninvolved in the current study. This provided an external validation of the analysis and ensured that each of the emergent themes listed were represented in the source material.

### **3.2 Presentation of the Results**

Despite the fact that each participant interview was analysed separately, there was significant overlap noted in the preliminary emergent themes between the respondents. Using the list of preliminary emergent themes, a set of superordinate themes was collated and defined which it was felt encompassed the crucial aspects and indeed the essence of each individual experience. Due to the fact that there was only one set of respondents within the participant population (i.e. mothers), these superordinate themes can be represented within a single thematic map. Due to the large amount of content it contained, this map was split into two parts for ease of examination; negative superordinate themes and positive superordinate themes.

A colour coding system has been used to identify the occurrence of these themes within the interviews.

- Identified in less than three of the respondent experiences
- Identified in less than six of the respondent experiences
- Identified in more than six of the respondent experiences
- Identified in more than nine of the respondent experiences

These thematic maps can be seen below in Figure 3.1 and Figure 3.2.

Figure 3.1 Superordinate Themes: Negative

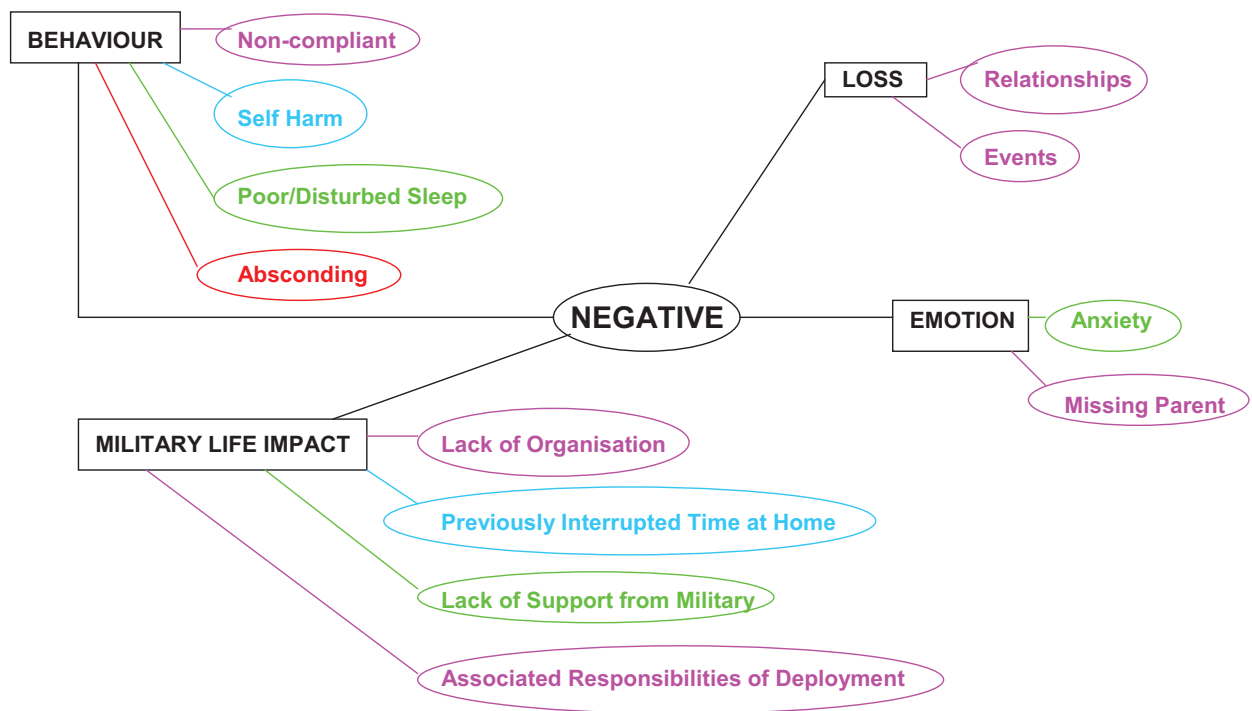
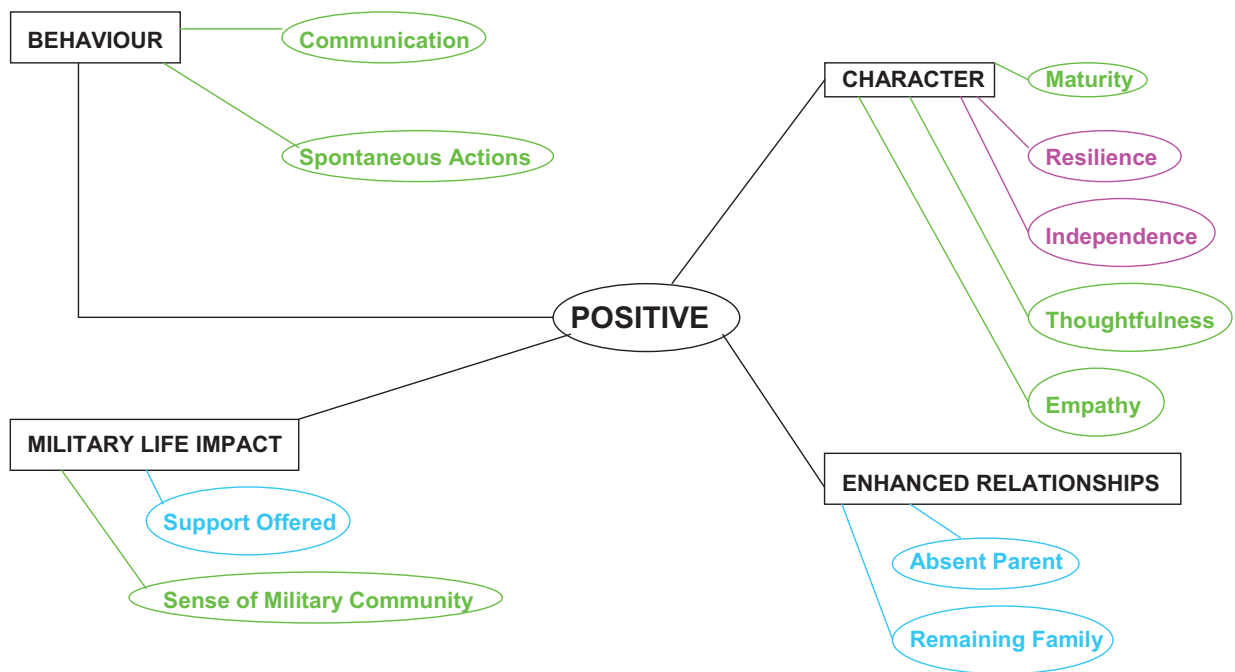




Figure 3.2: Superordinate Themes: Positive



### 3.3 Impact of Deployment

As previously described, the emergent positive and negative themes from the participant experiences were depicted within a thematic map (Figure 3.1 and 3.2) showing the perceived impact of paternal deployment on the child.

#### 3.3.1 Negative Themes

The four super-ordinate themes that were highlighted from the preliminary emergent themes were 'Behaviour', 'Loss', 'Emotion' and 'Military Life Impact'. These are described in more detail below.

##### 3.3.1.1 Behaviour

Many of the participants reported changes in their child's behaviour across the deployment process. These were changes that they attributed solely to their child's experience of deployment, and ones they felt would not have occurred had they not had a parent in the military. Eleven of the participants reported some form of non-compliance in their child ranging from what were considered minor incidents to more challenging rebellions. It was noted within the data that the older the child was, the more difficult their changes in behaviour were for the remaining parent to manage:

*"It was ok with the younger ones, sure they could get a bit stropky and difficult but with 'M' it was so much harder. I mean he was a teenager, he goes out and I can't lock him in the house so he acted out so much more; drinking, smoking, staying out till all hours and I'm pretty sure that he was trying drugs." (P5)*

*"The behaviour changes were definitely most difficult once they were teenagers. I suppose you have more control over younger ones naturally as they are around you; you're their key figure. With teenagers that changes and it's difficult for any parents to manage so this added stress factor can be really detrimental. Their peers become the people they listen most to and they have access to significantly more harmful activities." (P11)*

Whilst the majority of the aforementioned number of the participants reported on the non-compliance of their children whilst their father was away on

deployment; explained by some as the result of the absence of the typically authoritarian parent, all twelve of the participants who commented on this problem described the difficulties of non-compliance in relation to the absent father once he returned home:

*“See their father used to do most of the discipline so I think at first they didn’t see me as someone they had to listen to; he was gone and I didn’t count.” (P7)*

*“Like any children I think that such a big change means that they start to push the boundaries and that’s really hard especially at first. It’s so tiring to be the only one to deal with those problems with no-one else to support you; it’s just exhausting.” (P12)*

*“When he was home, he would tell them to do something and they just wouldn’t listen which made him angry and then it would get worse and worse”. (P3)*

*“It was awful again when he came back because they just ignored everything he said, like he didn’t matter. They would only respond to my direction, almost like they were punishing him for being gone.” (P8)*

As well as being described within the home environment, non-compliance was also reported by six of the participants as occurring within other areas of the child’s life specifically within educational arenas:

*“It was the same at school. I was getting reports back from teachers that he just wasn’t doing as he was told and they couldn’t get him to listen and obey their instructions”. (P9)*

*“They all seemed to be much more disobedient for their teachers as well. I can’t count the number of letters I had home or requests to go in and speak to someone there about it.” (P3)*

Some of these behavioural changes described above could be attributed to other emotional disturbances that will be explored in more detail in 3.3.1.3. For example, some of the parents described an impact on their child’s sleep patterns which could be a reflection of an increase in their anxiety:

*“She started to wake up with nightmares and then just didn’t want to go to sleep at all”. (P2)*

*“He was most nights in bed with me because of the number of times he’d wake up crying or unhappy because of some dream he’d had”.*  
(P1)

*“It started to get really difficult for her to get to sleep. Before she just went off really quickly but then she was up and down for hours for glasses of water, or to the toilet, just any excuse to come back to me really I think, that lasted for months.”* (P5)

*“J’ had really bad problems with nightmares, the doctor said they were night terrors. They lasted years actually even when his dad came back, but that was when they started – when he went away – he’d never had them before that.”* (P10)

A small number of the participants; two of those included in the study, reported even more extreme behavioural changes with some describing episodes of deliberate self harm in their children:

*“It was truly awful, it was like she had so much trapped inside her that the only way she could release it was by physically hurting herself. That was a really tough time, and although she got help and things got better she was so emotionally and psychologically affected by the situation it was so scary to see as a parent.”* (P8)

*“It’s all in the past now but she did go through a period of harming herself. I noticed it first with her eating; she became, well anorexic is the best way to describe it I guess. Then I started to notice little marks on her arms and stuff that’s when I got really worried and took her to the doctor. I mean that’s not ok, you can’t let that go. They said it was just all too much for her and this was the only way she could cope with it.”* (P7)

One participant described her experience of her child absconding both from home and from school:

*“She’s actually run away a few times, from here and from school. They’ve called me and I’ve had to go out looking for her. She never went far but still it’s worrying. That’s carried on too, even when he came back she still runs off.”* (P3)

The behaviour changes described by the participants seemed to occur largely within the different times of deployment with three of them describing difficulties prior to deployment, and all twelve reporting at least some behavioural changes when their father was away on deployment and immediately following his return. Six of the participants described behavioural changes that were ongoing one month after the return of their child's father.

