



THE OVERLOOKED CASUALTIES OF CONFLICT

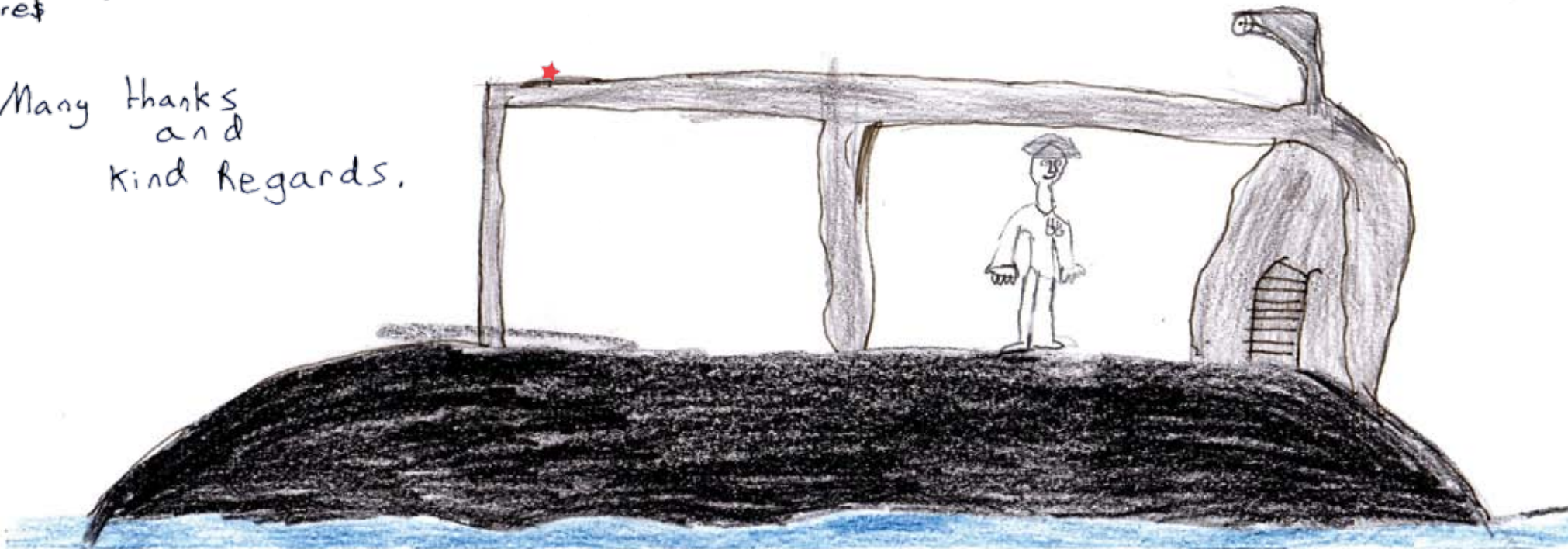
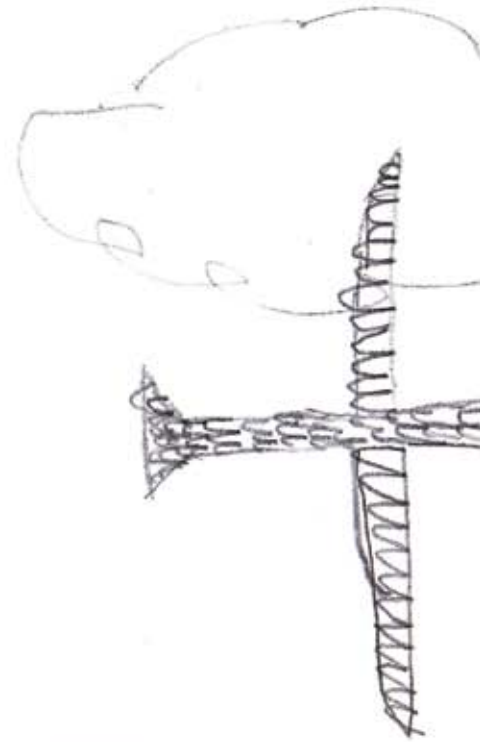
A report commissioned by
The Royal Navy and Royal Marines Children's Fund

November 2009



Dear Royal Navy and Royal Marines
Thank you so, so much for what you
have done. My life has become
much, much happier than it was
before. It is great because I
get to stay with my friends
and teachers. I feel very relieved
and grateful that I can stay at
my school
I am looking forward to a better
future.

Many thanks
and
kind regards.



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FOREWORD



It has been an extremely busy year for the Royal Navy and Royal Marines Children's Fund. Our support for the children of serving and ex-serving Naval personnel is at an all time high, with the number of beneficiaries rising by 27% in the last year alone.

For over 100 years we have been providing help for Naval children in need. This can stem from any number of challenges regularly faced by Service children – be it watching a parent being deployed off to a warzone, dealing with the constant news-reporting of casualties and worrying about their safety, and then re-adjusting to family life when they return, or frequently moving schools and having to adjust to a totally new environment, especially to a different national education system.

However, times are changing and we are heading in the wrong direction. We commissioned the Overlooked Casualties of Conflict report because, as a nation, we need to understand the pressures on Service children better and make some changes: the situation cannot remain the same any longer. For the last 25 years, we at the Royal Navy and Royal Marines Children's Fund have watched Service children battle with the effects of the Falklands War on their parents and we are already seeing history repeat itself with the repercussions of Iraq and Afghanistan. We are sitting on a ticking timebomb of problems for Service children which will only get worse if they are not addressed immediately, in a holistic manner, by all involved.

Many of the challenges we've explored in this report are not unique to Service children. What is unique is the context in which Service children are having to deal with them. It is one thing to have a learning disability or be stressed studying for your GCSEs, but it is another to do so while worrying for your parent's safety out on the frontline in Afghanistan. It is one thing to be a disabled child progressing through your education, but it is another to be frequently relocating and having to settle into new schools and friendship groups.

There has been much well-deserved attention given to the challenges experienced by our Service personnel, but how often do people think of the children back at home? We are calling on the Government – both local and national – to give greater consideration, help and awareness to the stresses on Service children. All too often we, as a charity, have to step in where the Government has failed to look after those who have gone into harm's way for our nation's interests, and it is their families who are making sacrifices to look after them when things go wrong. Hopefully the issues raised in this report will help illuminate the challenges frequently being faced by Service children. Disadvantaging them at that stage casts a life-long blight on their development and their ability to achieve their full potential. Not a happy outcome for a nation that purports to espouse "equal opportunities" so vigorously.

Service children cannot remain the overlooked casualties of conflict any longer.

Monique Bateman
Director of The Royal Navy and Royal Marines Children's Fund

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

"When a problem did arise (our son was bullied by a fellow pupil) we found the school completely unable to cope with the issue compounded by our son's distress at his father's absence. Eventually the issue was resolved, however, it really highlighted the unique difficulties Service children experience in comparison to mainstream pupils and this is often completely overlooked despite promises to the contrary."

Naval wife and mother [Submission to House of Commons Defence Committee report into 'Educating Service children', 2006]

There is so much well-deserved public debate and attention given to our serving and ex-serving Armed Forces personnel that we can often forget about the families and children back at home. No official statistics exist on how many Service children are in the country, but The Royal Navy and Royal Marines Children's Fund has calculated there are 175,000 Service children (of which 35,000 are Naval children) who day in and day out are living the Service lifestyle with their parents.

The Royal Navy and Royal Marines Children's Fund has been helping the children of Naval personnel for over 100 years, and for the last 20 has in particular been seeing Service children experience the ongoing repercussions of the Falklands War. This report aims to share this knowledge and raise awareness as the charity predicts we are sitting on a ticking timebomb of problems for children whose parents have served in Iraq and/or Afghanistan.

This report has found there are ten main challenges which Service children can have to deal with above and beyond those of their peers. They are:

1. **Stresses and strains on children when their parent is away** – 83% of Naval spouses say their children find it difficult when their serving father or mother has to go away for long periods of time. Whilst other families may be separated for work – such as oil rig workers and

lorry drivers – these children do not have to deal with the element of uncertainty, worrying for their parent's safety

2. **Impact of living in a temporary one-parent, or no parent, family** – with the family structure suddenly reduced to one parent, or to only grandparents, children can suffer from the prolonged absence of a father figure or conversely develop and grow in maturity
3. **Influence of the media** – children can be especially vulnerable to reports on the news and can become distressed, anxious and upset by the recurring images of gunfire in warzones and coffins being flown home
4. **Adjustments to family life when the parent returns** – As the family unit has had to adapt and change while the serving parent was away, learning to re-adjust when the parent returns can be one of the hardest stages in the deployment process
5. **Impact of moving homes, schools and communities** – More than 20,000 Service families are on the move each year. This brings with it a range of challenges, with two-thirds of Naval families saying they experience problems with differences in syllabus content and the standard of education when their child changes schools
6. **Stigma of being viewed as a 'military brat'** – Public dislike of military campaigns (such as the Iraq War and continued presence in Afghanistan) combined with the 'here today, gone tomorrow' reputation of Service life can bubble over into hostility towards those employed by the Armed Forces and their families. One in ten Naval spouses have said their family has experienced hostility from local people where they live for being a 'Service family'
7. **Dealing with bereavement** – The reality of having a parent in the Armed Forces means children can experience a constant fear and anxiety for their safety. 6% of children currently being helped by the charity (110 children) have experienced the death of a parent or sibling

8. **Dealing with parental illness or injury** – Many Service personnel return to their families with physical injuries or mental scars which inevitably have both short and long-term impacts on the family's emotional, functional and financial well-being
9. **Dealing with divorce and family breakdown** – 70% of Service spouses say that military operations have had a negative impact on their relationships, and sometimes the Service lifestyle can place so much strain on relationships that it leads to family breakdown and divorce
10. **Living with special educational needs (SEN) and/or a disability** – There are over 2,000 Service children with SEN on the MoD's database, but with over 700 of these moving each year, the children can get lost in the system and not receive any help. There is a wealth of research that says it's vital to diagnose and help these children from as young as possible, otherwise negative consequences can occur in later life. Service children must not be disadvantaged in receiving help or a new wheelchair because they happen to move to another Local Authority

Some of these challenges are the unavoidable consequences of having a parent in the Armed Forces (such as bereavement), whilst others simply should not exist in the first place (such as the bureaucratic restrictions on special needs provision when children move schools). The MoD, DCSF and local authorities need to appreciate the impact that the Service lifestyle can have on a child's behaviour, emotional well-being, psychological development and their educational attainment, and build this understanding into their future strategies, policies and budget.

Service children cannot remain the overlooked casualties of conflict any longer.

ABOUT THE CHARITY

The Royal Navy and Royal Marines Children's Fund helps around 2,000 children each year deal with the long-term psychological, emotional, physical, financial and social issues that can result from having a parent work in the Royal Navy or Royal Marines.

All sons and daughters up to the age of 25 years-old of serving and ex-serving members of the Royal Navy, the Royal Marines, the Queen Alexandra's Royal Naval Service, the former Women's Royal Naval Service, and the reserves of those forces who are in need, hardship or distress are eligible for help by the charity.

The repercussions of war and conflict go far beyond the injuries obtained by those on the frontline, and often those most affected are the families of Servicemen back at home. The charity's aim is to provide those serving in the Royal Navy and the Royal Marines with the reassurance and peace of mind that their children will be looked after and supported – whatever the need, whatever the eventuality.

ABOUT OUR LOGO

Last year we were thinking about redesigning our logo, then one day we received a thank you letter from a little girl we've helped, who was in a refuge with her mother. On the back of the letter was a drawing. We all agreed this was perfect for our new logo, so we've incorporated the image of the little girl with a big heart.



To rhrm
Thank you very much for
helping me get my tricycle.
I have been out on it
a lot and it has been
very good.



HISTORY OF THE CHARITY



Christmas at South Africa Lodge, 1942

In 1902, Deaconess Frances Wooldridge was walking through the Naval town of Chatham in Kent and found a child crying in the street. The child was an orphan whose father had been in the Royal Navy. The Deaconess, seeing the child in desperate need, took the child home to look after him. Shortly after she found another orphan in need, and another, and very soon it became clear that an orphanage was needed for these children.

The fundraising began and with the help of the King George's Fund for Sailors (now known as Seafarers UK), two orphanages were built – one in Gillingham (Kent) and one in Portsmouth. The orphanage in Gillingham was known as Pembroke House and at the outbreak of the Second World War, the children were moved to other children's homes and PH was used as offices for the military. After the war the Trustees decided that it was best and more cost effective to help the children to remain with their families or Guardians, and so started to support them in this way. The children's home in Portsmouth, known as South Africa Lodge, continued to function as a home, providing respite and refuge until the early 1990s.

The Royal Navy and Royal Marines Children's Fund was created in 1999 through the merger of the two charities which had looked after these orphanages – the Royal Navy and Royal Marines Children's Trust and the Royal Navy and Royal Marines Children's Home. The work of the Children's Fund now covers all the aspects of care that the children should expect to receive if life was straightforward for them.

"Our Sailors and Royal Marines, whilst they are facing the enemy, probably don't care too much about what is going to happen to them. Beyond surviving the day and dealing with their enemies, it is very hard for those at the front line to think about tomorrow. That, of course, is directly contrary to the families at home.

For them every six month tour that Dad or their spouse is away on operations is a gut wrenching, horribly worrying time. Each news bulletin becomes a milestone in their lives, each week that passes without bad news seems like a year. These are the people upon whom the long term strain is falling and whose sacrifice is overshadowed by that of the fighting forces. Clearly, this exerts all sorts of pressures on those who remain at home, especially the children. For kids living in a married quarter "patch" the visits by the Padre and Welfare Officers is all too common a sight. Is it their Dad's turn today? Will he be coming home at all, or if he is, how badly will he have been injured? The strain upon young minds is huge and we must never forget it."

Patrick Mercer OBE MP

[Speaking from personal experience, having followed his father into the British Army and served as an Officer completing nine tours, including in Northern Ireland, Bosnia, Canada and Uganda. In 1997 he received an OBE for services in Bosnia]

CURRENT WORK OF THE CHARITY

The military presence in Afghanistan (and formerly Iraq) coupled with the ongoing recession is placing a great deal of strain on Naval families. As a result, over the last year, the charity has experienced a 27% increase in the number of its beneficiaries, and is currently helping over 1,900¹ children.

The charity will also continue to provide assistance to children up to the age of 25.

This age limit was raised from 18 years-old when the Royal Navy and Royal Marines Children's Fund was created through the merger of the previous two charities, because many of the charity's beneficiaries have had disrupted childhoods and need the extra time to achieve the training and qualifications necessary to take up their role in society. 48% of the children also have some form of disability – either mental or physical – and the need to continue support for them is vital to enable care packages to be put in place to support them into adulthood.

In the past, the balance of children who have parents still serving and those who have left the Naval Services has been 50-50. However, currently 78% of the charity's children have a father or mother who is still serving in the Royal Navy or Royal Marines. This reflects the nature of the issues these children are dealing with.

The support provided by the charity can be summarised into the following categories:

- Help to support families at home when partners are away from home, at sea, or in an area of conflict
- Help to provide at-home support in times of crisis
- Help to assist with childcare when a parent is unable to cope
- Help with childcare so that mothers and fathers can work or retrain
- Help children who have suffered bereavement
- Help children who are suffering family break-down or parental divorce
- Help to provide special family days out in times of grief or distress
- Help in the home where there has been an injury or illness
- Help to assist families with travel expenses so that they can travel to be together, or travel to support children in hospital
- Help to provide respite care for children when there is only one caring parent
- Help to buy essential items such as food and clothing in times of financial hardship
- Help to educate children who are constantly 'on the move'
- Help to educate children who have special needs
- Help families to secure specialist equipment for children with disabilities
- Help in any way possible, where the need is proven and there are no other funds available

CASE STUDY



James and Anne were 11 and 9 years-old when they first needed help from the charity. Their Dad was a serving member of the Royal Navy/Marines, but the marriage to their Mum was very volatile, especially since their Mum suffered with bipolar disorder. In the end their Dad walked out leaving Anne blaming herself (she had eczema which covered her face and she thought she was ugly), and their Mum spiralled into depression. One day both James and Anne found her in their lounge after she had attempted suicide. While she went through recovery, the Charity helped to find a boarding school where James and Anne could be close to their grandparents. It was a long struggle but for a few years, life settled down. The children had no contact with their father who had remarried and had another family.

One day James ran away from school to find his father. After much searching, he found him only to be greeted with abuse and have the door slammed in his face. He was picked up by the police who returned him to his boarding school. Unfortunately he was very angry and when he found himself being teased, he lashed out. As a consequence of this, he was expelled. The charity helped to secure him a place at another school and he managed to get his GCSEs. James then went to a 6th form college. Sadly here he fell in with a crowd who were taking drugs and he ended up on the streets. His Mum and Anne never gave up, searching for him on the streets, making him eat and looking after him until he ran away again.

Then suddenly, out of the blue and with constant encouragement from everyone, James decided to resume his education. By now he was in his early 20s, but due to his arrested childhood The Royal Navy and Royal Marines Children's Fund helped him with his journey back through college and onto university. He is now a journalist, his sister is a nursery nurse, and their Mum is happily remarried.

ORGANISATION OF THE CHARITY

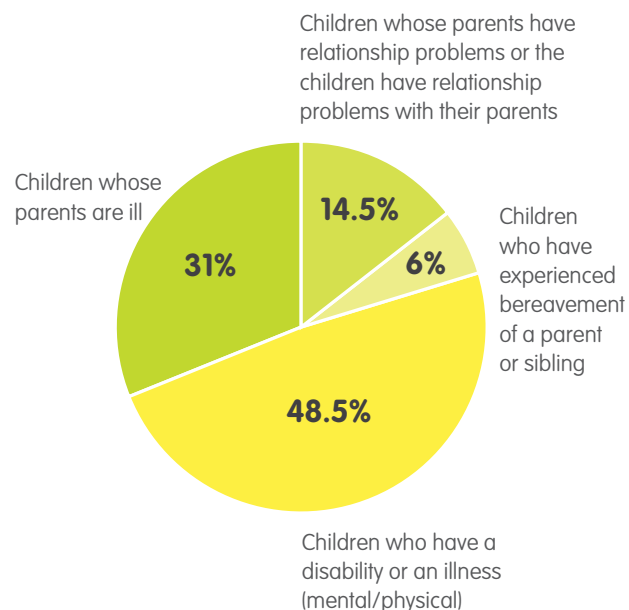
The charity is run by ten trustees, of whom five sit on the Welfare Committee that meets each month to evaluate all applications for assistance. Ad hoc arrangements are also organised when an urgent case arises.

The charity is run day-to-day by its Director, Monique Bateman, who has been with the charity for over 25 years. Monique also works with a caseworker and one part-time administrative assistant. The total administration costs are less than 1.5% of the charity's expenditure.

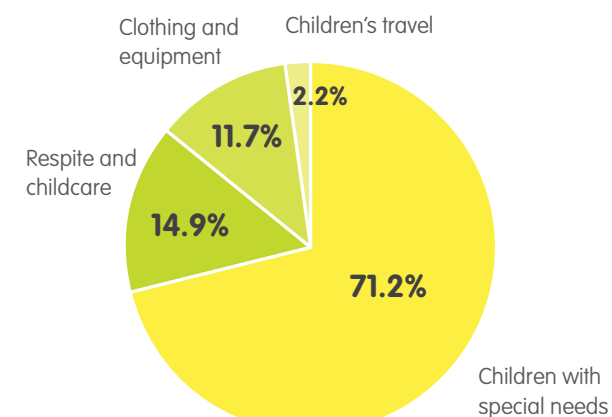
Applications for assistance are received from individuals, schools, local authorities, Naval Personnel and Family Services, SSAFA Forces Help, the Royal British Legion, the Frank Buttle Trust and many others. All applications are carefully investigated and, where necessary, supplemented by personal visits. When considering applications, the Trustees provide benevolence according to the child's needs and, where appropriate, can commit to long term assistance.



BREAKDOWN OF WHY CHILDREN ARE SUPPORTED BY THE CHARITY



BREAKDOWN OF CHARITY'S EXPENDITURE



INTRODUCTION

The general public are becoming increasingly aware of the stress, trauma and injuries which can be suffered by those serving in the Armed Forces, yet how much is understood about what their children back at home go through?

Unfortunately, the answer is very little.

Children of Naval personnel are not immune to the repercussions of war and the military lifestyle, and frequently face a set of unique challenges – be it relocating across the country and settling into a new school, or coping while a parent is away at sea or serving in a warzone such as Afghanistan.

Over the last 100 years, we have helped tens of thousands of children whose parent(s) are in the Royal Navy or the Royal Marines, and we have commissioned this report to bring all our experiences and knowledge to light, and to educate decision-makers at local and national levels about certain situations which frequently occur and yet often get overlooked.

This report is very aware that it's not all bad, and there are many, many positives to being part of the Service community. We've seen that children often take a great deal of pride, identity and belonging from their parent's role in the Armed Forces, and can build stronger bonds and grow up much quicker with the extra responsibility they shoulder while their serving parent is away. However, it must also be understood that with the upsides can come considerable downsides, and that children of serving personnel who are in hardship and distress cannot remain in the background as 'the overlooked casualties of conflict' any more.

The research conducted for this report has been compiled from a variety of sources to create a 360° picture of the situation. Over the last six months we have conducted in-depth interviews with over 50 individuals who have been touched by the issues we're exploring in this report. This includes the children and parents who we've helped, but also leading psychologists, researchers, other Service charities and political opinion-formers. This qualitative research has been combined with a comprehensive analysis of all academic literature and learnings from the UK and USA, and input from prominent psychologists in the field, such as Professor William Yule.

One of the most basic problems facing us is the lack of statistics about Service children. Building a better picture of where children live and their family set-up is one of the key recommendations of this report. Therefore, much of the analysis in this report draws on statistics and knowledge which has been gathered over the last 10 years in the United States.

Before we continue with the report, we would like to clarify some points. Firstly, the primary focus of this report is on the children whose parents are in the Royal Navy and Royal Marines. Many parallels, however, can also be drawn with the challenges faced by children of Army and Royal Air Force personnel. Secondly, whilst the report examines children, it in turn also looks at the experiences of the parent or guardian at home with the children, as how they are coping can also directly influence the well-being of the child.



WHY DOES THE TOPIC MATTER?

The Royal Navy is the oldest of HM Armed Forces, and is currently the second-largest navy in the NATO alliance. Since its formation in the late 1600s, children of Naval personnel have been dealing with parental absence for considerable lengths of time, and coping with issues such as family breakdown, parental injury and bereavement. These challenges are nothing new. What is new however, in modern times, is the scale of those currently affected, and the complexity of the ensuing problems.

What concerns us at the Royal Navy and Royal Marines Children's Fund is our experience of the ongoing ramifications of the Falklands War. We have been heavily involved at every stage of the Falklands War – not only in 1982 as children came to terms with what may or may not have happened to their serving parent, but even today as the long-term impacts still have a firm grip upon many families' lives.

There are various children on our books today whose fathers are still tormented with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder 25 years later, who were never diagnosed at the time, and their families are still suffering the price of it now. The mental and physical legacy of conflict can weigh heavy on families, and is particularly exemplified by the fact that more US Vietnam veterans committed suicide after the war than had died in it. May the UK never have to put the children of its Service personnel through the same kind of aftermath.

We have experienced the fallout from the Falklands War and fearfully predict that the country's Service families are sitting on a ticking timebomb of potential problems due to Iraq and Afghanistan. It has never been more pressing that both the short- and long-term ramifications of war are understood for all involved – Service personnel, partners and children – or we are going to see many more children suffer the same problems time and time again. This is why it matters.

Children must not remain the overlooked casualties of conflict anymore.

CASE STUDY



When challenges occur, many often assume it's because of an incident that has happened to the service family member. In the case of the Marshall family, it was the other way around. Sadly the Mum died of cancer in May 2009, leaving the Dad – a Naval rating – looking after his three children (age 3, 12 and 15) whilst juggling his role in the Navy.

To help the family adjust and get their act together, the charity provided assistance for childcare to enable the Dad to continue his job; funding for school uniforms and help for the family to bond during a camping holiday to the Isle of Wight. Sometimes measures such as family time together can be essential in the grieving process and helping the children know their remaining parent is there for them, especially as service life can reduce the amount of time parents and children get to spend together.



I got my glasses on Saturday
24th May just in time for the
U.K. Tour because I play in
goal for Mablethorpe Athletics.
Thank you for the £238.1 I have
got black charcoal frame
they gave me good luck.
We won the a match 2-0!
We also won a match 1-0!

SCALE OF THE SITUATION

There are currently 189,100² members of the UK Armed Forces, of whom 38,420 are in the Naval Service (Royal Navy, Royal Marines and Naval Reserve Forces).

Since the attacks of September 11, 2001, more and more British troops have been deployed to active duty in Afghanistan and Iraq. At its height, the deployment of British Armed Forces was the largest since World War 2 and has been increasingly characterised by longer and multiple time periods. Not only are Naval parents set to be deployed to Afghanistan for years to come, but this is the first time in many children's lives that they have had to deal with the possibility that their parent may be killed or injured in war.

During the war in Iraq, 179 British Armed Forces personnel lost their lives, and more than 800 have been left seriously wounded and disabled. When it comes to Afghanistan, at least 940 Service men and women to date have been wounded and as this report goes to print, the death toll currently totals 230. Over 6% of the children helped by the Royal Navy and Royal Children's Fund – over 110 children – have experienced the death of a parent, and many more are seeing their parents suffer with mental and physical injuries and illnesses.

In addition, not for a long time has this country been engaged in such a controversial war. A poll by the BBC³ to mark the eighth anniversary of the start of operations in Afghanistan found that 56% of the population were found to be opposed to the war, and 37% were in favour. It must be appreciated how public sentiment can have an impact on the health and well-being of children⁴.



WE WISH TO THANK
THE ROYAL NAVY & ROYAL
MARINES CHILDREN'S FUND,
FOR THE GRANT WE RECEIVED TO HELP
WITH THE PURCHASE OF ITEMS FOR
OUR BABY. WE HAD A BABY GIRL
ON 16/09/05 AND I HAVE NAMED HER
ELLY SHE WEIGHED A MASSIVE 7lb 8oz
WE HOPE THAT WE CAN REPEAT
THE KINDNESS IN THE FUTURE.
YOURS GRATEFULLY
LULU

HOW MANY SERVICE CHILDREN ARE THERE?

Unfortunately, there are no statistics held centrally by the Ministry of Defence or the Department for Children, Schools and Families on how many children have parents in the Armed Forces. Leading academics and child psychologists interviewed for this report have told us this is one of the biggest barriers preventing this issue from being accurately understood and addressed.

Having said this, the Ministry of Defence has asked a sample of personnel if they have children, and how many children they have, in its various Continuous Attitude Surveys of Armed Forces personnel and families of Army, RAF, RN and RM personnel over the last few years. Whilst this only represents a small proportion of the Armed Forces (response rates range up to 11,000), it is possible to use these figures to calculate an estimate of the number of Service children.

The MoD surveys revealed that 48% of Service personnel have children, with more officers having children than the other ranks. This means there are just under **91,000 parents across the three Services** (18,000 Naval, 21,000 RAF and 52,000 Army).

Based on these available statistics, we have been able to estimate that **there are just under 175,000 Service children, of which 35,000 are Naval children.**

This estimate is in line with calculations that already exist. Previous estimates have ranged from 90,000, by Ofsted⁵, to 186,000, by Mike Curtis, Chairman of the 'Service children In State Schools' Working Group⁶.

	Number of Service personnel	Officers with children	'Other ranks' with children	Average of all ranks with children	Number of Service personnel with children	Number of Service children
Royal Navy	38,420	56%	45%	48%	18,057	35,354
Royal Marines		67%	43%	46%		
Army	107,200	53%	48%	48%	51,456	100,688
RAF	43,480	54%	48%	49%	21,305	38,299
TOTAL	189,100	54%	47%	48%	90,818	174,341

[MoD Continuous Attitude Surveys for Armed Forces personnel and families of Army, RAF, RN and RM personnel, 2006 and 2008]



WHAT CHALLENGES TO SERVICE CHILDREN FACE?