### 3.3.1.2 Loss

Loss was reported as one of the major themes within the participants experiences with all of them describing some form of loss that they felt occurred during the experience of deployment. It was noted that this idea of loss for the child could be split into two main sub-themes; the loss of relationships and the loss of their father as a physical presence in their life. Eleven of the twelve participants spoke of the loss they felt had occurred in the closeness between their children and their father:

*"He was just always gone for a really big chunk of her life especially because she was so young they just never had the chance to form that special father-daughter bond". (P2)*

*"They just seemed to drift apart I guess; I suppose that's what happens to all of us when you're not around someone for a period of time." (P8)*

*"Those things that cement your relationship with a person just weren't happening because he was gone, I don't suppose you can be surprised really that they weren't as close anymore." (P11)*

*"It was like they didn't want to get close with him because they knew that sooner or later he'd be off again and they'd be left behind". (P12)*

For five of the participants this lack of closeness they described only appeared to be temporary:

*"It was always quite hard when he returned but after time it would fade and they'd be right back to where they were before". (P8)*

*"It just took time I think and perseverance and then everything slipped back to normal". (P6)*

*“It was fine in the end. They were ok and he was ok and life went back to how it was before.” (P9)*

But for the remaining seven of this group, the impact on the father-child relationship seemed to be a little more permanent:

*“They’ve all grown up without a father present really. It’s like being a single parent I suppose and that’s what it’s like for them; they have a mum but their dad is gone – how can you have a bond or a relationship with someone who’s constantly not there.” (P5)*

*“It makes me really sad actually to see how they are like strangers with each other. Neither seems to know what to do really, it’s like there’s no connection there”. (P11)*

*“It sounds so overly dramatic, but you see them in certain situations; how they are with each other, and I think back to what it was like before and you can’t help but think that irreparable damage has been done.” (P11)*

In part this loss of closeness with their father was attributed by the participants to the loss of having their father present at the most important times in their lives. Be those milestones in their development; such as walking and talking, or at events like birthdays, Christmas or graduations:

*“He was just never there for the really important stuff. He didn’t share in the things that made them grow and develop as people and you can’t make up for that.” (P8)*

*“It was the special times they noticed it the most like birthdays and Christmas. At first they would be sad and ask why he couldn’t be there and get upset and angry. But then they just seemed to accept it like they never expected him to be there and it didn’t matter to them anymore; that was even more upsetting to be honest.” (P7)*

*“R’ was graduating out of school, they had a big ceremony and that like they do in the States. Although he wouldn’t admit it, it was a really big thing for him and I think it made a huge difference that his dad wasn’t there to share it; to see all that he’d achieved.” (P5)*

Two of the participants noted that the sense of loss was heightened due to the fact that the child may have developed significantly in their father's absence and this was not necessarily acknowledged. The reintegration of the father back into the family system required a great deal of adjustment in some cases and this could lead to tension:

*"We'd just got used to it being us I suppose and 'G' was sort of the man of the house then. When his father had left he'd been a boy but now he'd grown up, matured and his father hadn't been around to see that so he didn't treat him accordingly when he got back and that was obviously frustrating for 'G'. It just meant their relationship was immediately one of conflict."* (P11)

Five of the participants also observed that these feelings of loss could have been added to by the change that occurred in how the father and child interacted:

*"He was different when he came back too, he didn't really have the patience he had before and the kids could sense that".* (P7)

*"To be honest I just don't think he was as fun for them anymore when he came back. He didn't want to play games or mess about, he was wanting to be on his own a lot more and they just don't understand that so after a while they stop trying."* (P11)

*"The injuries he'd got when he was away meant that he couldn't do all the active stuff with them that he used to and that was hard for them and for him really. They just never seemed to find something else to do together they just drifted apart."* (P5)

From the results it was noted that those participants whose families had experienced a greater number of deployments were, in general, reporting a greater sense of loss for their children.

*"It just gets worse and worse each time he goes too. He's never back long enough for the relationship to get better; he's home, he leaves and it starts all over again and the cumulative effect is what's irreversible I think".* (P11)

### 3.3.1.3 Emotion

The participants within the current study described various ways in which they felt deployment had impacted on their child's emotional state and these could be categorised under two cumulative sub-themes; anxiety or worry and missing the absent parent.

The anxiety reported by nine of the included participants appeared to manifest itself differently in different children and this seemed, at least in part, dependent on the age of the children at the time of deployment. The data suggested that generally older children displayed a more short-term anxiety related specifically to the worries they had regarding their father being away:

*“As teenagers they seemed to have those realistic fears about his well-being and whether or not he would be injured or killed. It meant that when he was gone they were often a little more restless or eager to hear any news I had about his whereabouts. They would get particularly anxious watching the news but were really obsessional almost about having it on. Sometimes they'd have trouble sleeping because they'd think about stuff over and over, but it just went away as soon as dad was back and they could see he was safe.” (P5)*

*“You could tell they were still worried as they got older but it was more directly linked to where he was and what he was doing; whether or not he was safe, that kind of thing. It didn't really last when he came home because those fears just weren't relevant anymore.” (P8)*

*“The older they got the less visible their anxiety was really, it may have still been there but it showed itself in different ways.” (P3)*

In younger children however the anxiety described by the participants seemed to take on more long-term and encompassing symptoms and it was in this age group that eight of the anxiety reports occurred:

*“It started when he went away for the first time when she was around 6, from then on she just always seemed to be that little bit more insecure about her relationships with other people and whether they would leave her. I suppose you could say it developed into an insecurity about herself really which has led to more complex difficulties for her.” (P8)*



*“He was really clingy at first and I didn’t think much of it because all kids go through that kind of stage don’t they? It’s just he never really grew out of it he stayed this really withdrawn and shy little boy who couldn’t cope with anything new or different.” (P3)*

*“You can see even now that it’s had a long-term impact for them I think it’s ‘cause they knew such significant separation at such a young age. I can see that they are less secure in relationships and they even show some anxiety about leaving home and having to live away from me.” (P7)*

There are a range of other emotions that were reported by the participants that they observed in their children during times of deployment. Eleven of those within the study described their children as, amongst other things, being more irritable, teary, angry, sad and more sensitive to certain situations. All of these emotions could be related to the experience of the child missing their absent parent and they appear to occur across the age range:

*“You could tell that everyone was a bit more fragile, it didn’t take a lot for emotions to start running high with them screaming at each other, and tears would come a lot more easily than before. It was like all that emotion needed a way of escaping.” (P4)*

*“It was so difficult to manage, it was just so unstable, you never knew what mood they were going to be in, and their moods could swing so quickly and to such extremes. They’d be shouting and throwing things one second and then curled up in a ball crying the next, it was just exhausting for everyone.” (P10)*

*“They were always getting upset over really small things and no matter what, it would always end up with tears and them saying how much they missed their dad and wished he was home.” (P9)*

#### *3.3.1.4 Military Life Impact*

There were many reports from participants about the negative impact that other aspects of military life (in addition to deployment) had on their family life and subsequently on their children.

All but one of the participants spoke of how life was increasingly challenging due to the lack of organisation within the military:

*“It was just totally last minute; you can’t make any effective plans really because everything is so likely to change.” (P)*

*“He was home, then he was away, then he was home again...it was so confusing for the children, you get them prepared for one thing then something different happens. Even when they’re old enough to understand that’s hard, but for the little ones it’s so incredibly distressing.” (P3)*

*“I could understand them needing to act quickly in certain situations, but that doesn’t even seem to be the prerequisite, they just don’t ever seem to be able to organise a specific timetable. It’s ridiculous really”. (P8)*

*“You’d think they would have to have some organisational skills, but apparently not. It’s a wonder they manage to function at all! Plus they don’t seem to acknowledge or maybe they just don’t care about the impact that has on the families.” (P1)*

*“You know what you’re signing up for when you become an army wife; you know that life will be unexpected and planning will not always work out the way you want it, but most of it isn’t even about military issues – it’s the fact that they aren’t effective in their planning and organisation. They must waste so much money too.” (P12)*

In addition to this, eleven participants also reported specific issues around the military in reference to the responsibilities and mandates surrounding deployment itself:

*“To be honest I’m probably the only person who’d say this but I don’t really like R&R; by the time he’s got back and settled in it’s time to leave again. It’s so hard for the kids and even for me, we have our routine, he disturbs that and then leaves. I just think it would be better if it didn’t happen that way.” (P6)*

*“With all the pre-deployment training and the R&R and everything it is so much more chaotic than a simple 6 month tour. It wouldn’t exactly be nice, but I think for families, particularly those with small children, it would be better to have everything together. So he walks out the door and*

*then doesn't walk back in until he's back to stay – anything else is just a bit too traumatic.” (P4)*

There were also comments from four of the participants that suggested that times of deployment were, in reality, not hugely different from their other experiences of military life:

*“To be honest he was never really around much. With courses and exercises and training and everything it was rare for him to be at home at all, at least when the children were awake. It was no different for them when he deployed because I was the one who had always done everything. I had to.” (P1)*

*“I suppose the cynic in me found deployment easier in a way. At least it was set. It was a six month period when I didn't have to worry whether he would be around or not; when he'd be home or if he would be available to do things with us. He was gone and that meant there'd be no last minute reasons why he wouldn't be home in time to put the kids to bed or go with me out for a meal.” (P5)*

A significant number of participants (eight in total), described experiences in which they had not felt at all supported by the military throughout the challenging times of deployment:

*“They just weren't there to support you. They said they would be, but what they said and what they did were just worlds apart.” (P2)*

*“It wasn't at all the way you thought it would be; I didn't hear from anyone, not once, the whole time my husband was away. Oh no, they did phone to tell me I had to pay his mess bill, but that was it.” (P4)*

*“It was like he went away and they forgot we were there. We just had to get on with it and deal with everything ourselves.” (P1)*

### **3.3.2 Positive Themes**

From the analysis of the participant responses there also emerged four super-ordinate positive themes some of which existed in direct opposition to the negative themes (i.e. fell into identical categories). These themes were;

'Behaviour', 'Character', 'Enhanced Relationships' and 'Military Life Impact, and they are explored further below.

### 3.3.2.1 Behaviour

There were two specific aspects of their child's behaviour described by participants to improve throughout their experience of deployment. The first of these was communication; nine of the participants involved in the study reported the increase in amount and quality of communication they had with their children and this occurred, in varying forms, across the age-span:

*"What was really nice in such a difficult time was I found myself talking to them all a lot more. Each in their own way would seek me out to talk to me, first it was about their father and how they missed him but it developed into more. Suddenly I was a confidante, someone they could trust and whose opinion they valued."* (P11)

*"They definitely talked to me more. The younger ones had always done it to a certain extent but even as teenagers it was almost as if they had to touch base with me each day. I found that all of a sudden I knew things I hadn't known before; who liked who at school, what the latest trends were, even who they liked. That increased communication from them was invaluable".* (P8)

*"We'd never really been a big talking family; everyone pretty much dealt with stuff in their own way but this was different. I think we found it easier to share the experience with each other, me included so we started having dinner all together and having these big talks around the dinner table; it was brilliant."* (P12)

An identical number of participants also reported positive spontaneous actions in their children that they had not noticed previously:

*"It was lovely, I no longer had to nag at them to get them to do things it was almost an instant change. Their cups were washed up and their clothes hung up, I even started getting a cup of tea put on my dresser each morning whilst I was in the shower."* (P)

*“I saw a massive difference in the way they behaved. They would help out around the house without being asked, and the older ones started to give the younger ones help with their homework, voluntarily!” (P7)*

### 3.3.2.2 Character

There were a number of areas in which participants described the development of positive personality attributes in their child.