OVERVIEW OF CHALLENGES

A child's life is undoubtedly influenced by their parents' occupations – whether they are an officer worker, teacher, builder or in the Armed Forces. As Jo Swinhoe, who was in the Army herself and then left to marry a Navy husband and raise two children, puts it:

"Many families are separated because of their work – for instance the families of oil rig workers or long distance lorry drivers. But what is unique to Service families, and what makes such a distinction, is the element of uncertainty. You don't know what's going to happen to your loved one, and when it's your husband or father that has signed on the dotted line, not you, the situation can become especially tough to cope with."

As mentioned throughout this report, there are many upsides to having a parent work in the Armed Forces, and children of Service personnel will not necessarily experience any problems or hardship. Having said this, the nature of having a parent being regularly away from home in a situation where you do not know if they will return can certainly cause strain to Service children, and these challenges need to be understood and properly prepared for.

As the Headteacher of Widewell Primary School in Plymouth – where half of the pupils are from Naval families – explains,

"If children of Naval personnel can be given the correct understanding and support, they can be absolutely fine and live perfectly happy lives. What is needed, however, is help to stop the children falling through the cracks in the path which can sometimes be created by the unintended consequences of a parent serving in the forces."

We have seen over the Charity's history that the 'cracks in the path' which can influence the children can be psychological, emotional, educational, physical, financial and/or social in nature. This chapter will now discuss these issues through the following categories:

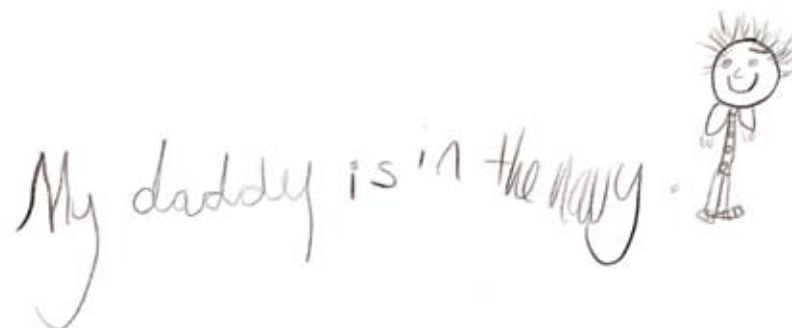
1. Stresses and strains on children when their parent is away
2. Impact on child of living in a one-parent family for significant periods of time
3. Influence of the media
4. Adjustments to family life when the parent returns
5. Impact of moving homes, schools and communities
6. Stigma of being a 'Service child'
7. Dealing with bereavement
8. Dealing with parental illness or injury
9. Dealing with divorce and family break-down
10. Living with special needs and/or a disability

"Adults will tell you if they're happy or sad but a child may take years to express his or her experience in words. However, they will give clues to how they feel in their behaviour. Very often schools have to deal with this and the trauma of service life is translated into a particular challenge for primary schools in military and naval areas."

"Service in the Armed Forces is not just a job, it's a highly mobile vocation that involves families as few others do. The philosophical 'can do' attitude that characterises service personnel in fully professional Armed Forces cannot be taken for granted in families who find themselves conscripted into service life. It is important that the organisation does all it can to make service in the Armed Forces attractive to the families that have to shoulder much of the burden."

Dr Andrew Murrison MP

[Speaking from personal experience having served for 18 years in the Royal Navy as a Medical Officer, leaving in 2000 as a Surgeon Commander. He served in the Gulf War of 1990-1991 and was recalled in 2003 to serve in Iraq. Dr Murrison is the Shadow Defence Minister]



1. STRESSES AND STRAINS WHILE A PARENT IS AWAY

Deployment is a regular and essential element of military life. Whether it is being sent on a ship or submarine, to training abroad, or to a warzone, families regularly experience stretches of time where they are parted from their loved ones.

Royal Navy deployments typically last for six months, but they can stretch up to nine months, so for Naval children, the regular and prolonged absence of a parent is a familiar experience. Over three-quarters (78%) of Service personnel have been on an operational tour or deployment within the last three to four years (MoD Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey, 2008).

"I feel proud of Daddy being in the Navy, proud. He is doing his best and I am proud of him because he is working to keep the country safe."

Simon, age 8 [Interviewed as part of Michelle Cross' research on Naval children in Portsmouth, 2009]

Having a parent away for a long period of time can be tough on children. It also makes a considerable difference whether the parent has been sent on a training exercise in a friendly country, or if they have been sent into a warzone. For those children with parents sent to conflict zones such as Iraq or Afghanistan, their experience of parental absence is often intensified by the threats of war, trauma and death. Both of these types of deployment will be discussed in this report.

The deployments can also be frequent, protracted and often unpredictable. If a new military development occurs, Service personnel can receive their orders one day, and be deployed the next. Recent MoD research found that around half of Service personnel who have been deployed in the last few years were given 11 weeks notice or more of the operational tour/deployment. Shockingly, one in ten received

only one or two weeks notice. In another survey⁷ of a British Forces Garrison Town in Germany, 70% of new mothers had husbands who were deployed for a month or more during their pregnancy.

Naval children have been watching their parents being deployed to Afghanistan since November 2001, when Britain's presence first started after Royal Marines from 40 Commando helped to secure the airfield at Bagram. The number of total UK Armed Forces personnel is now over 9,000, with this number set to rise. Over 4,100 of British personnel also served in Iraq. Aside from warzones, there are various military deployments all over the world, with the Royal Navy currently experiencing its largest deployment to the Far East in over a decade.

What is most significant as well is the increasing number of women and mothers who are in the Armed Forces⁸. It is easy to picture a man heading off into conflict leaving his partner at home to mother the children, but what if the picture is the other way around? And what if the mother is a single parent?

9.5% of the Naval Service is female – or 3,670 women – of which 80% are ratings and 20% are officers. Women and mothers regularly head to sea or to war as part of their military career. This is a feature of the modern Armed Forces, and more appropriate mechanisms need to be in place to deal with this current day mix of serving personnel.

EMOTIONAL REACTIONS TO DEPLOYMENT

When a parent is deployed, their children experience a broad range of emotions and reactions. The depth and severity of these responses will depend on a variety of factors, including, but not limited to, their age, maturity, gender, parent-child relationship and the coping skills of the remaining parent.

83.3% of Navy families say their children find it difficult when their serving father or mother has to go away for long periods of time

[MoD RN and RM Families' Continuous Attitude Survey, 2006. Statistic taken from respondents for whom the question was relevant]

Despite the coping mechanisms being unique to each individual, there is a general pattern of reactions and feelings which most families and children go through. This is called the 'emotional cycle of deployment'. The cycle is explained in the figure on the next page, and has been adapted from the esteemed model created by American psychologist Kathleen Vestal Logan⁹ in 1987, which is still used by the Navy in both Britain and America today.

"Like, for this war, you are always thinking about it because you don't want your Dad to be shot or anything like that, but when my Dad left, even before he left in the plane, I was crying like a little kid. I don't like it when he has to leave our family and stuff like that."

Teenage Army daughter, USA [Interviewed in 2009 by Dr Mmari et al. for academic study 'When a parent goes off to war']

- 60% of military spouses say their children had increased levels of fear and anxiety when their husbands/wives went to war
- 57% reported increased behavioral problems of their children at home
- 36% cited increased behavioral problems of their children at school
- 47% said their children had increased closeness to family members

[Survey of 13,000 spouses of active duty Servicemen, conducted by the US Pentagon, June 2009]

1. STRESSES AND STRAINS WHILE A PARENT IS AWAY

THE EMOTIONAL CYCLE OF DEPLOYMENT

Pre-deployment

Deployment stage	Duration of stage	Common feelings and reactions
1. Anticipation of loss	1-6 weeks before	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tension Increased crying Unexpressed anger Increased bickering Resentment
2. Detachment and withdrawal	Last week before deployment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Despair Hopelessness Lack of energy Numbness Hard to make decisions Emotional distance

Post-deployment

Deployment stage	Duration of stage	Common feelings and reactions
6. Renegotiation of relationships	6 weeks after homecoming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shock Excitement Grieving loss of freedom Resentment Role adjustments needed Difficulty bonding
7. Reintegration and stabilisation	6-12 weeks after homecoming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relaxation Bonds re-establishing Warmth and closeness Family unit

During deployment

Deployment stage	Duration of stage	Common feelings and reactions
3. Emotional disorganisation	First 6 weeks away	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relief Shock and anger Depression and irritability Guilt and numbness Indecision and confusion Wishful thinking Sleep and appetite disturbances
4. Recovery and stabilisation	Variable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New sense of freedom Increased confidence Initiating new activities Secure yet independent Increased sense of pride Isolation and anxiety
5. Anticipation of homecoming	6 weeks before homecoming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased energy and activity Joy and excitement Apprehension Nervous Restlessness and impatience Sleep and appetite disturbances

"It just takes a little getting used to that's all. We have a short period of being unsettled and getting back into routine than things are ok...just trying to get back to some normality can take time though."

Naval spouse and mother (Samantha O'Shaughnessy's research on Service children in Portsmouth and Plymouth)

"My son came in and went, 'Dad please don't go, please don't, I'm begging you', and he started stroking his face and saying 'I love you Dad' and there's tears and sobbing... I'm dealing with that, I have to be left with that."

Naval spouse and mother (Samantha O'Shaughnessy's research on Service children in Portsmouth and Plymouth)

"Children get very attached, well they are attached to both parents hopefully, and it's quite difficult, particularly with young children, when one parent suddenly disappears for a considerable amount of time."

Naval spouse and mother (Samantha O'Shaughnessy's research on Service children in Portsmouth and Plymouth)

"It can be quite sad when Daddy goes away because I've got a book we are reading and when he goes away I can't really read it. I don't really talk to anybody about it. When he leaves I just start cuddling Scruffy, my teddy, he's my most loved teddy."

James, age 7 (Interviewed as part of Michelle Cross' research on Naval children in Portsmouth, 2009)

"I don't like him going away on long trips. I think his longest trip was nearly a year. I feel sad when Daddy goes away, and glad and happy when he comes back."

Anne, age 7 (Interviewed as part of Michelle Cross' research on Naval children in Portsmouth, 2009)

1. STRESSES AND STRAINS WHILE A PARENT IS AWAY

DIFFERENCES IN REACTIONS BECAUSE OF CHILD'S AGE

"I feel scared when Daddy is away, in case Mummy goes away too."

Gordon, age 3 [Interviewed as part of Michelle Cross' research on Naval children in Portsmouth, 2009]

The seven stages which families experience when a Service person is deployed take them through a cycle of emotions – some positive, but most are negative.

Whilst generalisations are easier to make across adult populations, we must acknowledge that the reactions of children distinctly vary according to the age of the child. Looking in particular at the time while the serving parent is away (stages 3 to 5), the following table explains the various reactions children typically display at different psychosocial lifestages.

"I don't want to join the Navy like Daddy because there is more chance of dying. There's less chance of dying as an RAF pilot than in the Navy because if you're in the sky, you can jump out and open your parachute, can't you? You never know when a missile or a torpedo is coming under the bottom of the ship and explode and you're at the bottom of the ship, do you?"

James, age 7 [Interviewed as part of Michelle Cross' research on Naval children in Portsmouth, 2009]

A Pentagon study of 13,000 spouses of active duty US Servicemen released in June 2009, found that children of combat troops show more fear, anxiety and behavioral problems. According to the study, the effects were most pronounced in children between the ages of 6-13, followed by those aged 2-5.

Common reactions to parental deployment by childhood psychosocial lifestages¹⁰

Psychosocial lifestage	Main challenge	Primary reaction to deployment (Stage 3)	Common reactions to absence (Stage 4 and 5)
Babies (Under 1 year old)	Continuity of caregiver	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Crying 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Crying Searching for parent Subconscious confusion
Toddlers (1-3 years old)	Continuity of parent-child bond	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Slow to warm up to parent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resistance to soothing Difficulty with toilet training Decreased activity
Pre-schoolers (3-6 years-old)	Family relationships 'Aggression-fear conflicts'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feel guilty and scared about separation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Difficulty with toilet training Thumb sucking Refusal to sleep alone More emotionally attached Irritability Fear of abandonment
School-age children (6-12 years-old)	Friends / classmates / teachers relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Want attention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acting out behaviour (crying, arguing, talking back) Sleep disturbances Neglecting school work Difficulty learning Change in appetite Avoiding interactions with friends

CURSE OF UNCERTAINTY

It is nothing new or unique for children in the UK to experience the absence of a parent for a stretch of time. Working parents are frequently sent away from the home on business trips, or have occupations which require them to be based away from home.

What makes the situation so different for the children of Service personnel is the ambiguity and uncertainty of the absence. Much of the emotional upheaval can be based on the child constantly thinking 'will my Dad come to any harm?', 'will my Dad return home?'. By knowing that their parent is in 'harm's way', emotions can accumulate into an ongoing stress of unpredictability and uncertainty.

1. STRESSES AND STRAINS WHILE A PARENT IS AWAY

BEHAVIOURAL REACTIONS TO DEPLOYMENT

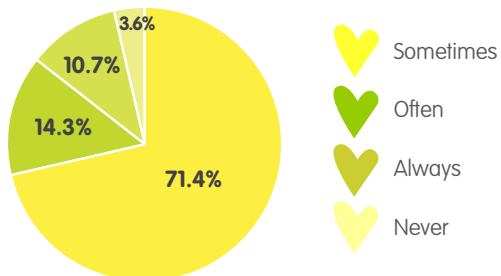
The Royal Navy and Royal Marines Children's Fund has been fortunate to be involved with a piece of research work conducted a few years ago, specifically looking at how British Naval children's behaviour and family life can be affected by parental absence. This was conducted by Samantha O'Shaughnessy¹¹ from the School of Psychology at the University of Southampton. The results are based on focus group and quantitative research conducted amongst 28 Naval spouses in Portsmouth and Plymouth, as well as 11 interviews with Naval children, a Headteacher and Naval social workers.

This piece of research is extremely valuable in understanding the challenges faced by Naval children in Britain, as it is one of only a few British studies which exist.

"Last time Dad went away it was a really long time and we really missed him. In my room I put up a calendar of when Dad was coming home and every day I ticked one off and counted how many were left."

Naval daughter [Samantha O'Shaughnessy's research on Service children in Portsmouth and Plymouth]

'DO YOUR CHILDREN FEEL STRESSED OR ANXIOUS WHEN YOUR SPOUSE IS ABSENT?'



Almost all parents (96.4%) said they noticed distinct changes in the emotional well-being of their child while the serving parent was away, with 11% saying their child always feels stressed or anxious during times of deployment.

Parents were also asked how their child's behaviour changes during the deployment period. As the research in the box on the right shows, children typically respond in either one of two ways – they either act out and become more naughty, or they retreat into themselves and become upset and more emotional.

"He pushes the boundaries of what's acceptable behaviour with me all the time just because he needs to have someone a lot physically bigger than him who's obviously wearing the trousers. When you're a Mum trying to deal with two kids you're trying to be this nice soft person on the one hand and this hard person asserting boundaries, and you can't really switch between the two in the way kids need you to be able to do. When you've got two adults in the house it works, but the dynamics of it are just all wrong."

Spouse of a Naval Officer and mother [Samantha O'Shaughnessy's research on Service children in Portsmouth and Plymouth]

'HOW IS YOUR CHILD'S BEHAVIOUR DIFFERENT WHEN YOUR SPOUSE IS ABSENT?' (TOP 5 ANSWERS)

1. More naughty
2. More upset and emotional
3. Difficulties sleeping
4. More tantrums
5. More argumentative

[Samantha O'Shaughnessy's research of Naval spouses with children living in Portsmouth and Plymouth, 2004]

"She pushes her luck with the rules that are set down by her father. She knows you don't just dump your bag by the washing machine when you get in, but she pushes it thinking 'well Dad isn't here, so maybe...'"

Naval spouse and mother [Samantha O'Shaughnessy's research on Service children in Portsmouth and Plymouth]

"In the first week they're always a bit...they miss their Dad, you know, and they can be a bit more naughty in the first week. Then they get more used to it being just Mum again and they are fine and start looking forward to him coming home again..."

Naval spouse and mother [Samantha O'Shaughnessy's research on Service children in Portsmouth and Plymouth]

My dad is in the Navy
and he doesn't live with me

1. STRESSES AND STRAINS WHILE A PARENT IS AWAY

COMMUNICATION

Sometimes families are able to adopt the 'out of sight, out of mind' mentality, but for most, regular and reliable contact with their loved one is very important. The charity remembers the time before blueys and e-blueys, when communication between Service personnel and their families was patchy at best, and non-existent at worst.

For many families, communication can help build 'normality' and routine in the home, with Mum and children emailing Dad every Sunday night, or drawing a picture to send to Daddy every Saturday morning.

"My husband is able to email the children now so he sends them to the kids individually and my eldest can actually read them now. He's got his own address on the ship so no-one else can read it which is nice. It's been ideal for us...without emails it would have been awful and we would have lost contact completely."

Naval spouse and mother [Samantha O'Shaughnessy's research on Service children in Portsmouth and Plymouth]

*"It depends what submarine he's on. If he's on S boats they can call in at ports and he can ring us. You could send normal letters and pictures and he could send them back. But now he's on HMS *****, and it means we don't have any contact at all. That's hard on the kids, they still write things to their Dad, but I can't send them to him. I pretend to, but they don't know he's not getting them. It's really hard."*

Naval spouse and mother [Samantha O'Shaughnessy's research on Service children in Portsmouth and Plymouth]

On the flipside, lack of communication can cause additional stresses and strains on the children back at home. If children are expecting to hear from their parent at a certain time, but due to military situations out of their control the parent is unable to send their regular letter/email/e-bluey, it can

exacerbate the sense of uncertainty and fuel negative thoughts about their parent's safety.

INFLUENCE BY HOW OTHERS ARE COPING

Children are incredibly tuned into the emotions and feelings of those around them, so they will be influenced by how their parent or guardian is coping with the deployment. Research¹² conducted in America on children's reactions to their parents serving in Iraq and Afghanistan has shown that maternal psychopathology is one of the most influential external stressors on their behaviour and emotional health.

Several studies by Professor Peter Jensen at the US National Institute of Mental Health^{13 14} have shown that when the remaining parent (usually the mother) adapts well to the separation, deployment appears to be less strongly associated with adolescent depression and anxiety.

Conversely, when a parent is struggling with the separation, it is another addition to the list of issues the child is dealing with. Not only are they coping with their own concerns, but they also have the stress of worrying about their mother.

"I would come home and my Mom would be in the living room eating dinner by herself, sitting with the lights off, and just like watching TV—it kind of freaked me out a little bit. But it does play a toll, because my Mom misses him, and your family just doesn't have their Dad around."

Teenager of Air Force personnel, USA [Interviewed in 2009 by Dr Mmari et al. for academic study 'When a parent goes off to war']

"The separation thing is quite a big issue for us because he's spent a long time at sea since I've had the children. I get very short tempered and I had a bad experience when my husband went away for the first time. I got to the point where I thought that my children really didn't like me anymore."

If you get yourself down in the dumps it's really hard to pick yourself up again...really hard."

Naval spouse and mother [Samantha O'Shaughnessy's research on Service children in Portsmouth and Plymouth]

MISSING IMPORTANT EVENTS

During the research for this report and looking back over the charity's experience, one of the most significant 'stresses and strains' while a parent is away is concerning important events. Birthdays, Christmas and Father's Day can all be hard to get through when your loved one is absent. This can cause such sadness for the children, also including events where they'd like both parents to attend, such as sports matches, school concerts, etc.

"He's been away on my birthday loads of times."

Karen, age 7, whose Dad has missed four of her seven birthdays [Interviewed as part of Michelle Cross' research on Naval children in Portsmouth, 2009]

"Whatever I was feeling, I always tried not to pass my anxiety or problems onto my children. The best advice I can give Service parents is to make sure the children don't know what they're missing. I remember one Christmas I had two children under the age of five and my husband wasn't due to return home until January, so I delayed Christmas in our household until he had returned home. Of course I was missing him terribly, but the children were still able to celebrate and happily exchange presents with him, and they never knew the difference."

Jo Swinhoe [Navy spouse and mother]

"At Christmas, when Daddy was away, they set up a camera on the laptop so that we could see Daddy, and Daddy was in his Christmas hat!"

Rob, age 7 [Interviewed as part of Michelle Cross' research on Naval children in Portsmouth, 2009]

2. IMPACT OF A TEMPORARY ONE-PARENT, OR NO-PARENT, FAMILY

"I feel sad for the first few weeks that he's away and then basically you get on with it like you're a one parent family and you forget you've got a husband for a while. I don't mean literally forget, but you get on with your life and the kids' lives... until a couple of weeks before they are due to come home again and then you go through that process all again, of being married again."

Naval spouse and mother [Samantha O'Shaughnessy's research on Service children in Portsmouth and Plymouth]

For those remaining at home, a parent's departure means there are considerable shifts in family dynamics and how the home and day-to-day life is structured.

Whether it is mum or dad who has been deployed, shrinking from a two-parent unit to a one-parent responsibility has substantial impacts. Children inevitably respond differently as to whether the remaining parent is female or male. Interesting, an academic study¹⁵ of this issue found that children do not exhibit any statistically significant differences in their psychosocial problems according to the gender of the parent who is away. But nevertheless, the problems remain in existence.



TEMPORARY GUARDIANS AND RELOCATION

In America, 4.4% of enlisted personnel and officers in the Marine Corps (and 9.9% in the Air Force) are in dual-military marriages¹⁶. There are no statistics available for the UK, but it is fair to assume a similar percentage. A significant proportion of UK Service personnel are also single parents, who for whatever reason are raising their children on their own whilst balancing a military career. If both parents in dual-military marriages are deployed at the same time, or single parents are sent to sea or war, they must find temporary guardians for their children, often at short notice.

It is almost impossible for a single mother to care for her child and have a sea-going career in the Royal Navy unless there is family support. In almost every case where the Royal Navy and Royal Marines Children's Fund has been involved in assisting a single, serving mother who is having to go to sea to progress her career, the mother has ended up leaving the Navy. A single rating simply does not earn enough money to cover the costs of childcare, and the strains become too much to bear.

If the children are left with temporary guardians, they may have little knowledge of how to handle the increased emotional or physical needs of children separated from their parents. If grandparents are able to step in and look after the children, they may face challenges of their own, such as physical impairments or different parenting values than what the children are used to.

In addition, it is highly likely that the grandparents or guardians live a distance away from the children's home, as Service personnel often relocate from their childhood home to a military base or its surrounding area. This requirement to suddenly move areas to live with their grandparents can restrict children's access to Naval support Services or friends from their military community who may be going through the same ordeal.

CASE STUDY - SINGLE NAVY DAD

One example where the Charity has helped is the case of Paul, a Royal Navy Officer who is now a single parent to his three children (ages 4, 6 and 8) after his wife died at the end of last year. This has been a traumatic time for all involved, and the Charity covered various respite costs while the Mum was ill.

What is more, just six months after the Mum's funeral, Paul was deployed to Afghanistan, and the Charity has continued to support the children while they stay with their grandparents while Paul is away.

2. IMPACT OF A TEMPORARY ONE-PARENT, OR NO-PARENT, FAMILY

CASE STUDY - SEVERE UPHEAVAL

At one US elementary school in 2006, an active-duty single mother was sent to Afghanistan. The girl was in the 3rd grade and had diabetes. She had to move from her home school to another state several hours away and to a new school. Her grandmother, whom she had only seen two times in her life, became her caregiver. The grandmother was not educated on diabetes or the child's care.

The child was tearful and scared for many reasons. She feared that her mother would be harmed and wouldn't return. She was worried about her own health and was fearful about going to a new school where she didn't know anyone. The school nurse at her home school reassured her that she would help the receiving school take good care of her. The school nurse arranged for the endocrinologist to see the student prior to the move and to update all orders. The mother wrote specific instructions for the grandmother and the school on the student's care. The student was instructed by the school nurse on carbohydrate counting and signs of hyperglycemia and hypoglycemia.

This child was relocated for seven months. When she returned to her home state and school, her blood glucose levels had been in the 300's and consistently higher and it took six weeks before she was regulated again. The effects of deployment affect more than emotions.

[US study of 'issues facing military children in times of deployment, 2008'¹⁷]

UNSETTLING OF FAMILY ROUTINE

68% of Naval spouses say they have to make large adjustments when their partner leaves (or returns) from long periods away from home.

[MoD RN and RM Families' Continuous Attitude Survey, 2006. Statistics taken from respondents for whom the question was relevant]

Whoever is looking after the child during a parent's deployment – and in the vast majority of cases it is their mother – one of the main challenges to navigate is renegotiating boundaries and family roles.

Family boundaries determine who does what in the home and provides a sense of routine and security to children. Deployment and temporary parental absence can create ambiguity. When the parent is physically absent but psychologically present, it can disrupt day-to-day life even more because the family members know that the status quo is only temporary. The goal is ultimately to find a balance between making decisions to keep life functioning, without feeling you are usurping the head of the household.

Does your life change at all when Daddy is away?

"Yes, kind of. Mummy's cooking is rubbish!"

Harry, age 7 [Interviewed as part of Michelle Cross' research on Naval children in Portsmouth, 2009]

"It's boring without him here because I've got my annoying little brother, that means I can't go out because Mum has to look after him."

Oliver, age 8 [Interviewed as part of Michelle Cross' research on Naval children in Portsmouth, 2009]

ASSUMING GREATER RESPONSIBILITIES

For many children, parental deployment can often lead to expectations for them to fulfil the role of the second parent to a certain extent – whether this is increased responsibilities for housework or taking care of younger siblings.

This can have positive impacts, with various studies¹⁸ finding some children take pride in their newly assumed 'adult' role, helping them to grow up faster and therefore be more responsible and dependable.

On the other hand, it can also have negative consequences, with many interviewed children describing the stress of additional chores on top of their already busy schedules with school and extracurricular activities.

"... And when they deploy you get like ... I know in my house, my mom started making me do all the laundry and I had to help her do the dishes, like way more than I normally had to."

Teenager, Air Force base, USA [Interviewed in 2009 by Dr Mmari et al. for academic study 'When a parent goes off to war']

"The children can start to take the role of supporting parents. They have to take on the responsibility - because there are times when I've just cried because the washing machine's broken, the car's broken down and the dishwasher's broken - all in one weekend."

Ruth [a doctor whose husband is a GP in the Army, and who has five children, aged 5 to 18]

"The worst thing that my husband ever did for me was he said 'look after the family' to our four year-old son and then of course he took that on board and then he became... we had battles, oh the battles."

Naval spouse and mother [Samantha O'Shaughnessy's research on Service children in Portsmouth and Plymouth]

2. IMPACT OF A TEMPORARY ONE-PARENT, OR NO-PARENT, FAMILY

LACK OF FATHER FIGURE

"The boys left behind think they are the male of the family; they try to replace the dominant figure. Most Servicemen are very dominant figures. You have to be a strong mother to counteract that and if they're not so strong then that's when it can cause problems."

Naval spouse and mother [Samantha O'Shaughnessy's research on Service children in Portsmouth and Plymouth]

Another challenge of the father being deployed is that the mother not only has to take on the jobs of the 'head of the household' (e.g. paying bills, changing plugs, etc) but they also are expected to take over the male parenting role. This can either be the disciplinarian's role, or the more playful and 'fun' parent:

"For my younger child, my husband is the one that does all of the fun stuff with the kids and right now, it is kind of difficult. I have to take on the role of the mom and dad and work, and it is hard for them too – their play person is gone and it is big challenge for us right now."

Air Force spouse and mother, USA [Interviewed in 2009 by Dr Mmari et al. for academic study 'When a parent goes off to war']

In addition to this being a challenge inside the home, it can also affect the child's extracurricular activities. One mother described how her son had to even drop out of boy scouts because he didn't have a father around with whom he could do the activities:

"When you hit boy scouts, it is really about the dads, and if you don't have a dad, it is very awkward with the camp outs and those things."