Again, nine of the participants described a noticeable increase in the maturity of their offspring:

*“I saw each of them gain in maturity whilst he was away. You could see it in the way they behaved and the way they spoke to me and each other. No matter what age they were at the time it was like they skipped ahead a few years.” (P12)*

*“She became this little wise old woman who thought and acted well beyond her years.” (P2)*

*“Before he deployed we had been having some difficulties with our eldest son just doing those stupid things that teenagers do with their friends but all of a sudden it stopped. He seemed to realise that wasn’t appropriate behaviour and instead he became this great example to the younger ones.” (P8)*

With eleven of the participants reporting an enhanced sense of resilience and independence in their children:

*“I think that they have become much more able to cope now than they used to, they’re much stronger and able to deal with whatever life can throw at them.” (P7)*

*“I don’t think they rely on us for everything as much as they used to. They’ve been able to discover a lot about themselves and become much more self-reliant.” (P5)*

*“He is so much more independent now; he’ll take the initiative on so many things and not come running to us straight away if something proves a little challenging.” (P3)*

*“She has been through a difficult time, and seen us go through one too but we’ve talked about it and shared the experience with each other*

*and now she's seen that life does throw challenges at you but if you communicate well and support each other then you can get through it." (P6)*

On a more emotional level, the experience was described by eight participants as one which has increased the thoughtfulness of their children and developed their child's ability to empathise with those around them:

*"I think the whole experience had meant that they are so much more aware of people around them now; their feelings and how things can impact on them. I can see them take other people into consideration before they speak or act." (P8)*

*"She's definitely changed in regards to how she treats the people around her. Before I think she just went about her life in whichever way she wanted and didn't really stop to think about the implications of that. Now there's more of an understanding of other people's feelings and more of an awareness of her responsibility to protect those to a certain extent." (P4)*

*"They certainly are much more considerate to me and to others since that time. It's like they've realised early on the importance of considering the feelings of others and doing your best to be understanding and accommodating of them." (P9)*

### *3.3.2.3 Enhanced Relationships*

As was seen in section 3.3.1, eleven of the included participants commented on the negative ways in which they felt deployment had impacted upon certain relationships; namely the father-child bond. However five participants (and in some circumstances the same participant) described the positive impact it had on forming stronger relationships with not only their father but also their mother and siblings:

*"It brought us all so much closer, having to go through something like that; we were a much stronger family unit afterwards." (P)*

*"I don't think that they would be as close as brothers and sisters if it hadn't been for that experience. They were there for each other and supported each other and that formed a bond that will last well beyond the end of their dad's employment in the military." (P7)*

*“I feel so much closer to them now, we talk about things and they come to me for advice and vice versa too! I think there is a mutual support there and we all benefit from it.” (P5)*

*“Having their daddy away was difficult but if anything I think it meant we focussed a lot more on him. If he’d been here they wouldn’t necessarily have spoken to him as much or spent so much time with him, but here we were spending hours writing to him, making him things and trying so hard to share our entire lives with him. I think strangely it brought them closer together.” (P10)*

*“It gave them and their dad the opportunity to share so much more with each other than they would have otherwise done. When he was home he worked so hard and so often that they just didn’t have that much contact but this meant they both put in huge effort to keep the other involved and it paid off.” (P4)*

*“They’re so proud of their father and I think that has increased their respect for him. It’s a difficult time but they know it is part of his job and I think that helps them to understand him better which in turn benefits their relationship.” (P11)*

#### *3.3.2.4 Military Life Impact*

Just as in section 3.3.1.4 participants described the negative aspects of being part of the military population so were some of these resulting experiences attributed to a more positive outcome.

Eight of the participants described the benefits of residing within a military ‘community’:

*“It’s nice to be surrounded by people in the same position as you. They know what it feels like and can understand exactly what you’re going through.” (P6)*

*“There’s always someone nearby to have a chat or a cup of tea with; someone who’s been where you are and who can help you get through it.” (P8)*

*“It’s not the same as civilian life, you move so often, you have to make friends fast and be prepared to leave again but it’s ok because everybody knows how it is and it’s exactly the same for them.” (P9)*

*“There’s support there; not just for you but for your kids too. You all have people around you who are in exactly the same boat.” (P4)*

There were also positive reports of the support received by four participants directly from the military in contrast. This was in sharp contrast to those described in section 3.3.1.4:

*“His unit was brilliant, I couldn’t have asked for a more attentive and supportive group of people. They regularly rang to ask if I wanted to be involved in whatever social activity was going on and would even come and bring me there if I had any transport issues.” (P6)*

*“Whenever I had any questions or specific difficulties I just rang the welfare centre and they sorted everything out for me, they were really great.” (P10)*

There did not appear to be any significant suggestion within the results or the participant demographics that may have suggested why this was the case, and could simply be attributed to the fact that each military squadron is different and no universal practice is in place dictating their efforts for families of the deployed. This means that the experience of families is often dependent on their current posting; somewhat akin to the idea of a ‘lottery postcode’, an occurrence generally felt to be unacceptable.



### 3.4 Pre-Deployment Welfare

This section provides an overview of the participant responses that fell within the 'pre-deployment' experience within the interview spine. It has been further broken down into two aspects; firstly, what they felt would have helped immediately prior to their partner's deployment; and the second part details any specific examples of things they did which they felt were of benefit to themselves and their children.

#### 3.4.1 What would have helped?

The thoughts of the participants regarding pre-deployment help seemed to fall into two distinct categories; organisation of the deployment and the pre-emptive support offered by the military.

Seven of the participants described the often chaotic period immediately preceding deployment and the benefits to their family if this had been more structured:

*"It was so last minute; he was in and out on trainings and such we didn't really know when he was leaving until pretty much the day before. If we had just had a set date then we could have planned a little better." (P2)*

*"It would have been so much more beneficial to have had him go on the training all in one go; even if it meant him being away longer. That way the children would have been much more settled." (P3)*

*"I don't know if it was because they wouldn't or couldn't tell us but we seemed to only know things right at the last second which is devastating for kids; not being able to prepare for it." (P1)*

A smaller number, two participants, also commented that time allotted specifically to the family to say goodbye would have been helpful:

*"Everything is so busy and it's go go go that it would've been good for the kids and for us I think if we had some time just as a family to be quiet and be able to take the time to say our goodbyes. A week, or even a few days before their deployment date should be time just to be at home with your family; that way you wouldn't feel so much like he'd been snatched away." (P7)*

Although articulated in different ways, the majority of participants (all but one) suggested some form of pre-deployment brief for the families. They felt this could have provided them with useful information and strategies for coping as well as detailing more practical aspects of deployment:

*“It would have been nice to have been invited to a briefing where we could meet the families of the other soldiers who would also be leaving; that way we could have been aware of the other people in similar positions to us.” (P10)*

*“If the unit had just provided us with something to let us know what was available when they were gone, what we could access and put faces to those names.” (P12)*

*“So many people have been through this before I mean we can’t be the first ones to wonder what and how to tell our children can we? So why not create some kind of forum to advise on those things they know from previous experience are going to be difficult.” (P6)*

Two of the participants commented on some positive aspects of the welfare package offered by the military:

*“Well there were some really useful things organised by his unit; there were some social events to introduce the wives and families to each other and they set up a ‘phone tree’ so that any important information like the fact that they had arrived in a new place safely, were passed on.” (P4)*

*“They helped me a lot with practical things that I did not know about. My husband had always organised many things and they gave me a leaflet that helped to tell me what extra I needed to be doing.” (P9)*

At least some of these points however appeared again to be dependent on the specific unit to which the serving personnel belonged, rather than a universally offered system of support.

### **3.4.2 Examples of Good Practice**

The participants also offered many examples of things they had tried or that they had been informed of that had proved beneficial in providing help and

support for their family at this time. For clarity these have been listed in bullet points below:

- Tape recording deployed parent reading bedtime stories that can then be played each night when they are gone (the military offer a similar service for this 'storybook soldiers' but many families found it difficult to access due to distance / time restraints)

*"We recorded him reading her favourite stories, I think they offer this officially now but I think you have to make your own way to Salisbury and for some that's just not possible. You don't need a recording studio though, a tape recorder works just fine!" (P4)*

- Taking many photos and laminating them so that the deployed parent is able to take these and decorate their bed space; these can then be updated throughout the tour.

*"I know he likes to make his bed space special when he's away so I made sure that he had loads of photos of her and then I laminated them and put them on a sort of washing line he could hang over his bed. Then as the tour went on I sent him updates so he could change them as she grew." (P2)*

- Preparing for milestones. The deployed parent could prepare for those important milestones they will miss; events such as birthdays Christmas and Easter. This can be done by buying presents early or by making an Easter treasure hunt map for their children to follow and would allow them to be somewhat present on that day. They may also think about other important occurrences they may miss for example their child's first steps, their child eating with a spoon and bowl for the first time, all the way up to attending their first prom. These could be prepared for by the deployed parent buying a set of shoes or bowl and spoon or special dress that can then be worn and photos of this sent to the deployed parent to show they were still able to be some part of it.

*"If we'd thought about it just a little more I think we could have prepared a little better. If he had been a part of some of the big steps she took whilst he was away then he may not have felt like he missed so much. Like he could've bought her first pair of shoes and then when she started walking I could of sent photos of her in them – things like that." (P2)*

- When addressing where the deployed parent is going, some families described positive experiences using large maps on which they cut out photos of each family member and pin them to where they will be; this could be a sort of game, moving people around when they go on holiday etc.

*“We basically cut photo heads of everyone we knew and then stuck them on a poster map. Daddy was obviously really far away but we talked about other people we knew and loved who were away and even when people went on holiday – they saw that people who left came back and I think that helped some. (P4)*

- In a similar vein almost all of the families who participated spoke of using a calendar as a visual tool to mark off days till the deployed parent returns many describing a sort of ritual each evening when they crossed off another day.

*“I think everyone uses a calendar and just crosses off the days. Having a big visual thing like that helps; ok it’s a long way off till he’s home but you fill the time in between with special stuff and they see those approaching and they can also see how much time has passed; that’s beneficial. We have a special ritual each evening to cross it off and we take it in turns with the red marker. I like doing it that way as I think it reminds us at the end of each day to stop and think about daddy.” (P5)*

- In addition to the letters sent and received during deployment some families spoke of the joy of finding ‘surprise’ letters that had been hidden; either in the bag of the deployed parent or around the house in obscure places for the family left at home.