Air Force spouse and mother, USA [Interviewed in 2009 by Dr Mmari et al. for academic study 'When a parent goes off to war']

"The absences are harder for the boys 'cos the rough play fighting and stuff the mother doesn't tend to do, Tommy misses that man to man stuff when my husband is away."

Naval spouse and mother [Samantha O'Shaughnessy's research on Service children in Portsmouth and Plymouth]



CASE STUDY - HELP BOYS BE BOYS



Dear RNRM Children's Fund,
I just wanted to thank you for the VIP tickets to the Portsmouth v Manchester City game that we went to today.

I have never been to a football match before in my life (my son has only been to one match before with his father but this was not in Portsmouth, it was in Stoke which his father supports).

My son really enjoyed it and it was a real treat considering how expensive the tickets are and he would never have the opportunity to go to see Portsmouth play if it had not been for the kindness of yourself and the Trustees in giving them to us.

Thank you once again
Shirley Jones

Without a father figure regularly around, Douglas (age 10) is missing out on activities a young boy would typically do with his father. To help Douglas with the nightmares and sleepwalking he has been suffering from, the Children's Fund gave him and his Mum a grant so they could see Portsmouth FC play football.

2. IMPACT OF A TEMPORARY ONE-PARENT, OR NO-PARENT, FAMILY

CHILDCARE

15% of the charity's expenditure is on providing childcare and respite.

The final issue to consider when evaluating the struggles of being a one-parent family is childcare. When a parent is on their own and living a distance from close family, having access to childcare can be essential. It is a frequent tale that the charity hears.

"Living on my husband's military wage, I didn't have enough money to travel to visit my family as often as I would have liked, or pay for childcare. I remember I was even asked to leave an art class because I bought my baby along and I was breast-feeding her. I had no other option as both my family, and my husband's family lived away from us. I was too proud to ask for help, but just a little help – such as with childcare now and then – would have made such a difference."

Jo Swinhoe [Navy wife and mother of two]

IMPACTS ON THE CHILD FROM A TEMPORARY AND DIFFERENT FAMILY SET-UP

POSITIVE

- Mature with extra household responsibilities gained
- Learn to be more resilient during stressful situations in future
- Develop better relationship with absent parent due to franker and more honest discussions in letters/emails/blueys which you wouldn't say face-to-face or day-to-day

NEGATIVE

- Confusion and insecurity with new role in the household
- Miss out on activities you'd normally do with the absent parent – e.g. scouts/football with Dad
- Consequences of remaining parent not coping with the situation
- Need to temporarily move home and school

"In all walks of life, families who are separated have problems. Children need their parents and parents miss their children.

In my experience I have seen that this is exacerbated in the Royal Navy, where parents serving on a ship thousands of miles away are inevitably unable to give their children the support they need. This can often lead to behavioural problems and unhappiness. On the other hand, we need experienced people in the Royal Navy, and this is where charities such as the Royal Navy and Royal Marines Children's Fund do such good work. I hope everyone will give them their full support."

Richard Ottaway MP

[Speaking from personal experience, having been a former Officer in the Royal Navy: Artificer Apprentice, 1961-1964; Seaman Officer, 1965-1970, and the Royal Naval Reserve: 1971-1982]

My Dad works on the H.M.S Endurance,
the only boat that can brake the ice
of antarctica



3. INFLUENCE OF THE MEDIA

When examining the stresses and strains experienced by children while their parent is away, it is impossible not to consider the impact of the modern media. It is so influential, that this report has dedicated a specific section to the topic.

Our experience has shown that children are especially vulnerable to the media – be it the arguments they hear on TV shows, images they see on the news, or statement headlines on the front of newspapers. During an interview with an 8 year-old boy earlier this year (as part of Michelle Cross' research for her dissertation is Early Years Childhood Studies¹⁹) it was clear that young children quickly absorb information they hear on TV. Following a piece on Afghanistan on Newsround (a news programme aimed at children), the little boy told Michelle: *"People die in the Army and Navy, yeah. 10 people in 10 days have been killed"* – echoing the statistic he learnt on the programme.

As one of our experience boxes on the right demonstrates, the media not only can be a external force in children's lives, reporting on war efforts, but it can also be a primary influencer of their well-being and distress. The box provides a snapshot of some of the instances of media influences from the Gulf War.

EXPERIENCE BOX - FIRST GULF WAR

When the Gulf War kicked off in 1990 and Naval personnel were suddenly deployed to the Middle East, it had a gripping effect on the families and children back at home. For various primary and secondary schools in Plymouth and Portsmouth interviewed for this report, they witnessed how the media had a direct influence on how their pupils and parents coped with the situation. Examples of what happened include:

- The Gulf War was one of the first conflicts to be subjected to the modern media sandstorm of scrutiny and 24/7 updates. In many cases, it was the media who first found out the names of the deceased and announced them before the MoD had got its act together and contacted the next of kin. For parents and older children, this created a constant sense of suspense and worry – "every time I watched the news, I kept thinking – am I going to hear his name? I couldn't bear it." [Katy, RN mother and wife]
- Whilst many children couldn't understand the vocal reports on the news, or were shielded from it by their parents, they couldn't escape the images on TV and on the front of newspapers. Many children were continually distressed, anxious and upset by the reoccurring images they'd see of black body bags being flown home and were fearful their dad might be in one.
- For one little boy aged 8, called Fred, the constant suspense and distressing images on the news was too much. One morning, Fred's mum entered his bedroom to find he had hung himself, unable to cope with the emotional distress of the situation.
- The media not only provided war reports which Naval families watched, but they also sought for the Naval families to become part of the story. As soon as Naval deployments happened, the media – eager for a human angle to the action – congregated outside certain schools near Naval bases on the south coast to film the families' reactions to the deployment. For days, the press camped outside the school gates, and the Royal Navy and Royal Marines Children's Fund organised for a counsellor to be based in the school to give advice and support to the mums and pupils of the school. Unfortunately, after being followed home by TV cameras with questions being bombarded at her, one Mum found the situation too much to cope with. That night she took an overdose and the next morning was rushed to hospital. The charity helped organise childcare and support for the children whilst their Mum returned to health and was helped to mentally process and cope with the situation.

4. ADJUSTMENTS TO FAMILY LIFE WHEN A PARENT RETURNS

"When Daddy comes right through the door I go jumpy, jumpy, jumpy. When he is away I am sad."

Matt, age 7 [Interviewed as part of Michelle Cross' research on Naval children in Portsmouth, 2009]

It is a common misconception that the difficulty of separation instantly evaporates when the deployed parent returns home. As parents exit and re-enter the family unit, children inevitably experience shifts in their experience of parenting. Whilst the immediate reunion can be joyous and relieving, a parent's return can often be just as challenging for children as the separation.

We have observed there are six 'reunion challenges' which families often have to overcome when the serving parent returns home:

A. RE-ASSIGNING ROLES AND BOUNDARIES

Once a family has adjusted to life without the deployed parent and everyone has been given new responsibilities, it can often be tricky for family members to relinquish their new roles and revert to the 'old' system. In turn, when the Service personnel returns home, they may feel superfluous or excluded from the family if they are not naturally able to slip back into their previous roles.

In addition, it is often the case that children adapt and become accustomed to the particular parenting style of their mother while their father is away, but then experience confusion when the system changes back to two parents.

"For me, I can explain it simply as I keep the house very, very neat when father is gone and then father comes home and there is stuff everywhere. It completely throws off my kids because they are so used to thinking in such a neat way, and then father, yeah, they have such a routine and it is not really the fault of the soldier, it is just that they come and they are like, "I'm home," and they just want to relax and let everything out and it does, the transition of the coming back is really hard to understand."

Air Force spouse and mother, USA [Interviewed in 2009 by Dr Mmari et al. for academic study 'When a parent goes off to war']

"But I know it is challenging for a kid to go by either mother or father while the other parent is away and then when they come back, the parenting style is a little different. Mom has already instilled something—I'm sure it's confusing for them as well. "Well, who do I listen to or I've been doing this all year, so why is he or why is she telling me something different now?"

Army spouse and mother, USA [Interviewed in 2009 by Dr Mmari et al. for academic study 'When a parent goes off to war']

B. CHANGES TO HOUSEHOLD MANAGEMENT

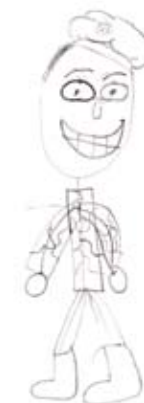
Returning spouses may also experience frustration when returning home, because they feel an intense need to normalize their lives but realize that they are unfamiliar with the new management of the household. Feelings of unfamiliarity may increase tensions between the couple to such an extent that subsequent deployments are welcomed as a source of relief from conflict.

"When Daddy's back home, there's double the amount of telling off."

James, age 7 [Interviewed as part of Michelle Cross' research on Naval children in Portsmouth, 2009]

And of course, for the children, not only do they have to cope with getting reacquainted with their returned parent, but their established household routine often gets flipped on its head. It can be the case that the returned parent seeks to establish control in all the areas they can – and discipline and providing guidelines to their children is frequently chosen. Whether it is no longer being allowed to use the phone to talk to their friends at a certain hour of the evening, or participate in afterschool activities, children may find certain elements of their life changing. In addition, many children can feel pressured that they have to spend all their free time with their returned parent when, in fact, many felt that they have hardly anything to talk about, as they "barely knew anything about him."

One example the RN RM Children's Fund has witnessed of how hard it can be to integrate back into the household is when Rob, a Royal Marines Officer, returned home from Iraq. He suggested to his son Toby that they head to the park together, only to be greeted with the answer, "hold on, I've got to go ask Mum's permission first". For a burly Marine used to commanding troops in the battlefield, it can be tough to realise that Mum has had to assume the role of head of household and he no longer holds this position in his child's eyes.



4. ADJUSTMENTS TO FAMILY LIFE WHEN A PARENT RETURNS

C. PARENTAL REJECTION, ANXIETY AND RE-BONDING

Another factor which can make a parent's return particularly stressful for the child is the fact that the two of them might have to become reacquainted. This can often be the most difficult aspect of the entire deployment cycle, as both children and parents have changed, and it can require a great deal of time, energy and stress to get to know each other again.

A frequent problem for Service families during reunion, especially those with young children, is when the child rejects the parent or is anxious in his or her presence. The parent could have deployed when the child was an infant and return to a child who has changed significantly and no longer recognises them. Others may return to infants who were born while they were away and become frustrated by the strict household regime necessary to accommodate the child (e.g., feeding or sleeping schedules). Ultimately, men may also experience jealousy because their wives or partners have less time for them²⁰.

"When your parents are gone for so long and then they'll leave and you'll be like 12 and then they come back and you're like 14 and you have changed so much and you don't really like know them because you kind of forget little things about them and they don't know you because you have grown up."

Teenager of Army personnel, USA [Interviewed in 2009 by Dr Mmari et al. for academic study 'When a parent goes off to war']

"As much as we change while our parents are deployed, they change as well. Like going into a war zone and stuff, they come back completely different people sometimes. It's like my dad can't sleep with his back to a door. . . . It has kind of changed how we are in the house a bit; it's a little stricter and he doesn't want me to go out as much."

Teenager of Air Force personnel, USA [Interviewed in 2009 by Dr Mmari et al. for academic study 'When a parent goes off to war']

D. WHEN THE HONEYMOON EFFECT WEARS OFF

Reunion often is a greatly anticipated and romanticized event, and a reunion honeymoon period may initially be accompanied by greater family cohesiveness. However, problems can soon start to arise, and old issues swept under the carpet have had time to fester and become even more substantial. This change can be sudden and take family members by surprise, often meaning children find it hard to adjust.

"On his first night back, I'd cooked all his favourite food, but neither of us knew what to say to the other. He'd been gone such a long time that everything I'd been doing seemed an irrelevance. Why would he want to know about the TV breaking down when he'd been watching people die? I couldn't start a conversation and we just sat there, eating in silence. It was awful."

Kate, Navy wife [speaking of when her husband returned from a six-month tour to Afghanistan just before Christmas]

E. RE-ESTABLISHING RELATIONSHIPS

Couples where one parent (or both) are in the military face unique stressors because of the situation. It can be tough on a relationship for one parent to be continually away for months at a time in dangerous situations, and then the expectation to re-adjust back to 'normal' suddenly. Due to the amount of problems couples frequently experience when a husband/wife returns, Professor Kathryn Basham²¹ asked the question 'is homecoming a safe haven or the new front?'. For some couples, they are able to successfully navigate through the hurdles erected by military life, yet for others, deployment and conflict shake the foundations of their partnership beyond repair. For further exploration of this challenge, see the section later in this chapter on family breakdown.

F. SERVICE MEMBER'S PHYSICAL AND MENTAL CONDITION

How Dad or Mum has coped with the consequences of being at sea, or in war, will have a direct impact on their children. Serving parents can return home with physical and mental issues, especially after combat situations, and some families will be changed forever because of it.

Reunion can also be stressful if the returning Service member is experiencing Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) – even if this disorder has not yet been diagnosed. Research conducted in 2007 by Kings College London²² found that Armed Forces personnel who were deployed for 13 months or more in the past three years were more likely to suffer from PTSD and experience problems at home after deployment. Symptoms of PTSD can include nightmares and flashbacks, withdrawal from activities (e.g., sports, hobbies, work), and detachment from others. This can inhibit the maintenance and development of emotional connections to family members and children can feel alienated from their returned parent. Such family adjustments may be especially difficult during times when the broader society does not support military operations or views military members negatively.

The full challenge of PTSD and other mental and physical injuries is explored later in this chapter.

5. IMPACT OF MOVING HOMES, SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES

Frequent moves are a feature of Service life, and when the family follows the serving parent to a new area, it can have a distinct impact on all involved. For the children, the move means settling into a new home in a new location, making new friends and attending a new school.

The cross-Government Command Paper 7424, published in July 2008, cemented the principle that no Service person or their family should be disadvantaged by Service life. However, this is not always possible as the logistics and realities of relocation often put pressure and stress on families.