*“It was weeks afterwards and I was still finding little notes he’d hidden for me around the house. That was so nice it made me quite emotional at times, I think he’d put them in places he knows I go when I need a moment to myself so it was like he could give me that bit of extra support when he knew I needed it the most.” (P7)*

- Some families took advantage of new decorative ideas such as large wallpaper canvasses on which photos, notes or poems can be written and these were completed on the walls of their children’s rooms to try and keep them ever-present.

*“We found all sorts of stuff that we could decorate with – large blank canvases or wallpaper that you drew yourself. He put pictures and drawings and poems all over this huge wall covering that we put behind her crib. It was absolutely lovely, in fact we’ve just left it up there. We used to say goodnight daddy to his picture every night and she still does that even though he’s home.” (P2)*

In every case it was described as not only the outcome that was beneficial but also the planning and execution of the idea that counted:

*“It’s just about the thought really. Sitting down and taking the time to think about exactly what you’ll miss and how you can be a part of that even when you’re physically absent. Then the preparing of it is something you can often do together which brings you closer and gives you added camaraderie. Yes it can be sad but ultimately it’s better especially for the children.” (P2)*

### 3.5 Welfare during Deployment

Within this section an overview is provided of what the participants in the study reported would be helpful to them whilst their partner was deployed overseas; within the 'deployment' part of the interview spine. Once again it also summarises any examples they gave of strategies they used that benefited their families' experience that could be shared with others in their position.

#### 3.5.1 *What would have helped?*

Most of the suggestions made by the participants fall under the heading of support although this varied between practical and emotional support and in some instances referred to issues of organisation within the military structure. Each of the participants included in this study described some need to feel as if they were supported by the military whilst their partner was away and the positive effect they believed this would have had on their emotional, psychological and physical state:

*"You just want to feel involved; that someone knows you're there, whether you need to utilise the help they offer or not."* (P3)

*"There is a welfare service, there are people employed specifically to look out for the emotional well being of the troops and their families. How hard is it to drop a quick line or pop round to the families of the deployed both on or off camp? They'd only need to do it each week or even each fortnight, but at least it would make sure that you knew you weren't alone in it all."* (P6)

*"It wouldn't take much for them to make the families of the deployed still feel like a part of the unit; it doesn't even have to be welfare there is always the rear party [the small unit contingency left behind when the rest deploy] that could do little things too that would make you feel involved or at least like someone cared."* (P10)

*"You just don't want to feel forgotten that is the hardest part, that feeling that you are utterly and entirely alone."* (P12)

In addition to the opportunity to regularly speak with military personnel the participants reported the benefits of practical support. Nine of the participants described varying difficulties in completing fundamental aspects of life like shopping, due to problems such as their lack of skills (inability to drive), resources (no car or sufficient public transport) or the physical support necessary (babysitters / additional pairs of hands). Seven of this participant sample commented that having this sort of practical assistance offered by the military would have made a significant difference to their experience of deployment. It was particularly noticeable when families were themselves based overseas and therefore unable to access certain public services available in the UK (i.e. shopping online):

*“It’s just awful when you can’t drive, particularly in Germany when everything is much harder to access. You can’t even get to the shops to buy what you need to survive. If they could organise some sort of service that could provide that it would take away so much stress.” (P1)*

*“Shopping is a nightmare; just finding a way to get there let alone having to manage a band of young and not very helpful kids who lets face it would rather be anywhere but there. It sounds so small but something like that just affects you so much.” (P5)*

*“They wouldn’t even have to provide transport and babysitters I don’t suppose, they would just need to do some kind of shopping service; like internet shopping that you can do in the UK, that’s not available in Germany. Ok, being able to go yourself may be preferable but at least it’s something to take away the stress.” (P11)*

Nine of the participants spoke of the activities and events that were organised for the families and the benefits of having regular contact with those in similar positions. However all but one of this sample also commented on the fact that some of these activities were not always inclusive of all age groups and some could find themselves excluded due to practical reasons:

*“The wives committee did organise day trips and nights out but most of them had much older children so they could go on the rides at the theme parks or babysit their younger kids so they could go out for dinner. I didn’t have that, there was no way a theme park was a realistic option and I*

*couldn't go out at night as there were no babysitters and even if there were it would have been so expensive to do.” (P1)*

*“The opportunity to meet with others in the same position was fantastic but it just didn't really happen, at least not consistently or regularly. Plus the activities that they organised as one offs were never practical options for me as the kids were too small to enjoy them.” (P4)*

Both this and other difficulties described by the participants suggests the possibility of the benefits of an organised 'babysitting circle' in which families gain points by babysitting for others in the group that can then be exchanged in return for their own babysitter. This was a common practice in communities in the eighties and nineties and could be of significant use within military communities.

Four of the participants described the benefits of being close to a family support system and the emotional strength this offered them. Of those who were not in such a position, a further six suggested the importance of having someone available particularly for their children who may be able to offer additional support:

*“I think having someone available in the school to talk to the children would be so useful, or even in the youth club that's on camp. Just someone they know is there who isn't their mum or dad or someone really close to them that they can say anything to.” (P3)*

*“The kids can see that it's hard on you, on everyone in their family and I think that makes them less likely to open up and share with you when they are having difficulties. If there was someone unattached that they could access maybe through school or the local clubs then that would be so supportive for them.” (P4)*

*“Non-military schools just don't really understand so it's even more important that there is someone available for the children within the military community and maybe someone who can advise the schools on what they should be doing to help these kids.” (P5)*



There were also suggestions from half of the participants of organisational aspects within the military structure that they felt may have benefited them. Once again the negative aspects of R&R (rest and recuperation) were highlighted and also the suggestion of some sort of 'family advisor' to the military was made:

*"R&R was just not the positive experience that they think it's going to be. By the time he's home with all the cancelled and delayed flights he has to almost turn around and leave and it's just so disruptive. It would be hugely more beneficial if he could just come home earlier. I understand they may need a break but perhaps they should just go for a few days in Cyprus and chill out."* (P7)

*"There are so many civilian family members who could advise all of this to the welfare people and be a sort of representative. I bet you could find at least one volunteer on each camp or base so it wouldn't even cost them anything and the benefits would be extraordinary."* (P3)

There was a general feeling from participants that even the beneficial things that were happening were not universal and it was a case of where you were that dictated what you were offered:

*"It's a camp lottery really. Nothing is across the board and it should be."* (P9)

*"It should be a case of; 'this is what should be offered' and it should be offered at every military camp or base not dependent on the state of the welfare department in each location."* (P2)

There were an increased number of positive comments regarding support offered by the military in this section, with seven of the participants describing some aspect of welcome welfare action during the time their husband was deployed:

*"Well I had to move house while he was away and although I never actually saw anyone from welfare they did stay in regular phone contact with me and help co-ordinate the move."* (P2)

*“Whenever I had a problem with the house I’d give them a quick ring and it would be sorted pretty quickly; like our boiler broke down and they had it sorted in a matter of hours.” (P11)*

*“The welfare people organised some fortnightly meetings for the families, some were to offer practical advice and others were just an opportunity to meet and chat; either way that was pretty beneficial for us.” (P4)*

It should be noted however that these positive reports were often coupled with negative aspects, for example, the participant who described welfare’s support with moving house, highlighted that this was never face-to-face contact which arguably would have been more beneficial, and she also went on to question why she and her family had been placed in such a stressful position right in the middle of her husband’s deployment.

### **3.5.2 Examples of Good Practice**

Information was again gathered from the participants regarding things they tried during deployment that they felt were beneficial to their children. Some of these examples came from individual participants and others were reported by numerous members of the study but these examples have been summarised for ease of reporting and are listed below:

- All of the participants described the importance of making the most of all forms of communication; writing letters individually and as a family and putting together care packages which may represent everything you have done that week. The need to share out the phone calls but also use e-mail and audio and video messages (these may also be offered by the military)

*“There are so many ways you can stay in contact, I mean none of it is the same as seeing him but you can make a game of it and everyone can get involved and make it really personal; it just keeps you connected somehow.” (P10)*

- One participant suggested for younger children, using ‘blueys’ as their colouring paper and then making a big deal of going to the post box to post them.

*“At nursery instead of just getting them to colour on paper, you use blueys and then you can all go to the local post box to post them – it’s fun and it keeps daddy in their every day life” (P4)*

- Multiple participants spoke of keeping a diary of what happens when someone is deployed that they can read on their return. They described the benefit of not only spouses doing this but also children finding this really useful; a ‘diary for daddy’ that is special between them and him (he can also do the same whilst deployed).

*“Keeping a journal of what happens on a day to day basis is a really great way of keeping him involved. Even not reading it till he comes back it has all those little things you’d never remember to tell him after the event and if he does the same for you then you have this amazing insight into how it was for him. I don’t know I think it just helps to bridge the gap.” (P2)*

- Another participant described the ritual of each day writing how you are feeling or something important that has happened on a slip of paper and then making these into a paper chain which by the time the deployed parent returned would be hanging all around the house.

*“Every day or whenever something happens – good or bad, you just write what it is or how you are feeling on a slip of paper and then add it together to make a paper chain. It’s brilliant by the time he comes back it’s all over the house and he can see the journey you’ve taken even though he wasn’t there. I think it is really nice for the kids too, its their way of being able to tell daddy about it even when he’s gone. Seeing his face when he reads it all too is really special.” (P6)*

- Many participants reported the benefits of making a big deal of every occasion, not just major milestones like birthdays, but also decorating for Easter, Mothers Day, Valentines Day, or any festival that can help to make days special for the children

*“Just having events to break up large chunks of time helps. You can decorate for any occasion – that way you make the decorations, put them up and have a mini party and it uses up weeks!” (P8)*

- Every participant spoke of how having a set routine is incredibly beneficial and built into that could be learning a new skill or having an

extra activity that is a positive part of having a parent deployed which can then be showcased on their return.

*“You just have to have a routine. That’s pretty much essential even when he’s home but this way you know you have the stability and reassurance that comes with being in control of everything; even when deep down I guess you know you’re not. Maybe that’s why it helps so much.”* (P11)

- Some participants spoke of completing a family project whilst a parent is deployed, perhaps decorating a room or even doing something for the deployed parent e.g. turning the shed into a ‘man-pad’.

*“They loved doing something especially for him whilst he was gone, I think it made them feel closer to him whilst he was away and they knew he’d be so proud and love his ‘man-shed’ when he came home. It just gave them something more positive to focus on.”* (P3)

- A minority of the participants described the beneficial experience they had of getting their family involved in doing things for other children who had a deployed parent, by providing support they found that they were provided with it.

*“My girls spent a lot of time with the younger children on the street – they organised little child-friendly events and sort of en masse babysitting for the mothers which was obviously a great big help to them but it kept mine from focussing on their own sadness too much. My helping to make the others feel better it worked on them too!”* (P12)

All of the participants described the importance of doing something to keep busy and occupied during the period of deployment which appeared to help to pass the time quicker:

*“It’s all about distraction I think really. Just wracking your brain to think of anything and everything you can do to make the time pass quicker and to make the children feel special.”* (P11)

## 3.6 Post-Deployment Welfare

The section provides an overview of the participant responses that fell into the interview spine category of 'post-deployment'. As in section 3.4 and 3.5 these have been split in to two parts describing what the participants felt would have been helpful at that time by way of support, and any examples they gave of things they did that were beneficial.

### 3.6.1 What would have helped?

The participant's reports of areas in which they felt they could be increasingly supported post deployment appeared to fall into issues that could be covered by two specific strategies. Firstly there were many reports (nine of the involved participants) about the need for a period of resettlement time for the entire family and how this could be achieved and safe guarded:

*"Well they have their POTL [Post Operational Tour Leave] once they get back but that isn't always as forthcoming or as soon as you think it's going to be. It would also be useful if the schools were a little more understanding about the situation and would allow some flexibility in taking a small amount of time away outside of holidays." (P9)*

*"It's essential for the whole family to have that time together – not necessarily everyone and all at once but it would be nice to have the ability to organise that reintegration without worry about them being called into work or the school becoming upset about a few days absence." (P5)*

*"It's again a totally different experience depending on your circumstances. Some units and some schools are really supportive at this time, others aren't it's just hit and miss." (P3)*

Following on from the suggestion of a pre-deployment briefing, five of the participants described many benefits that could be attained from having specific information and experiences within post-deployment briefings:

*"A brief for the wives and families before they came back would be great. It could give you an idea of what may happen, things to look out for, ideas of how to cope and what was available by way of support if you felt that you weren't." (P8)*

*“You could have a brief before they return and then one together once they are back so that you are both aware of what might happen and what support exists. It could also go a long way to opening up the way to effective communication between you as a couple and as a family.” (P4)*

*“You just have no idea, even if you’ve deployed yourself in the past, you have no idea and somewhere just to have someone to say that - out loud - to both of you and give you some ideas and encouragement of what others have done or what support you can access. Well it would be invaluable.” (P2)*

Although five of the participants described some aspects of support that were offered post deployment from the military this was typically the existence of a short briefing in which they were given practical information regarding the logistics of their husband’s return. It was universally felt by this sample that this could have been significantly improved upon.

*“All we got was a ten minute talk about when he’d be home and where I could meet him and who could meet him, that kind of thing. I think they mentioned it could be hard for him to readjust and to ‘give him time’. That was it.” (P6)*

### **3.6.2 Examples of Good Practice**

In comparison to the previous two sections of the interview spine; pre-deployment and during deployment, the examples given by participants for useful examples of things they had tried post deployment were much more sparse. The participants generally found these much more difficult to bring to mind and those described were often much less specific. The examples that were provided are listed below:

- Many participants spoke of the importance of including the recently returned parent into the current routine; giving them a specific place within it so they felt included and needed.

*“You’ve had this routine and way of life that just hasn’t included him. You don’t want to put pressure on him to engage and he doesn’t want to interfere and it just escalates. Giving him specific parts of that can really help him take part ownership and start to feel more a part of the family again.” (P7)*

- The importance of taking special and sufficient time as a family was highlighted by some participants so that the deployed parent could be reintegrated into each family relationship

*“It just takes time and I think you just need to acknowledge that and not expect it to happen overnight. Six months is a long time you need to give sufficient effort to combat that. And do special things as a family, as a couple and just your husband with the kids, then you are giving it a chance to heal.”* (P1)

- Almost all of the participants described the importance of communicating well with the returned parent; talking about everything even if it doesn't seem special so that they felt a real part of family life

*“Just talk and talk and talk. As much as you can and about everything you can. Once you start shutting each other out it's just a downhill slope.”* (P8)

*“So many families have horrendous difficulties and in my experience it seems to be when they just stop talking to each other. You can't understand the other person's thoughts and feelings if you don't communicate.”* (P11)

- For younger children, some participants described bringing them into the routine first doing more enjoyable activities such as bath-time and mealtimes so the infant would become used to them again in a pleasant situation.

*“I just let him do all the fun stuff. The stuff I knew she really enjoyed. That way she started to associate him with happy things and gradually she just got used to him doing it all. Plus I think that way made it a lot less stressful for him – he had fun too!”* (P2)

- They also described encouraging moments of tough love when the deployed parent would need to persevere in order for the infant to become comfortable in their presence once more.

*“He would just cry and cry when I left him with his dad but in the end that's the best thing we found to do; he would be upset for a little while but he got over it and then it just got better and better each time.”* (P4)

There was a general feeling of not knowing the best way forward within this section and all participants highlighted this time as the one in which they felt

they needed the most help and had the least idea about the correct way to address it:

*“This was by far the worst time. You have no idea, you have no guidance and you’re making it up as you go along.” (P5)*

*“It’s all just guess work. There’s no plan at all, you could be making it better or worse you just have no idea until you try as there is no-one guiding you.” (P8)*



## **CHAPTER FOUR: DISCUSSION**

### **Overview of Chapter**

This chapter presents a detailed discussion of the findings from the described study. It begins by summarising the main findings from the qualitative investigation and discussing these in relation to the previous theory and research described in chapter one. Then consideration is given to the strengths and limitations of the current research and the implications that the findings may have on clinical practice. The chapter culminates by suggesting possibilities for future research and action in this area followed by some concluding comments.

### **4.1 Summary of Main Findings**

The qualitative investigations described within this study aimed to record and examine the experience of deployment from the viewpoint of the parent who remained at home. It intended to highlight areas that respondents felt presented the most challenges to their children and explore the impact that they felt this had physically, emotionally and psychologically on their child. Many of the results from this study supported the findings of Brindley (2009), however an increasing amount of detailed experiences were recorded and this resulted in a higher level of descriptive analysis and, in addition to reports on impact, also prompted some service recommendations and provided possible examples of good practice.

From the analysis it was shown that it was felt by the remaining parent that deployment affected children both positively and negatively, and these affects could be grouped within specified sub-sets into specific themes. For some there were negatively perceived changes in behaviour as well as significant feelings of loss both in terms of relationship and physical presence. There were also descriptions of increased negative emotional states and an ongoing

experience of maladaptive life events concurrent with life within the military community.

The most commonly reported negative aspect was that of loss and every participant involved in this research described some form of loss they felt their child had suffered due directly to their experience of deployment.

In positive terms, the experience of deployment was described as prompting beneficial behavioural changes in some children in regards to their levels of communication and spontaneous actions, as well as enabling them to develop more positive aspects to their character such as an increased maturity, independence and resilience. Their increased thoughtfulness and ability to empathise was seen as a contributing factor to enhancing their relationships both with the deployed parent and those who remained at home. The military life events that were described in a negative light by some were also described within a positive context, with some respondents highlighting the support and sense of community that military life offers.

It was the positive changes in their child's character that were most commonly reported by the participants as a beneficial result of the deployment experiences. This suggests that they feel that these characteristics are important and felt to be beneficial by military families.

In many cases the participants reported both positive and negative aspects of the impact of deployment suggesting that there were mixed feelings about the experience from those most closely involved. In some cases there were even contradictory reports offered; for example the negative reports of increased anxiety in their children but, in contrast, the positively viewed increase in their empathy and thoughtfulness.

Across the deployment experience (pre, during and post) participants called for an increase in support from the military and for an improvement in the way deployments and the associated requirements are organised. Participants provided multiple examples of successful strategies they had tried or encountered throughout their experiences and offered further development to their own ideas of best practice that they felt would be beneficial to be shared amongst the military population.

No differences were highlighted between participants in relation to certain demographical information. For example, no difference was found between

the reports of those partners of 'high risk' personnel; those regularly in direct combat situations (i.e. UK SFG and Parachute regiment) and those of low risk; those usually within increased protective environments (i.e. Signals). There also were no significant or continuous differences highlighted between those of officer status and those of other rank. Although some variations occurred between these participants, these were considered as relevant simply on an individual basis rather than due to the difference in rank status. It should be noted however that no specific analysis was done in association with the demographical information taken from the participants and these findings are based on the interpretation of the individual researcher.

## **4.2 Interpretation of Main Findings**

Examination of the present study's results suggests clearly that deployment (in this instance paternal deployment) has substantial effects on military families and in particular on the children. The participant reports in this sample demonstrate that the remaining parent (in this instance the mother) although often feeling impotent to defend against it are highly aware of the negative impact that deployment has on their child's well-being and their relationship with their father (the deployed parent).

However, the participant reports also highlight the positive impact they believe deployment has on their child suggesting advanced emotional development which again impacts directly on their child's well-being and immediate relationships.

The high percentages of both positive and negative impact to their children provided by the participants do suggest an apparent contradictory view of deployment. The details of this however can help to guide support services in the specific areas that may need to be developed in terms of welfare, whilst also highlighting the more positive aspects of impact from deployment that could be encouraged.

The main themes which were highlighted within this study are consonant with findings that emerged in related research within US military families. In common with Huebner and colleagues (2007) this study presented reports suggesting the children of deployed parents exhibit a range of maladaptive

behaviours and emotions, including 'acting out' and varying manifestations of anxiety and low mood. When considering this in terms of attachment theory however, it is unclear whether this is a direct result of deployment or rather as a result of a general separation from a crucial care giver.

The results from this research also supported the recent UK findings in Brindley (2009) reiterating many of the emergent themes (such as Behaviour, Loss and Emotion); however it should be noted that the nature of this study allowed for further detail to be garnered from the participants and a greater wealth of information recorded showing increased description of the highlighted strengths and difficulties.

Whilst any sense of loss can have negative ramifications on the child and their future development, it is the reports of this longer term impact which causes a higher level of concern as it suggests that the impact of deployment may be further reaching and more permanent than was previously thought.

There is also support from previous US literature for the suggestions gathered regarding improvements to support services offered within the military. Huebner et al (2007) suggested that children would benefit from sharing their emotions and experiences of 'loss' with others which was a view shared by many of the participants in this study who believed their children would benefit from the opportunity to talk with a supportive individual not directly linked to their family.

As was described in Jensen et al (1996), currently selected military communities offer informal support networks for the spouses of deployed personnel. The findings from this research suggest that not only would it be beneficial to develop these networks and ensure that they are offered across the board rather than in selected military communities; but also that children would benefit from similar support groups. This would give them the opportunity to discuss shared difficulties and reactions within a population of their peers who are in similar circumstances. Chandra et al (cited in McFarlane, 2009) offers reports of a pilot intervention study in the US showing that a child's participation in a free summer programme was associated with perceived benefits in regards to their ability to cope better with their parents' deployment.

The results of this research from the interview spine addressing deployment in three main stages supports the idea suggested by Pincus et al (2001) that each stage promotes specific difficulties and triggers certain emotional and behavioural responses. In particular the findings were consistent with Huebner et al (2007) reporting that the reunion and reintegration of the deployed parent back into the family can present significant challenges. This study highlights that this is often when families feel most at a loss about how to approach the situation successfully and need additional support and advice to achieve their goal. Specifically highlighted by the participants was the need for sufficient time to be allocated by the military and schools, a factor that Pincus et al (2001) suggested previously is essential in order for children and families to become reacquainted and readjust.