One factor which exacerbates the situation for children of Royal Navy and Royal Marines personnel is the 'trickle posting' system. The Naval Service relocates its personnel on an individual basis. This means that whilst RAF or Army families are generally moving with other families from the serving personnel's unit or company, Naval families are often relocating on their own. The children typically do not have any Service friends who will also be attending the new school, or moving to the new area with them.

Over 42,000 Service personnel and their families live in Ministry of Defence accommodation, with just under half (20,000) moving each year²³. Aside from the fact that the 2009 House of Commons Public Accounts Committee report on Service accommodation found that nearly a third of Service families consider their properties to be in a poor condition, the number of families moving each year is in fact much higher than 20,000. This is because many Naval and RAF families typically own or rent private accommodation, and they are not included in the figure of those who move within Service accommodation. Whilst there are various upsides to

living in private accommodation, it also means that when a family moves into a new area, they do not necessarily have any other Service families around them, which can make settling into a new community that much more difficult.

Based on the Royal Navy and Royal Marines Children's Fund's experience, there are five main issues facing Service children when it comes to moving. They are explored over the next few pages:



"One of the greatest burdens service families have to cope with is the absence of a loved one for prolonged lengths of time. In recent years, the stress of this absence has been added to by the nature of the hazardous operations on which people from all three arms have been deployed. With 9,000 members of the armed services deployed on operations in Afghanistan, there are around 50 - 60,000 partners, parents or close relatives who watch the news every night with high levels of concern and stress.

"We have to understand the impact that prolonged periods of absenteeism, particularly when on operations, has on families, and children in particular. Employers, schools, universities and colleges all need to understand the levels of stress these people are under when they are concerned for a loved one serving in operations. Greater training is required across our public services and more support is required for the individuals concerned. I pay tribute to the Royal Navy and Royal Marines Children's Fund for the work they do. The need for them has never been greater."

Richard Benyon MP

[Speaking from personal experience having served in the Royal Green Jackets, 1980-1985]

5. IMPACT OF MOVING HOMES, SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES

A. HOW MANY SERVICE CHILDREN ARE IN UK SCHOOLS?

The number of Service children currently being educated in LEA maintained schools is unknown. There is a significant population of British Service children living abroad, but this will not be the focus of this report, as the charity concentrates its work to children living in the UK.

Estimates range from 90,000, by Ofsted²⁴, to 186,000, by Mike Curtis, Chairman of the 'Service children In State Schools' Working Group²⁵. CEAS, the Children's Education Advisory Service, estimates there are about 750 schools in England and Wales who have Service children ranging from 1% or 2% to 100% of their 'number on roll'. Yet despite these statistics, the picture still remains vague.

Back in 2006, the House of Commons Defence Committee, as part of its inquiry into the education of the children of Service personnel, found it "unacceptable that there is currently no means of determining a reliable figure for the number of Service children in UK schools". Unfortunately, three years on, this is still the case.

The Committee's report recommended this data should be captured in the Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC) conducted by the then DfES (now DCSF) every January. However, whilst a question about Service children was introduced in 2008, it is still ineffective as the census lists the question as 'optional', meaning its response rate is too low. For many reasons, some parents do not wish the school to know their son or daughter is a 'Service child' for the connotations it brings. In other cases, some schools in non-military areas are just unaware if the information is not actively told to them. This is unacceptable and has to be urgently addressed with a dedicated and holistic strategy.

Boarding schools

Some Service parents choose to educate their children at boarding schools to ensure the continuity of education and to provide a supportive environment for the child, especially as schools can often have counseling Services available and more one-to-one support. The Boarding Schools Association, which represents over 500 boarding schools in the UK, estimated (in 2006) there are 10,871 Service children at boarding school²⁶. This statistic echoes the findings of the MoD's Continuous Attitude Survey, which found that 9.1% of Naval families surveyed had one or more children at boarding school.

The Royal Navy and Royal Marines Children's Fund frequently helps children to attend boarding school. The charity is presently supporting 107 children at boarding school as some of the children have special educational needs, and others have emotional needs and behavioural problems. The BSA argues that continuity of education is one of the keys to educational success, both in its widest sense, and in its more limited measure of academic performance.

"I first went to a boarding school at the age of 11, now at 16 I can say that compared to all other schools I recently attended, this one is most definitely the best. My dad currently serves in the Royal Navy - this gave myself and my three younger sisters a chance to a better education. The boarding school I am at now is excellent. Before I went there 5 years ago, I hated going to school, but now I think that one of the best parts of the day is the education! I personally think that boarding schools are the best of education a child/young person could receive, it is truly amazing."

Naval daughter [Submission to House of Commons Defence Committee report into 'Educating Service children', 2006]



"As the son of a professional soldier, the nephew of a submariner and the grandson of an RAF officer who served in World War Two, I have a deep personal connection and admiration for each of Her Majesty's Armed Forces."

"I remain extremely proud of my late father's service and my earliest memories are of parades taking place at various military bases across the UK. When growing up around my father and his colleagues I was always struck by the dedication, discipline, courage and community spirit that the Armed Forces had instilled in them – values so often lacking in much of modern-day Britain. I fully support the Royal Navy and Royal Marine's Children's Fund which carries out invaluable work with the children of Naval personnel in times of great need."

Mark Field MP

[Speaking from the perspective of a service child and personal experience of the service lifestyle]

5. IMPACT OF MOVING HOMES, SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES

B. CONSEQUENCES OF MOBILITY

Service children of school age who accompany their parents on postings experience a high degree of disruption to their education. During the House of Commons Defence Select Committee's inquiry in 2006, it found that the mobility of Service children can be very high. For example, it found that Montgomery Junior School in Colchester, which is comprised of approximately 90% Service children, had mobility levels of over 100%. It also received evidence from one teenager who had already attended 11 different schools so far.

Emotional and social consequences

There are considerable consequences experienced by Service children as a result of mobility. Some of them can be positive, such as developing the ability to socialize and make friends quickly, learning to be more adaptable, increased confidence and a sense of perspective gained from living in multiple locations and communities. However, many consequences are also much more challenging.

"The issues raised through mobility are many and complex at pupil, parent, school and teacher levels. For children, the social and emotional issues vary considerably; some appear to cope and show little sign of trauma when leaving or joining the school, whilst others are noticeably affected. Interestingly, it is not just the children who leave the school who show signs of distress, often it is the friends who are left behind who have lost someone they really care for."

Teacher of Service children [Submission to House of Commons Defence Committee report into 'Educating Service children', 2006]

The MoD has produced a 'handbook'²⁷ to provide advice and help ease the process for schools, parents and children. In the handbook, the MoD lists the following as 'possible problems' mobile children can endure:

- A sense of loss at each move
- Extrovert or introvert behaviour, especially if a parent is on active Service
- Insecurity
- A dependence on adults and/or other Service children and siblings
- Special educational needs (see later)
- Language difficulties (for children who grew up overseas)
- Difficulty in making commitments to relationships with peers, adults and schools as a whole – the danger of disaffection
- Curricular discontinuity
- Complications with public examination courses
- Inability to go on holiday with serving parent if are deployed or on active Service during school holidays

"Service children are wonderful and have great personality and enthusiasm. They do cope with change well on the outside but the older they get the more they are affected by loss of friendships. Again for those left behind it can be equally upsetting."

Teacher of Service children [Submission to House of Commons Defence Committee report into 'Educating Service children', 2006]

The Defence Select Committee report concluded, "moving schools is stressful for all children and frequent moves can have a significant detrimental impact on young people, particularly on their willingness to form friendships with their peers".

"We consider it self-evident that the children of Service personnel should receive at least the same quality of schooling and educational opportunity as any child being educated in the UK. We demand much of our Service personnel, not least that they adopt a lifestyle that is often turbulent and sometimes dangerous. In turn, Service personnel deserve assurance that their children's education will not suffer because of their parent's employment."

Conclusion of House of Commons Defence Committee report into 'Educating Service children', 2006

Securing a place at school

The nature of mobility means that families often have to move at short notice, or with limited information on their new destination. This can cause significant problems, such as when it comes to securing a place at school in the new area for the Service child.

"I cannot put my daughter's name down for a school without an address. The Government will not give me an address until our turn for allocation is up. Having contacted the schools in the area we think we will be housed in, the majority of them are full with big waiting lists. Those that are not full, cannot accept our details without a) an address or b) a confirmed date (our move is scheduled for August when the schools will be closed). Any places available now cannot be kept open for my daughter as we don't move until the summer, when my husband returns from Afghanistan. Can the process for housing/schools not be made easier/quicker/less stressful for Service families?"

Naval wife and mother [Submission to House of Commons Defence Committee report into 'Educating Service children', 2006]

5. IMPACT OF MOVING HOMES, SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES

"Postings mid-year play havoc with family life. We moved within the UK during March and could not get a pre-school place for our rising 4 yr old, nor a Reception year place for her the following September in the good local school (top of the league table). To ensure we had a place and to get high quality schooling, we decided to go private."

Naval wife and mother [Submission to House of Commons Defence Committee report into 'Educating Service children', 2006]

- 43% of Naval families have experienced **problems finding a place** for their children at the school of their choice
- 26% of Naval families who did experience problems obtaining a place at the school of their choice **did not have their issue resolved** or a satisfactory solution found
- 64% of Naval families have **experienced problems with the differences in the standard of their child's education** when changing schools
- 62% of Naval families have experienced **problems with the difference in syllabus content** when their child changes schools
- 52% of Naval families have experienced **problems with the information available on schools** prior to a change in draft

[MoD Royal Navy and Royal Marines Families' Continuous Attitude Survey, 2006. Statistics taken from respondents for whom the question was relevant]

Educational consequences

The 2002 Ofsted report, 'Managing Pupil Mobility'²⁸, found that whilst the relationship between a child's mobility and educational attainment is complex, "almost all schools with mobility above 15% have GCSE scores below the national average". A UK study in 1999²⁹ also found that 'up to two out of every five pupils fail to make expected progress during the year immediately following the change of school'.

CEAS also commissioned a study³⁰ by NFER (the National Foundation for Educational Research) to look into the attainment of Service children. Whilst the NFER could not complete the final part of its study because it could not identify how many Service children there were in the educational system, it echoed the Ofsted report, finding that mobile pupils gained lower GCSE grades than their 'stationary' peers.

Postings can also cause considerable disruption to a student's education, particularly if it is during GCSE and A-level years.

"It is apparent that there is no communication regarding possible postings between the people responsible for postings and the soldier. Forethought should be given for children when a posting is within the GCSE and AS/A Level years. If such a course has started, it should be policy that the soldier is only posted within the school catchment area. Both my children have suffered by postings within GCSE and A Level courses, one is a whole year behind their peers."

Naval wife and mother [Submission to House of Commons Defence Committee report into 'Educating Service children', 2006]

"Children suffer if they have to move during an exam course. Not everyone seems to be aware that once the second year of a two year exam course has begun, the family have an entitlement to stay in quarter and therefore at the same school until the exam is done, even if this means Mum staying to see the child through while Dad goes off to his new posting. Not an ideal solution but better than no support at all."

Naval wife and mother [Submission to House of Commons Defence Committee report into 'Educating Service children', 2006]

"I am a Service father of 3 children who is deploying to Portugal with my family. I know that when I return to the UK in two and half years time (Sep '08)- I will not be allocated an address in enough time to be allocated a school place at a school of our choice i.e in our catchment area. The closing dates are usually around January - I will be lucky enough to have an appointment at this time, let alone an address. This is a worry."

Serving father [Submission to House of Commons Defence Committee report into 'Educating Service children', 2006]

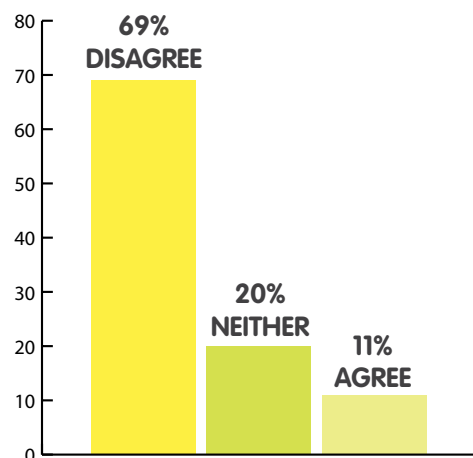
"Education is a huge issue for Service families, especially if they choose to have their children educated in the state sector. The government policy of parental choice has obviously impacted on Service children's education as schools appear to have no obligation to provide places for children in their catchment area if they are full – the class limit for Key Stage 1 is 30. Also, why should a school forgo the pro rata money from a pupil to hold a certain number of school places for children of Service personnel?"

[Submission to House of Commons Defence Committee report into 'Educating Service children', 2006]

5. IMPACT OF MOVING HOMES, SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES

In addition, depending on the pattern and timing of movements, a school may receive no information about a child until some time after their arrival. This means it may be unclear what the child has previously studied and leave children being moved to different curriculums and children experiencing gaps in learning. There are instances where children arrive at a new school only with their latest exercise books as a guide to their educational attainment, with formal records arriving weeks or months later. Some parents also report that children are bored repeating areas of the curriculum or that they are left to study alone something different from the rest of the group they have just joined.

'I FEEL THAT MY CHILDREN'S EDUCATION DOES NOT SUFFER DUE TO THE MOVES WE'VE HAD'



[MoD Royal Navy and Royal Marines Families' Continuous Attitude Survey, 2006. Statistics taken from respondents for whom the question was relevant]

Financial consequences

Moving house can be expensive. Whilst some help is sometimes provided, there inevitably ends up being a financial cost to the Service family.

Sometimes relocation is necessary to be near other families members to help out. One example with which the charity has assisted is the case of Eddie.

Eddie, age 6, was born with the rare genetic disorder, Cri-du-chat, and is therefore highly disabled. A comprehensive work plan has been put in place for his needs, and as part of this, his therapist recommended that a Terrier Trike would be vital for his treatment. However, Eddie and his family have just moved across the country to a bungalow to be nearer to Eddie's mum's family, as Eddie's dad is in the Royal Marines and was about to be deployed to Afghanistan. The move took up all the family's spare cash, so the charity assisted towards the cost of the Trike.



"As the son of a soldier in the Regular Army, I had first hand experience of the strain on families of a parent going off on operations when my own father served in the Suez campaign and the Cyprus troubles. With the pace of operations today the absences of parents, especially fathers, on operations have become much more frequent for large numbers of service families.