Many areas within the current study's results suggest the importance of the influence of attachment when considering the impact on the children of the deployed. Whilst this is not necessarily addressing deployment as a sole factor; rather it considers separation of any kind, the impact it incurs is nonetheless vital when considering the development of the children involved. The reports gathered within this research show that the experience of families is rarely similar and whilst this is understandable when considering individual differences, the inconsistency in the welfare support received does appear to be more crucial. If the 'breaks' in a child's relationships (such as parental deployment) are not managed correctly; in particular the reconnection, then this can have long lasting adverse affects. From the results of this research it appears that post-deployment is a significant area of support need that is currently unfulfilled meaning that this 'reconnection' is often significantly challenging. For some there is support offered by the military or other support services, but for others they are left to manage this difficult time without the help of professional guidance.

The results from this current study support many aspects of previously conducted research within both US and UK literature, but for the first time within the UK, provide specific examples of good practice and possible recommendations for policy that come directly from those who experience deployment first-hand. For example the inclusion of increased official briefings post-deployment to aid the reconnection period and provide advice

and support as well as practical information and what might occur. These will be described in further detail later in this chapter.

It is important however to interpret the findings within the context in which they were gathered and be cautious about generalising these beyond this specific group. They do nevertheless provide important insights into how deployment affects military families and perhaps, more crucially, how they themselves perceive this impact. By understanding and addressing the individual and systemic changes that occur within the families the professionals involved in their care and support can be better equipped to provide successful responses to the multiple challenges and significant impact that deployment presents.

The more specific strengths and limitations to this current research will now be explored.

### **4.3 Strengths of the Current Study**

This is the first study within the UK that has used qualitative methods to explore the impact of the fathers' deployment on the child through the perspective of the mother.

The sample was inclusive of all ranks and incorporated numerous different corps from within the Army.

The research is innovative in that it uses a discovery spine interview technique to capture the true experience of each individual in their own words and directly enquires about their opinions and ideas regarding national policy and practice. This method was beneficial due to the personal nature of the participant responses and the depth of information that could be accessed, as well as its ability to promote improvement ideas. It also meant that due to the nature of the discovery spine technique, particular prompts and questions could be appropriately adapted in response to previous interviews as the research continued.

The apparently contradictory evidence (for example a view of an unsupportive military system and a supportive military system) gathered from the same participants within this study is seen as a significant strength to the research. The structure and personality of the interviews meant that a lot was garnered from each participant and the contradictory nature of this only reflects a realistic outcome; evidence is bound to be contradictory, because that is what life is fundamentally like. The researcher feels that these results echo the honest and open feedback that was received from the participants.

The researcher's personal circumstances (as an army wife) may have enabled the success of this research due to feelings of shared experience for the participants, which may have aided both recruitment and the openness of individuals within the interviews.

This study is the first of its kind in the UK to contain possible recommendations to national military policies regarding support services and network systems from those individuals experiencing these first hand. It is also unique in its collation of possible examples of suggested best practice from this population.

The concept and aims of the research were welcomed by the targeted population as can be seen from the way in which the researcher was approached by individuals outside of the defined recruitment procedure who wished to participate. The methodology was considered acceptable to participants as evidenced by the fact that none of the consenting participants chose to withdraw from the study and all of these individuals, plus many who were not randomly selected to participate, attended the feedback session on completion of the research. This is an important finding to consider as it suggests that such methods could prove beneficial within this population in the future.



## 4.4 Limitations of the Current Study

The following limitations of design and methodology within this current study must be acknowledged:

### 4.4.1 Sample

*Sample Size:* Although the sample size used within the research gave adequate findings to suggest significant responses from the population when considering the qualitative methodology used, there is a need to develop this study on a larger scale in order to further generalise the results. Strict restrictions on the researcher's time and resources contributed to the limited sample size in this study.

*Recruitment:* There are inherent difficulties facing recruitment in studies such as this one. Military cohorts are extensive, but there are difficulties in accessing participants due to high geographical mobility or participant inertia (Iverson et al., 2006). The topics covered are also highly difficult for many to address due to the perceived consequences of their impact and this can influence response rates. By allowing participants of this study to present themselves this eliminated many of these potential difficulties but resulted in the situation that all respondents were those who actively sought out official input and were confident in sharing their experiences. This may neglect a significant and substantial portion of the population.

*Heterogeneity vs. homogeneity:* The current sample whilst exploring all ranks and varying corps within the Army, did not draw participants from either of the other two services (Navy and Royal Air Force). Whilst it was useful to explore the experiences of a representative sample of the Army, there are substantial differences in personnel experiences across the Armed Forces and these would need to be explored further in order to prevent true effects being hidden.

*Representation and potential bias:* As previously discussed the participating sample is not fully representative of all military personnel and it must be acknowledged that there may be biases influencing those individuals who sought out participation in the study. For example, those families who had experienced significant difficulties or on the contrary, who felt that they had

effective success stories to offer may have had greater interest in participation. This means that the experiences reported by the participants in this study may not reflect the experiences of the majority of the population. Furthermore the study does not represent the range of family structures that exist within the military and instead includes families in which parents have a more positive dyadic relationship and focuses solely on those families in which it is a male combatant.

#### **4.4.2 Measures**

*Informant bias:* As discussed in chapter one, previous research has suggested that a parent's report of their children's mental health experiences can be influenced by their own mental state. Although participants in this study were not currently receiving any professional input for significant mental health difficulties, by collecting data from a single informant such biases could exist within the results. Future studies may collect data from multiple informants including fathers, children and teachers to provide a more objective and representative view of the child's well-being. In addition to this, the researcher was presented to the participants as having a non-military occupation in order to prevent any concern about impact on serving personnel's occupational standing. This however may have created either a bias within the results due to the individual's personal opinions and experience of civilian interference.

#### **4.4.3 Methodology**

*Discovery Spine Interview:* Use of a semi-structured interview for information gathering can lead to a somewhat chaotic report of events due to the participant-led approach it encourages. This provides greater challenges for the researcher in focussing the interview and analysing the resulting data. Due to the difference in participant educational backgrounds the language within the interview spine also had to be adapted appropriately in each instance which may have led to slightly differing understandings of the prompt questions.

*Therapeutic Interference:* Due to the highly emotive nature of the subject and the fact that for many participants there had been no previous opportunity to

explore their experiences in such detail, there could be a tendency to flood the researcher with information and this made it difficult to remain focussed on the relevant topic. There was also the potential for participants to concentrate more on their own personal difficulties rather than reporting on the impact on the child, meaning that the work of the researcher could be quite demanding in maintaining focus. The therapeutic nature of such an experience meant that it was challenging for the researcher not to fall into a therapist role whilst conducting the interviews and care had to be taken to sustain neutrality throughout.

*Environmental Factors:* The interviews were conducted at a location of the participant's choice (typically their home) and this meant that the environmental factors were outside of the control of the researcher. For example in some cases there were other children present and the interviews included some interruptions from spouses or other family members. This may have had an effect on the flow of information within the interview or even the quality and nature of information shared.

*Researcher bias:* As discussed previously in the methodology chapter the position of the researcher as an army wife, and the participant's knowledge of this may have influenced both the responses given and the direction taken within the interview itself. The participant's tendency to digress from the original topic (as described above) may have been a product of this slightly more complex feeling of association and camaraderie with the researcher.

#### **4.4.4 Thematic Analysis**

*Demographic Impact:* When analysing the results, particular attention was not paid to the specific demographic information provided by each participant meaning that any potential differences these may have presented were not individually addressed. In future research this information could be used to explore the effect of additional factors such as rank (and subsequent socioeconomic status), gender, regularity and length of deployment.

*Focus bias:* This research addressed the perceived impact of deployment, but a large focus was placed on recommendations for policy and examples of best practice. Further investigation could be done into the experiences of participants in regards to both the positive and negative impact they feel

deployment has, and this could be extended beyond their children into other familial relationships.

*Researcher bias:* The researcher's position as a member of the military community discussed previously in chapter two may have influenced the thematic analysis in so far as those aspects of the data that the researcher felt were of significant importance at a personal level may have been increased significance within the analysis.

*Missed data:* The method used to analyse the interviews provided an effective way of highlighting themes and ideas that were common to the study's participants and enabled the aims of this research to be met. However by developing such themes from a list of initial themes it is possible that some depth of the information recorded was lost and parts of the experience offered by some participants may not have been appropriately represented within the data.

It is also important to highlight that the analysis of IPA is based largely on the interpretation of the individual researcher, and whilst both the initial and the final themes were examined by an unrelated researcher this could mean that the preliminary themes identified were subject to the initial researcher's associated biases.

## 4.5 Suggestions for Further Research

Although they are not directly explored within this study, the limitations in the criteria within the methodology of this research suggest some areas which would warrant future investigation:

- The sample size of the present study was not large enough to examine the effect of age and gender within the children concerned. Given the understanding of the different needs of boys and girls and the different needs of both genders across the age range, future research with larger samples should explore the effect of deployment within separate age and gender groups.
- The current sample was also taken solely from within army families and therefore future research should address the difference and similarities of these responses in comparison to those from across the tri-service military community.
- The military service to which an individual belongs (Army, Navy or RAF) and even the corps within this, will affect the length and regularity of their deployments. Longitudinal studies could be developed to explore the cumulative impact of multiple deployments on families.
- There is also opportunity for further research when considering the service context; for example the difference in impact for the deployed and their family when serving in operations that have a high level of public support, in comparison for those with a lower level of public support, or a higher risk to the deployed individual (e.g. infantry) versus a lower level of risk (e.g. camp based role).
- The present study relies solely on responses from the parent remaining at home while the other deploys. Future research would examine responses to the same research questions from other sources, for example the deployed parent, the child's teachers and the individual child.
- It may also be useful in further research to look at more objective means of assessment that rely less on individual reports and therefore are less subject to individual bias. Assessments such as observational analysis or psychometric measures could be employed.

- Very little research has been done with non-traditional military families such as single parent families or those with children of female personnel. Any future research exploring the impact on military children may wish to include these families in order to examine any differences in their experience.
- In a similar vein, further research could also specifically address any possible ethnic differences within the military population.
- The sample in this current study was taken from a population with no pre-morbid mental health difficulties or current problems such as parental PTSD (post traumatic stress disorder). Future research may explore the impact that such factors have on individual experiences. It must be noted that some research has already occurred in this area but has been largely quantitative in nature.
- Another aspect that has not been addressed within this current study but could be interesting to explore in further research is the impact of differing educational and social circumstances on the experience of deployment. There is a significant proportion of military children currently attending boarding schools and there is, as yet, no research exploring how this changes the child's experience of parental deployment, or in fact their experience of military life. Such research could provide beneficial findings regarding both positive and negative results to these differing individual circumstances.

In addition to these there were a number of findings within this current study that suggest further research questions that could be explored:

- The responses from the participants within the current study varied at an individual level and this may be due to certain demographics such as the rank of the serving personnel or the unit to which they belonged. When considering further research, the impact of rank and corps (and its implications for socioeconomic status) may be explored in relation to the support received and welfare packages offered.
- Some responses from the current participants also suggested an impact on the spousal relationship due to deployment. Future research could explore this both as a separate risk factor and also as an indirect impact on familial relationships.