"Canvassing on the married quarter estate for our local regiment, I met one little boy whose father had been badly wounded the previous night on active service. It brought home to me the stress which young children are bearing as result of their parents' service.

"Meeting members of my own former TA unit who had just returned from operations brought home again the long periods which their families, who don't even live in a military community, have to bear. The work done in this area by the Royal Navy and Royal Marines Children's Fund is extremely important."

Julian Brazier MP

[Speaking from personal experience as an Army son and Officer in the Territorial Army for 13 years]

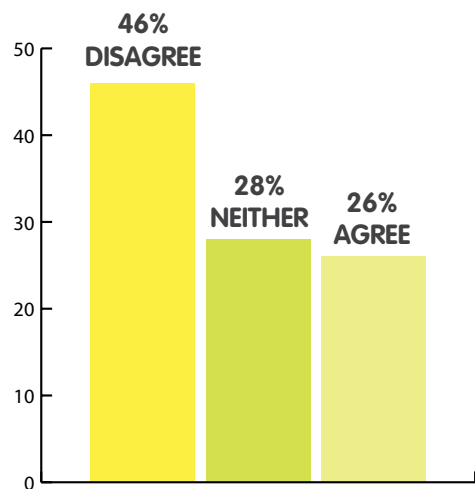
5. IMPACT OF MOVING HOMES, SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES

C. KNOWLEDGE AND CONSIDERATION OF SCHOOLS

Some schools are very familiar with the challenges faced by Service children, and are able to appreciate what stresses and strains a child might be experiencing when their parent is on active Service, or how tricky it can be to settle into a new school. Other schools, however, are not as familiar with these issues. If a school cannot understand the life of Service children and provide appropriate support, it can have an additional impact on the child.

In the MoD's research into this issue, just under half (46%) said that schools are understanding and accommodating to the problems faced by Service families.

'SCHOOLS ARE UNDERSTANDING/ACCOMMODATING TO THE PROBLEMS WE FACE AS RN/RM FAMILIES'



[MoD Royal Navy and Royal Marines Families' Continuous Attitude Survey, 2006. Statistics taken from respondents for whom the question was relevant]

In her research into this issue, Samantha O'Shaughnessy³¹ asked Naval spouses how schools could be more understanding and supportive of Naval children. The most popular response related to holidays. One third of respondents wanted schools to be more flexible in allowing children to take time off if their serving parent returns home during term time, especially if they have been away on a long deployment.

In 2006, Mike Curtis (Chairman of the 'Service children In State Schools' Working Group) echoed this²⁶, saying "the desire of many families to take a holiday when the parent who is in the forces returns from active duty abroad. This family bonding session is important in re-establishing the roles, responsibilities and caring in the family." This is a much debated topic, but measures like this can help ease the transition back into family life and kick start the re-bonding process between parent and child.

Another topic which caused a great deal of frustration to Naval spouses when interviewed related to how their children are viewed. Some schools were appreciative of the lifestyle of Service children, whilst others just saw the children as a temporary annoyance which would impact their attainment and attendance figures.

"I'm coming to the end of my PhD in which I have looked at the experiences of education of army children. In my research, it has become clear that there is a vast difference between the perceptions of army students and their teachers/policy makers. The army students I interviewed all mentioned their feelings of sadness when moving and leaving friends, whereas teachers and policy makers were most concerned about missing records/funding. It strikes me that there needs to be more understanding about what matters to the children

involved – by looking at their needs, we might be able to make their experiences better."

PhD student [Submission to House of Commons Defence Committee report into 'Educating Service children', 2006]

57% of Naval spouses said their children's behaviour is different at school when their spouse is away.

"My daughter's headteacher is aware of the problems and she's quite sympathetic. One of her big things at the moment is school attendance which she feels could be better, but she's still sympathetic to Service families who are trying to get their families together around the constraints of leave and that kind of thing."

Naval spouse and mother [Samantha O'Shaughnessy's research on Service children in Portsmouth and Plymouth]

"Teachers always blame the fact that the kids are just being naughty. I don't think they are very supportive, no. Well, it depends on the teacher."

Naval spouse and mother [Samantha O'Shaughnessy's research on Service children in Portsmouth and Plymouth]

"I think the child's behaviour in class depends on the right teacher being there, a good teacher."

Naval spouse and mother [Samantha O'Shaughnessy's research on Service children in Portsmouth and Plymouth]

Samantha O'Shaughnessy's research also looked into how children can change according to what's happening at home – i.e. if their parent has been deployed to active Service, etc.

"His teacher will come out and say 'he's been a bit offish today, is his Dad away?'. His concentration goes down when his Dad's away...things are harder for him at school."

Naval spouse and mother [Samantha O'Shaughnessy's research on Service children in Portsmouth and Plymouth]

5. IMPACT OF MOVING HOMES, SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES

THE MOST FREQUENT CHANGES IN CHILDREN'S BEHAVIOUR AT SCHOOL

- =1. They are more upset and emotional
- =1. They have poor concentration
 - 2. They are quieter
- =3. They are more helpful
- =3. They don't want to go to school
- =3. They are cheeky and/or answer back
- =3. They are more moody

[Samantha O'Shaughnessy's research of Naval spouses with children living in Portsmouth and Plymouth, 2004]

Changes such as these can exacerbate why Service children can often be regarded as 'military brats' – see next chapter for details.

On the other hand, schools can play a vital role in recognising and assisting when children are not coping well during stressful periods – e.g. time of parental deployment, etc. The school can provide emotional anchors for the thousands of children whose lives are frequently disrupted. It is important for children to maintain normal routines and to interact with their peers, and the school environment provides the stability to enable them to do this.

Teachers are often the first to observe changing behaviors in children. Since the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, various school personnel have noticed increased behavior problems among military children and youth in school:

"Right now, we are in a time of war. We have been in a time of peace for so long that I think for military kids, you didn't even notice that they were military kids. You know, they packed up and moved, and everything was fine. But I think in the past couple of years, we have seen a lot more behavioral problems and a lot more instability—a lot more problems because their parents have been pulled away from them."

Teacher, near Air Force base, USA [Interviewed in 2009 by Dr Mmari et al. for academic study 'When a parent goes off to war']

D. INTEGRATING SERVICE CHILDREN INTO SCHOOLS

Schools can sometimes be reluctant to accept Service children for the number of administrative challenges it brings. As mentioned previously, due to Service children often joining and leaving the school at unusual times of year, it can influence the school's attendance record, which in turn affects its funding.

One problem can be anticipating the number of Service children who will be entering or exiting the school in advance. The example below is the case of Zouch Primary School in Tidworth, which was the subject of Wiltshire County Council's memorandum to the 2006 Defence Select Committee inquiry into the education of Service children:

"Individual bases are often unaware until the last moment of precise redeployment, and the particular housing which will be allocated to Service families. This means, for example, that in 2005, Zouch Primary in Tidworth was preparing for a significant influx of children in September, who eventually attended another school in Hampshire which was closer to their quarters near Andover. The school set its budget and staffing levels in the previous April on the anticipation of increased numbers and now faces a deficit budget as a result."

The system for the transfer of student records between schools is also often poor and in need of improvement. There are particular problems for Service children with special needs.

E. SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

Around 18% of all pupils in school in England (1.5 million children) are categorised as having some sort of special educational need (SEN)³². When a child has a special educational need, it is one thing to deal with. When their parent is in the Armed Forces and they have to move schools to follow the posting of their parents, it can become another challenge altogether.

This issue is frequently experienced by the Royal Navy and Royal Marines Children's Fund, so it has been given its own section in this report. Please refer to section 10 later in the chapter for more information.



6. STIGMA OF THE 'MILITARY BRAT' LABEL

In addition to the various challenges created by the Service lifestyle which children have to overcome, they sometimes also have to manage the public's perception of them as a Service child. The term 'military brat', or 'army brat', is frequently bandied around to describe children of Service personnel. Whilst this term is increasingly being recaptured by the Service community as a phrase of endearment, it is most often used in a negative or pejorative sense with the aim of distinguishing the group of Service children as different from everyone else.

It is this viewpoint – of Service children as a sub-set of society, or disregarded as second class citizens – that can cause problems. Many people interviewed for this report, including teachers, parents and children, talked about this reputation of Service children existing for two reasons; either the public does not understand them, or they think 'they won't be here for long'. This attitude also has an impact on the Service children, and what they think is 'normal'.

"My friend Tom, his Dad doesn't even do a Navy job, he's just a normal person really."

Jack, age 8 [Interviewed as part of Michelle Cross' research on Naval children in Portsmouth, 2009]

Some children have a great deal of pride in their parent's military occupation, but for others, they do not think other children will understand. During a 2009 interview with Michelle Cross for her dissertation on Naval children living in Portsmouth, she asked if the little boy (age 7) would like his school friends to know his Daddy is in the Navy. His immediate response was "keep it a secret".



REPUTATION VS. REALITY

One of the main problems of being labelled a 'military brat' is the stereotypical image of a child from a military background which precedes them – one of authoritative parenting, buzz haircuts, withdrawn emotions and relocating frequently.

Whilst many often assume 'military brats' will cause trouble with bad behaviour and being disruptive and argumentative, etc, research has consistently shown them to in fact be better behaved than their civilian counterparts³³. Sociologist Phoebe Price has suggested³⁴ this is because military parents have a lower threshold for misbehavior in their children; Service children are often eager to fit into their new surroundings, and they are aware any bad behaviour might impact on their parent's career.

6. STIGMA OF THE 'MILITARY BRAT' LABEL

TARGETS FOR ANTI-WAR HOSTILITY

One by-product of having a parent work in the modern day Armed Forces is the UK's current presence in Afghanistan (and formerly Iraq). Opinion polls are frequently showing minimal public support for the ongoing war in Afghanistan, and this anti-war sentiment can often bubble over into hostility towards those employed in the Armed Forces and their families. A number of parents and school personnel interviewed for this report mentioned that children of deployed parents are often "prime targets" for bullying, especially during the Iraq War.

Sometimes children can take this bullying and hostility to the extreme. One mother (interviewed earlier this year for a study in America³⁵) said that because she is living 'off base' in a civilian neighborhood, she only tells a few trusted neighbors that her husband has been deployed—and this is primarily to protect her children.



Another mother reported a story of how her son was attacked by a knife from an older child with anti-war parents:

"One of the kids came after my oldest son with a knife because he said my son's father was in the war, and it was like this kid was insinuating that his father was personally responsible for the war and that he shouldn't be in the war. That was devastating for us and it instilled a lot of pain on all of us. Before this incident, it would have never occurred to me that people would consider my children to be responsible for the war. For the rest of the time that we lived in that neighborhood, we were terrified for our safety. My daughter didn't eat for weeks and she was just so afraid."

Service spouse and mother, USA [Interviewed in 2009 by Dr Mmari et al. for academic study 'When a parent goes off to war']

"I have had an experience where my child was being bullied, ended up with a black eye, but was excluded along with the bully for retaliating."

Naval wife and mother [Submission to House of Commons Defence Committee report into 'Educating Service children', 2006]

More than one in ten (12%) Naval spouses feel they have experienced hostility from the local people where they live because they are a 'Service spouse'

[MoD Royal Navy and Royal Marines Families' Continuous Attitude Survey, 2006]

BULLYING

When bullying does occur (for whatever reason), Service children can often respond by retreating into themselves, believing the son or daughter of someone in the military should be tough like their serving parent.

"When my child was bullied, I eventually managed to speak to his form tutor the teacher told me that he had an idea of what was happening due to the fact that he had days where he thought if he pretended not to be in school, no one would notice he was there and often hid himself away."

Naval wife and mother [Submission to House of Commons Defence Committee report into 'Educating Service children', 2006]

In some instances where Service children are shy, finding it hard to make more friends in yet another new school, other children can exploit this 'weakness':

"Some people find it hard to meet new people. These people fade into the background and keep to themselves and be given the title of loner. Some people react to this and talk to them, but others often bully these people. I have seen cases like this everywhere I have moved!!!"

Service child [Submission to House of Commons Defence Committee report into 'Educating Service children', 2006]

7. DEALING WITH A PARENT'S DEATH

More children in the UK experience bereavement than many typically think. Winston's Wish, the leading childhood bereavement charity, reports that every 22 minutes a mother or father of someone under 16 dies, meaning that 24,000 children are bereaved of a parent each year in Britain.

No statistics are collected specifically on the number of Service children who are bereaved each year, but we know that over the last 10 years (1999-2008) 1,617 members of the Armed Forces have died, of which 311 were from the Naval Service. From this we can conclude that hundreds of Service children must have suffered the death of a Service parent during the last decade.

UNCERTAINTY AND FEAR

One of the first issues to consider when looking at how children deal with a parent's death is to appreciate what they go through before they receive the news. The continual fear of the worst happening can cause significant stress on the child and must not be underestimated.

"Once Daddy was in Afghanistan and there was all like these people attacking with guns and that and I keep worrying and he was actually in there shooting a big gun."

Jack, age 8 [Interviewed as part of Michelle Cross' research on Naval children in Portsmouth, 2009]

6% of the children currently supported by the Royal Navy and Royal Marines Children's Fund – over 110 children – have experienced the death of a sibling or parent.

UNDERSTANDING OF SITUATION AND BEREAVEMENT

- **Under the age of 5 or 6:** A young child may not be able to understand that death is permanent nor that it happens to every living thing. A 4-year-old may be able to tell others confidently that 'my daddy's dead', but the next sentence may be: 'I hope he'll be back before my birthday' or 'He's emailing me tonight'.
- **Over the age of 5 or 6:** Slightly older children may still have a hope and belief that the death will not be permanent but are beginning to understand 'forever'. Children bereaved when they are 5 to 8 years-old may feel that they can in some way reverse what has happened: 'Dad will come back if I'm very good and eat my broccoli'. They may also feel – as may older children and young people – that they in some way caused the death: 'I was angry with him for going away again and shouted at him when he left and I refused to give him a hug. And then he never came home again. It's all my fault'.
- **'Older' children:** For older children who understand more about death and dying, the death of a parent may make them anxious about the health and safety of surviving members of the family. They can become clingy or more reluctant to be parted from parents, wanting to stick close to protect their loved ones from the mysterious occurrence that made their dad disappear. Older children may also feel they need to take responsibility for their remaining parent and any younger siblings they have.