- There was an incredibly high level of response generated within this initial study amongst appropriate responders which suggests that there would be significant possibilities to widen the participant base of this initial study to provide more relevant results for a more generalised military population.
- Longitudinal studies with larger samples could also be conducted to examine factors that may mediate the impact on children, namely following the implementation of this study's recommendations or the publication of the examples of suggested best practice within the population.
- As discussed earlier in this chapter the issue of attachment is crucial when exploring the impact of deployment. Future research could address more specifically the key aspects of attachment theory and examine how these are influenced by deployment; such as resulting attachment styles and the potential impact this has on future child development.

## 4.6 Clinical Implications / Recommendations for Practice

It is important that the results from the current research are explored further within the suggested future research before any concrete clinical implications can be drawn from their analysis. The research study explores a very small sample of the military population and the limitations of the study would need to be addressed in further robust and large scale research projects before any significant adaptations can be made to national policy; particularly as these could be of significant cost to the military both financially and in terms of resources. However, although the findings of this research represent a very small proportion of the population, and the potential biases within this sample must also be considered, the potential implications of the current findings will be useful to consider prospective recommendations for improving current practice. In addition to the sample biases, it is also important to consider the possible biases in terms of the researcher's position and the implications this may have had on the breadth and quality of information gathered before applying this to clinical practice.

The results of this study demonstrate that families taking part in this research felt unsupported by the military during their experience of deployment which suggests that it may be important for military welfare to prioritise, encourage and perhaps even aid in the developing of strong support networks as well as providing more specific and practical resources to help families facing these challenges.

The initial suggestions presented by the participants within this research have been summarised by the researcher into four main areas of possible future recommendations to be considered:

- Firstly, the development of a universal welfare package to be offered to all families of the deployed regardless of their residential location. This would mean that all military families were provided with similar access to the same resources and support facilities no matter where they were stationed or what service or unit within the military they were in. Possible inclusions within these packages could be specific policies regarding the opportunities that should be offered to families at home whilst one parent is deployed. For example the ideas suggested within



this current study were services such as shopping assistance and age inclusive activities, in addition to regular contact with the welfare team whether it is initiated by the family or not. Further policies could outline the beneficial support that could be offered to families, for example advisors and counsellors to be available for children and information and advice regarding further access to professional support services if and when it should be needed.

- The second associated suggestion from this study's findings in regards to a universal welfare package, is the inclusion of regular 'briefings' for the family of deployed personnel. An initial briefing pre-deployment could offer information of the upcoming tour as well as practical advice regarding what may need to be done in the absence of an influential family member. This would also offer the opportunity to introduce individuals who would all be in similar situations to each other promoting an internal support system that could be continued within the welfare package. Towards the end of the deployment period it was felt by the participants of this study that a briefing immediately prior to the deployed personnel's return could help to prepare families for the challenges of this change in circumstance. The findings of this study showed that this time was considered the most difficult and perhaps the least supported aspect of the deployment experience so a dedicated opportunity detailing the support available and offering simple advice for ways to manage any obstacles would be greatly welcomed. There was also the suggestion that this brief could be repeated in the presence of the returned personnel to maintain awareness of the difficulties and promote an increase in communication between partners which has been shown to be beneficial.
  
- The third potential main area of suggestion; the sharing of best practice amongst the population, could be included as an aspect of the previous recommendations. This could be done in a variety of formats; producing an informative leaflet, summaries of collected examples included in briefings or even the personal sharing of these experiences

within a specifically designed forum that could be developed in which military families are able to commune and share their examples with each other. Although these examples may not be effective or realistic for everyone within the population, it will provide ideas from those who have been in similar situations and promote increased awareness in the importance of safeguarding against potential difficulties. In time this could also provide evidence of improved experiences.

- Finally, the fourth possible area of recommendation is that all of the above, plus specific guidelines for more significant difficulties can be undertaken in collaboration with the MoD clinical psychologists and each military Department of Community Mental Health (DCMH). These professionals have immeasurable hands-on experience with military personnel and their families and are invaluable resources in developing effective responses to psychological and emotional difficulties as well as providing accessible information to advise about potential stressors and possible warning signs of significant mental health difficulties.

It is essential to emphasise at this point the challenges to developing significant changes to military welfare policy at this current time. In addition to the previously described factors associated with the size of this current research and the need for further exploration and evidence base, there are also the limitations due to financial restraints that are prominent due to restrictions on budgets. Developing policy and reviewing welfare support across the military population might have some costs attributed to it, and whilst there is some support for this within the current study, further evidence would be essential before significant changes could be made. Care must also be taken before making blanket changes in policy; emphasis must be placed on carefully monitoring and evaluating any new interventions. For example, new packages could be implemented on a pilot basis, perhaps in direct comparison with a control group of the current welfare package, in order to examine appropriate outcome measures.

Perhaps what this study suggests most strongly is the need for an increased consideration from those involved in military welfare support at every level about how they could improve or develop their own support network without the need for financial demands. As this study has shown, the military population is both accessible and free, which could provide an effective resource for those seeking to improve their experiences. Social media is already utilised by many private military groups (e.g. wives facebook pages) and this could be developed as part of a welfare support package with very little additional cost. Over half of the participants involved in this study reported that they would be willing to offer of their own time with no financial incentive, to help develop and support welfare packages in their communities which suggest that there may be a wealth of resources remaining untapped by the military.

Perhaps then the first possible outcome resulting directly from this current research is to create a forum to review the existing military packages offered to the families of their employees. It could look at examples of good practice within the population and work on co-ordinating and developing the production of a common welfare package for UK families. It would be pertinent to begin with UK only bases as those abroad would be significantly different and potentially much more costly. Once a UK initiative has been assessed then the locations further a field could be addressed.

The forum would not have to incur much additional cost if currently employed resources (e.g. welfare officers) alongside volunteers from within the target population were utilised. Initial ideas may involve self-help options or publicising what is already available which would not be financially demanding.

All of the possible recommendations described in this section can be detailed further using responses from participants both within this study and other current research giving specific examples of relevant support that would be welcomed. Further research should seek to increase this informed knowledge further and culminate in an effective and detailed support resource for the

military community which in turn will lead to improved mental health for the population and a decrease of the known negative effect of a military career.

## 4.7 Final Comments

This research, in part, highlights the importance of fathers in the continuing development of their children, and recognises the need for further research into the impact of their absence or prolonged separation from their families. This is an occurrence not limited solely to families within the military population and widening the current research agenda to address paternal as well as maternal influences would greatly enhance the understanding of attachment and child development across the more generalised population.

The position of the researcher within this study may have played a significant role in many aspects of the research, and the researcher's decision to maintain a reflective journal throughout the process provided valuable insight into these influences and enabled some potential bias to be acknowledged or overcome. Ultimately it is felt by the researcher that her emotional connection to both the subject matter and individuals within this population had a positive effect on the outcome of the study increasing her motivation and understanding as well as encouraging a more honest and detailed response from participants.

The decision to send our troops into any military combat situation is not made without careful consideration of the implications that such a response would have; economically, politically and in terms of the potential impact on the members of our Armed Forces.

This research highlights the sacrifices that are made by military troops that extend beyond the level of the individual, affecting their families and the communities to which they belong.

The findings suggest the need for increased attention to be given to the impact on these families, not only of deployment itself, but of military life in general.

It is vital that policies are developed based on a thorough and substantial evidence base that aims to prevent, or at the very least minimise the negative effects on their families of preparing and sending our troops to war.

This type of research is particularly pertinent to many UK families considering the number of troops currently, and potentially imminently, being deployed to Afghanistan and other areas of the Middle East and North Africa.

Future robust and large scale studies must be conducted to develop these initial findings further and determine appropriate measures that could effectively be taken to alleviate part of the burden taken on by those individuals and their loved ones who answer the call to military service.

As a relative newcomer to the military world, the researcher was profoundly affected by the way in which she was welcomed openly into sharing the personal and highly emotive experiences of so many families.

The obvious desire expressed by these individuals to help and support those in similar situations to themselves by reporting without hesitation both their successes and failures highlighted to the researcher the valuable resource that current and past military families could be to future policy development and practice. There is so much experience that exists and not enough learning from it; examples of this experience need to be captured, shared and then fed back into the system.

It appeared to the researcher that although some negative opinions were expressed in relation to the military system, there was often a strong underlying sense of pride and community among this population of individuals. This sense of group cohesion did seem to alter in strength dependent on individual experiences and specific aspects of their circumstances but if this could be further understood and enhanced, the researcher feels that this could prove a critical tool in improving both the fundamental quality of life of military families and their relationship with the military system as a whole.

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## LIST OF APPENDICES

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**Appendix I:           Deployment Booklet**

'A Guide for the Families of Deployed Regular Army Personnel'

***[www.mod.uk/NR/rdonlyres/F9214D7A-F22A-4381-AA17-9799F3D2D50A/0/20110308\\_PDF\\_Families\\_Deployment\\_guide\\_March2011.pdf](http://www.mod.uk/NR/rdonlyres/F9214D7A-F22A-4381-AA17-9799F3D2D50A/0/20110308_PDF_Families_Deployment_guide_March2011.pdf)***

## **Appendix II: Advert Request for Volunteers**

### **MOTHERS WANTED!!**

There is an increasing amount of attention being given to the emotional and psychological impact of military life on the families of our Armed Forces, in particular the effect it has on children and young people. To explore this best, it is essential for us to talk to the people who know the most about it – YOU!

We are looking for wives of currently serving personnel to aid in the completion of a clinical psychology doctoral research project looking at the impact of paternal deployment on the well being and development of their children.

We are interested in hearing the personal experiences of the deployment process from women who had children living at home when their partners deployed to either Iraq or Afghanistan. We want to hear your opinions on the support you received and more importantly any areas in which you feel there could have been additional welfare services offered either by the military or from other related sources. We will be asking about the impact you feel that your partner's deployment has had on your children and collecting any examples you have of 'good practice' that you have tried that could be of use to others in similar situations.

All of the experiences will be held confidentiality and recorded completely anonymously.

If you are interested in participating or would like to be sent a more detailed information sheet then please contact the researcher at the details below.

**Written for publication in the Army Families Federation Magazine  
Issue, October 2010.**



**SOUTH WALES DOCTORAL PROGRAMME IN CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY  
CWRS DOCTORIAETH DE CYMRU MEWN SEICOLEG CLINIGOL**

***“A qualitative study exploring the impact of UK military deployment on female spouses and their children.”***

*Thank you for expressing an interest in participating in the above project.*

Please read this sheet carefully and should you wish to be considered for participation then complete the questions below and return this in the addressed envelope provided.

**Name:** .....  
**Age:** .....  
**Ethnic Origin:** .....

- 1) To which military service and unit does your partner belong?  
.....
- 2) What military rank does your partner currently hold?  
.....
- 3) How many times has your partner deployed overseas (to Iraq or Afghanistan) whilst you have had children living at home?  
.....
- 4) Please list the number and age of *each* child living at home during *each* of these deployments.  
.....  
.....
- 5) Are you or any member of your family currently receiving or awaiting treatment for any mental health issues? Please give details.  
.....  
.....
- 6) I am able to understand and fluently speak English.  
**YES / NO** (delete as applicable)





## SOUTH WALES DOCTORAL PROGRAMME IN CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY CWRS DOCTORIAETH DE CYMRU MEWN SEICOLEG CLINIGOL

### PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

You have been invited to take part in a research study which is being conducted as part fulfilment of a Doctoral Training course in Clinical Psychology. Before you decide to participate you need to understand why the research is being done and what it could mean to you. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please feel free to contact us and ask us if there is anything that is not clear to you, or if you would like to know some further information. Once you have read this information please take some time to consider whether or not you wish to take part.

#### **What is the purpose of the study?**

The purpose of the study is to explore the personal experiences of mothers whose partners have been deployed on overseas military missions. It hopes to highlight the main concerns of mothers regarding the mental health/psychological wellbeing of their children. It aims to identify what aspects of support offered by the military have helped or hindered their family in their attempts to minimise the impact and highlight any areas which they feel would benefit from additional support services. It also aims to uncover any suggestions of good practice that are currently happening within the population, and any potential solutions to factors that could be addressed by the Ministry of Defence family support services.

#### **Why have I been invited to participate?**

As the partner of serving military personnel who has been or is currently deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan and as the mother of a child/children under the age of 16 ***your thoughts and opinions are extremely important to us.*** We are keen to hear from those mothers who have direct experience in these areas as it is their views that will be most helpful to us.

#### **Do I have to take part?**

No, participation in this study is entirely voluntary and it is up to you to decide. Hopefully this information sheet will help you to make your decision. If you do decide to take part, you will be asked to sign a consent form to show that you

have agreed to participate. However, you will be free to withdraw at any time and you will not be required to give a reason for this decision. Withdrawing from this study will not affect you or your family in any way.

### **What does the study involve?**

Mothers of children under 16 years of age whose fathers have previously been, or who is currently serving in either Iraq or Afghanistan have been asked to participate in this study. You will be asked to take part in an interview that will last for **approximately one hour** during which you will be asked your views and experiences of living a military lifestyle and the impact you feel this had had on your children. You will be asked specifically about the experience of deployment and any examples of good practice you may have employed in order to combat the things you feel your child may have been affected by. The interview will be as relaxed and informal as possible so you are able to comfortably express your views. As far as possible the date, time and location of the interview will be arranged at your convenience.

### **Will participation in this study be kept anonymous and confidential?**

All ethical and legal practice will be followed meaning that all information received from participants will be kept **strictly confidential and anonymous**. This means that when the results are reported you will never be identified by name. You will not be expected to disclose any personal details that you do not wish to, and it should be noted that although this study aims to benefit the support services offered by the Ministry of Defence to military families, it is not military led and will therefore have no impact on serving personnel. It should be remembered that normal rules of confidentiality apply and should it be felt that you or a member of your family is at risk then the researcher would be obliged to report this appropriately.

Interviews will be audio taped and transcribed (written up) to assist with the analysis of data. The audiotapes and transcripts will be kept in a locked cupboard and erased/destroyed at the end of the study. Only the researcher will have access to the information you provide and any discussions with the researcher's supervisor regarding the data will be anonymous.

### **Are there any benefits to taking part?**

By reporting your experiences, thoughts and feelings, important changes can be considered in how the Ministry of Defence can support other military families in the same position as you and the difficulties they face as a direct result of their lifestyle can be addressed. It also means that any examples of good practice can be shared widely amongst the military family population.

***This will hopefully contribute to the support you receive and thereby reduce any negative impact on your children which your current situation may involve. In turn this will improve the quality of life for the individuals in your family.***

### **Are there any disadvantages to taking part?**

***It is understood that living within a military environment can be very stressful and talking about your experiences and the impact on your children may be quite distressing.*** Therefore if you feel that you would find this topic too difficult to talk about then you would be advised not to participate. If you were to become distressed during the interview it would be stopped immediately and sources of support would be offered to you.

### **What if there is a problem?**

If you have a concern about any aspect of the study you can speak to the researcher who will do their best to answer your questions. If you remain unhappy and wish to complain formally you can request the information for the appropriate complaints procedure.

### **What will happen to the results of the research study?**

The results will be written up as part of a clinical psychology doctoral training course. It may also be submitted for publication in selected journals. All participants in the study will be invited to attend a follow-up group after the completion of the interviews in which they will be given anonymous feedback on the information that was gathered. In addition to this, participants and those who expressed an interest will be sent a summary of the results of the study and its recommendations. Please inform the researcher if you do not wish to take part in the study but would be interested in a summary of the results.

### **Who has reviewed this study?**

This study has been granted approval from the research and development department of the Cardiff and Vale NHS Trust.

All research must be looked at by an ethical committee in order to protect your safety, rights, well-being and dignity. This study has been reviewed and given favourable opinion by the ethical committees of both the Ministry of Defence and the University of Wales, Cardiff.

### **How do I take part?**

***If you want to be involved, please return the attached questionnaire and consent form to the address provided.*** Being involved in this study is entirely voluntary. You don't have to take part unless you feel comfortable doing so, but if you do wish to get involved then once you have returned the necessary information the researcher will contact you directly to inform you whether or not you have been chosen to participate. If you are chosen to take part then a date, time and location that is convenient to you will be arranged. Please return the consent form and questionnaire within two weeks if you would like to be considered for inclusion in the study.

### **For further information.....**

If you would like further information before deciding to take part in this study, please contact the researcher who will be happy to answer any questions you have.

**CONTACT:**

Katy Farrell-Wright, Trainee Clinical Psychologist (Tel. \*\*\*\*\*)

**Supervised by:**

Dr. Neil Roberts, Consultant Clinical Psychologist, Traumatic Stress Service, University Hospital of Wales (Tel. \*\*\*\*\*)

Dr. Jamie Hacker-Hughes, Military Clinical Psychology Lead (Tel. \*\*\*\*\*)

***Please keep this information sheet so that you are able to refer to it at any time during the course of the study.***

*Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.*

**Appendix V: Participant Consent Form**



**SOUTH WALES DOCTORAL PROGRAMME IN CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY  
CWRS DOCTORIAETH DE CYMRU MEWN SEICOLEG CLINIGOL**

**PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM**

I ..... agree to participate in the below study.

***“A qualitative study exploring the impact of UK military deployment on female spouses and their children.”***

I understand what participation in this study involves and am aware that the interview in which I partake will be recorded in order to be later analysed.

I accept that any information that is given within this interview may be used in future recommendations for research or policy and any examples of good practice may be published for distribution amongst a wider military population.

I understand the rules of confidentiality as they have been explained to me by the researcher and give permission for all content of my interview to be used anonymously within this research project and in further publications.

I would / would not like to receive a written copy of the completed research study.

I would / would not like to be invited to attend a follow-up group after the study's completion in order to hear a verbal explanation of the results and future recommendations.

**Signed:** .....

**Date:** .....

**Appendix VI: Demographics and Participant Information**

	<b>Age</b>	<b>Ethnic Origin</b>	<b>Service &amp; Unit of Serving Military Personnel</b>	<b>Rank of Serving Military Personnel</b>	<b>Number of Dependants</b>	<b>Number of Deployments</b>	<b>Age range of Children during Deployment</b>
<b>Participant 1</b>	46	White British	ARMY - Signals	Warrant Officer II (Sergeant Major)	2	3	2 - 11 years
<b>Participant 2</b>	29	White British	ARMY - UK SFG	NCO (Corporal)	1	2	3 months - 3 years
<b>Participant 3</b>	34	White British	ARMY - Signals	NCO (Staff Sergeant)	2	4	8 months -12 years
<b>Participant 4</b>	35	White British	ARMY - Parachute Regiment	Officer (Captain)	2	3	4 - 15 years
<b>Participant 5</b>	42	Black British	ARMY - Infantry	Warrant Officer I	6	4	5 months –16 years
<b>Participant 6</b>	29	White British	ARMY - UK SFG	Officer (Major)	3	1	2 – 8 years
<b>Participant 7</b>	36	Black British	ARMY - UK SFG	Warrant Officer II	5	2	3 – 14 years
<b>Participant 8</b>	48	White British	ARMY - Signals	Officer (Captain)	3	3	6 – 15 years
<b>Participant 9</b>	24	Ghurkha	ARMY - Signals	NCO (Corporal)	2	1	4 – 6 years
<b>Participant 10</b>	19	White British	ARMY - Infantry	Officer (Major)	3	1	9 – 15 years
<b>Participant 11</b>	49	White British	ARMY - Parachute Regiment	Officer (Lt. Colonel)	4	5	2 – 16 years
<b>Participant 12</b>	37	White British	ARMY - Infantry	Officer (Major)	3	3	2 – 13 years

## Appendix VII:

## Interview Spine

### Initiating Phrase:

*“Hi, before we start I just wanted to go over a few of the general points of the interview. Thanks so much for agreeing to take part, I wanted to reassure you that, like it was explained to you on the information sheet, everything you say today will be recorded totally anonymously; so your name won’t appear anywhere in the project. Also you don’t have to answer any of the questions if you don’t want to, some of the things we talk about may be a little bit difficult for you and I wanted to be sure that you knew that you can stop the interview at any time if you’re no longer comfortable. Also, just to remind you I will be taping our session today so that I can type up everything that is said later and just focus on you during this time rather than taking lots of notes. Is all of that ok? Do you have any questions before we begin?”*

### Pre-Deployment:

Tell me about how this time was for you and your family?

- How do you think it affected your children?
- Did you and your husband talk about how you would deal with this time?
- What kind of support did you receive from the military?
- What about support from anywhere else?
- Is there anything that you felt could have made that time easier for you and your family?
- Did you try anything at this time that you found helpful (give example)?

### NB: Encourage Expansion

*What was that like / how did that feel / give me an example of that*

### During Deployment:

Tell me about how this time was for you and your family?

- How do you think it affected your children?
- What kind of support did you receive from the military?
- What about support from anywhere else?
- Is there anything that you felt could have made that time easier for you and your family?
- Did you try anything at this time that you found helpful (give example)?

### NB: Trigger Specifics

relationships / communication / behaviour / positive & negative

### Post Deployment:

Tell me about how this time was for you and your family?

- How do you think it affected your children?
- What kind of support did you receive from the military?
- What about support from anywhere else?
- Is there anything that you felt could have made that time easier for you and your family?
- Did you try anything at this time that you found helpful (give example)?

NB: Encourage Expansion

*What was that like / how did that feel / give me an example of that*

**Is there anything we haven't spoken about that you feel it would be important to share? Anything you feel that I have missed?**

**Concluding Phrase:**

*"I also wanted to remind you that once this research is completed I will be offering everyone who has participated the opportunity to come to a sort of group 'meet' where I will feed back all of the results and the recommendations that I have gathered. If anyone would prefer do that separately then that's fine too. There will be written copies of the anonymised final study available as well. Is it ok for me to contact you to invite you along to that?"*

*I'd also like to give you a quick ring this time next week just to make sure that you are alright with everything we have talked about. Would it be alright with you if I do that?"*

*It should be noted that this was the original interview spine developed by the researcher and was amended following subsequent interviews with participants.*