CASE STUDY - BEREAVEMENT



Dear RNRM Children's Fund,

On behalf of me and my daughter I would like to thank you for your help and generosity during this difficult time. The death of my wife came as a massive shock to us and we appreciate the work you do to help service personnel in situations such as this.

I can't thank you enough for the donation which most certainly gave Cathy a smile during a very quiet Christmas time.

Thank you
Lewis Wood

Cathy's (age 11) Mum was feeling unwell one day in October, and a few hours later, Cathy's Dad suddenly realised that her Mum was no longer breathing. Sadly Cathy's mum died of a haemorrhage, leaving her Dad – who is a rating in the Royal Navy – to look after Cathy with no other immediate family nearby, and continue to work. As the funeral took up Cathy's Dad's savings, the charity was able to step in and provide a donation towards Christmas presents for Cathy that year.

7. DEALING WITH A PARENT'S DEATH

REACTIONS TO BEREAVEMENT

Leading researchers agree that the death of a parent is one of the hardest losses a child has to face. Winston's Wish has seen that children's responses to the death of a parent will vary according to:

- Their age
- The cause and nature of the death (e.g. whether it happened on deployment or 'at home', whether by suicide or violence)
- The family circumstances (e.g. whether parents lived together, whether major life changes will now be necessary)
- Any previous experience of death or trauma within the family
- Their own resilience and the support and care they receive



Children and young people can experience a huge range of feelings and thoughts after the death of someone close, especially in unexpected or surprising ways. Grief is chaotic and the process is unique to each individual. Having said that, there are made reactions which are shared by children, and these feature in the list adapted from Winston's Wish below:

- **Sadness, not necessarily shown in crying:** 'Don't they realise people cry on the inside too?'
- **Guilt:** 'If only I hadn't refused to tidy my room.'
- **Anger, at others and/or at the person who has died:** 'I hate him for joining the Navy; he can't have loved us.'
- **Disbelief:** 'If I don't think about it, she'll come back.'
- **Confusion:** 'I don't understand anything any more; it's all jumbled up.'
- **Fear:** 'No-one's safe; they say everyone dies.'
- **Rage, often expressed in physical violence to objects:** 'I want to smash up the whole world.'
- **Anxiety and a desire to control events and people:** 'What's going to happen next?'
- **Despair:** 'There's no point in anything any more.'
- **Feeling 'frozen':** 'I can't feel anything at all.'
- **Avoiding the subject:** 'I'm leaving if you mention Dad again.'
- **Wanting to keep busy at all costs:** 'I can't talk ... I'm off to football.'
- **Yearning:** 'If I could just see him for a second.'
- **Powerlessness:** 'What can I do?'
- **Worthlessness:** 'It should have been me who died.'

CASE STUDY - BEREAVEMENT



James, the father of two twin girls, was killed in a plane crash while working at Royal Naval Air Station Yeovilton. Both of his daughters (one of which has special needs) were at boarding school because their Mum is a Nurse and works long and late hours, and it wasn't realistic for them to live at home with their father frequently being on base or deployed away. The girls were 13 years old when James died, so were just about to make their choices for their GCSEs and they were desperate to remain at the school so that they could complete their education there.

Unfortunately, to make matters worse, when James died the family lost their home in Service accommodation and therefore had to find somewhere else to live as well as the extra money to pay a deposit and rent. The circumstances became very difficult, especially because their Mum had MS and knew that she would not be able to work as a nurse for much longer. The Royal Navy and Royal Marines Children's Fund was able to provide the girls with help to deal with their grief and to remain at their school to complete their GCSEs.

7. DEALING WITH A PARENT'S DEATH

The process of grieving can also be influenced by how their remaining parent is coping. Children are much more likely to experience more intense or varied emotional responses if the surviving parent is so emotionally distraught that he or she is unavailable to care for the child.

RELOCATION OUT OF SERVICE ACCOMMODATION

One of the factors which significantly aggravates a Service child's grieving process is the fact that following the death of the serving parent, the widow and children are required to move out of their Service accommodation.

Often, this means the family has to move out of the area altogether to find more affordable accommodation, especially since the Service partner can be the main breadwinner. They might even have to relocate across the country back to where the remaining parent grew up, to be near grandparents and other members of their extended family. This relocation also means they become cut off from their Naval 'family', and are no longer plugged into the network of family days and support systems. This is often devastating as this is just the time when the children need stability.

The Charity regularly receives cries of help from widows who say that they are barely coping with their own grief, and have no idea of how to help their children. In these instances, the Charity will make sure the family can access the Services of bereavement counselling and do what it can to help the children maintain their routine and stability. This often has to be paid for and where the family is descending into financial difficulties, the Charity is able to help with a grant.

MEMORY OF THE DECEASED

With so much well deserved publicity about the death of Armed Forces personnel whilst fighting in warzones such as Afghanistan and their immediate description of 'hero', it is noticeably harder for the child whose father dies in other circumstances. As discussed in the next section on parental injury, it is one thing to psychologically deal with a family member becoming injured on the battlefield in the line of duty, but what happens if this isn't the case? What if they were hurt or killed on a training exercise, or in a traffic accident driving home from the base one day? The label of 'hero' is well awarded to our Servicemen, but many children feel they cannot call their serving parent a 'hero' if their method of death wasn't stereotypically heroic.



SUICIDE

When examining the issue of parental death, the issue of veteran suicide also needs to be taken into account. The scars of war leave lasting impacts on those who have experienced them. Much research has been conducted on this topic in the US, with many studies revealing that more US Vietnam veterans committed suicide after the conflict than those who were actually killed in action during the war.

The first major UK study examining the suicide risk in personnel who have left the forces was released earlier this year. Researchers at The University of Manchester's Centre for Suicide Prevention³⁶ revealed that ex-Servicemen under 24 years old were at greatest risk of committing suicide, with those in lower ranks and those with shorter military careers also proving most vulnerable.

During the study period (1996-2005) 233,803 individuals left the Armed Forces, of which 224 took their own lives. Out of this number, 50,818 were in the Naval Service, of which 34 took their own lives. Worryingly, the research also found that veterans had a low rate of contact with mental health professionals in the year before death – just 14% for those under 20 years of age and 20% for those under 24 years.

8. DEALING WITH A PARENT'S ILLNESS OR INJURY

Second to children's fears that their Dad will be killed are often fears that something else 'bad' will happen. When a parent obtains an illness or injury – whether in the line of Service or not – it can drastically impact on family dynamics and responsibilities, as well as issues such as future employment, income and disabilities.

FINDING OUT ABOUT THE INJURY

When a parent suffers an illness or injury, one of the first problems that can be experienced from a child's perspective can stem from how they are told about the situation.

It is often difficult for the child's parent or guardian to know how to tell the child about their parent's illness or injury. Often the nature of the information that is shared is based more on the anxieties of parents, rather than the needs of the children. Not infrequently, parents or guardians may choose to share either too much or too little information with children, making it difficult for them to understand the nature or seriousness of the injury and its realistic implications for the injured parent.

Parents' decisions to withhold information from children can be due to a variety of reasons, often related to a desire 'not to worry them'. Sometimes, research has shown that the uninformed children have been as old as 12 or 13 years and have demonstrated a full capacity to rationally understand the injury. In such circumstances child psychologists have argued that lack of appropriate information could lead to unnecessary worry or 'catastrophising' on the part of children. These children may wonder "what else are they not telling me about?", resulting in greater long term anxiety.

PERCEIVED REPUTATION – WHAT IS A HERO?

What makes a hero? There has been so much progress made with championing the rights and respect for serving and injured personnel, especially by the charity Help for Heroes, that the term 'hero' is now frequently associated with members of the Armed Forces. But what if a serving person is injured, but it didn't happen in the line of duty? Are they still one of our nation's heroes?

John is a 27 year old father who sustained multiple fractures from a truck accident that occurred while he was driving in Iraq. He has two sons, aged 7 and 8, who live with a former spouse. John thinks that since the injuries were not sustained in battle he could not share the news of his injury with his sons for fear that he might disappoint them. He wanted his boys to be able to view him as a "war hero" so he chose not to share information about this non-combat caused injury.

(Interview conducted by Dr. Stephen J. Cozza (a retired Army colonel and expert in Child and Adolescent Psychiatry) and colleagues³⁷ during their study of the impact of Operation Iraqi Freedom on US Service children)

The case study of John raises a pressing point about the stigma surrounding the way injuries are obtained. The Royal Navy and Royal Marines Children's Fund has often witnessed a form of guilt on the part of injured Servicemen who believe they need to conform to the stereotype of a 'war hero' and provide everyone with a heroic war story behind their injury. An injury which happened during training, or even during downtime between deployments, can have just as much impact on the rest of their life and their families at home, as that obtained during conflict, but the reaction can be very different.

PHYSICAL INJURIES

Since 2001, over 2,000 British Service personnel have been 'seriously' injured. The war in Iraq left more than 800 seriously wounded and disabled, and when it comes to Afghanistan, the figure is currently 940 and rising. In the month of July 2009 alone, 94 Service personnel were wounded in Afghanistan. The MoD also estimated in September 2009 that 14.6% of the Armed Forces — 25,400 of the 174,000 Service personnel — are medically unfit for combat duties.

When a parent returns home with a physical injury, it has an immediate and distinct impact on the child, as it is visible before their eyes. In rare situations, a parent may go to one extreme and demand that a child looks at the injury. When the injury is one of considerable trauma, is physically disfiguring, or is the result of amputation, graphic exposure can lead to pointless and problematic anxiety. The tale of Steve below, also taken from Dr Cozza's research with US families, provides an example of a parent who forced his young son to integrate the injury in a way that was more reflective of his own needs than his son's.

Steve is a 23 year-old father whose injury resulted in a below knee amputation. He was concerned that his 3 year-old son Jim would be scared of his injury and was relieved when, after a visit, Jim showed no concern regarding the stump. Steve asked his son "where is Daddy's foot?" and Jim pointed to his father's stump. Steve replied "no, no, that's not it." When asked again where his father's foot was Jim, this time, went over and touched his father's stump. At this point Steve became somewhat irritated and scolded "that is Daddy's foot" as he pointed to his prosthesis. When asked a third time where his father's foot was Jim hesitantly pointed to the stump again and walked away from his father.

8. DEALING WITH A PARENT'S ILLNESS OR INJURY

Of course, the injured parent isn't always the father, and when it is the mother that is wounded, it casts a different dynamic over the family and parent-child relationship.

Tanya, the 32 year-old mother of a 6 year-old girl, sustained multiple serious injuries including the loss of functioning in her right arm. She was concerned about how her husband and daughter would respond to her when they visited, worrying that they might perceive her as ugly, mutilated or incapable of functioning. When they did visit, Tanya found that her daughter was gentle, loving and helpful. The fact, however, that she required her daughter's aid in some activities that she would have previously done on her own left her feeling sad and withdrawn. This was true despite the fact that her 6 year-old appeared to enjoy the closeness and her ability to help her mother.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are growing numbers of troops currently returning from zones of conflict unwell – mentally and/or physically – and unable to work. This evidently has implications on the family's finances, with families struggling to pay the bills or juggling childcare needs whilst the partner goes out to work for a second income.

What is more, the financial help which is often made available from the Government can be slow in coming. It has been reported in the UK national press that more than 2,500 Service personnel are currently waiting for compensation under the 'Armed Forces Compensation Scheme' after being wounded in the line of duty. The Service personnel and Veterans Agency, which administers the AFCS, as seen it's claims rise sharply over the years. In its first year of operation, in 2005/06, the SPVA received 520 claims, and by 2008/09 this figure had increased to 5,785 in – a tenfold rise in three years.

"They move at the speed of a striking sloth. While they delay and prevaricate, the burden falls on the wounded and their families."

Col Bob Stewart, a former British commander in Bosnia, speaking about the Service Personnel and Veterans Agency, 2009

MENTAL ILLNESSES

Physical injuries are not the only medical problems with which returning Service personnel, and subsequently their families, contend. War is horrific and it leaves an impact on everyone involved. Despite this fact, relatively little research has been conducted on the impact of mental health problems of Servicemen on their families. It is essential that these disorders are properly understood and effective treatments are put in place, otherwise they will negatively impact the children and families of returning Iraq and Afghanistan personnel.

Latest figures released by the Ministry of Defence, show that **3,920 new cases of mental health disorders** were diagnosed in 2007 among UK Armed Forces personnel (this is around 2% of the military population). Around 150 people a year are also discharged from the Armed Forces for mental health reasons.



OVERVIEW OF MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

Combat Stress – the leading charity specialising in the care of British Veterans who have been profoundly traumatised by harrowing experiences during their Service career – have identified the following mental health issues which are often experienced by Servicemen:

- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Clinical depression
- Anxiety states
- Adjustment disorders
- Phobic disorders
- Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)
- Bi-polar illness (manic depression)
- Issues relating to past and present substance abuse/dependence (drug and alcohol)
- Psychotic conditions in a non-acute phase
- Issues relating to anger

A 2007 study published in the British Medical Journal³⁸ reported that of those UK troops serving 13 or more months in a theatre of operations, 5.2% suffered from PTSD; 21.8% suffered from psychological distress and 23.9% suffered from severe alcohol problems.

8. DEALING WITH A PARENT'S ILLNESS OR INJURY

FOCUS ON PTSD

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is one condition where the charity is experiencing more and more cases – particularly stemming from the Falklands War – where children and families are being impacted and are suffering.

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder can occur following the experience or witnessing of life-threatening events. At the most basic level, it is the result of a breakdown in the defence system that copes with traumatic and frightening experiences.

Symptoms of PTSD may include:

- Re-experiencing the event
- Feeling detached from others and emotionally numb
- Inability to sleep
- Nightmares and intrusive thoughts
- Physical chronic pain, stomach problems, headaches
- Trouble eating, or overeating
- Irritability or outbursts of anger
- Feeling jumpy and easily startled
- Substance abuse
- Guilt, shame, or self-blame

The impact of PTSD is often complicated by the fact that it frequently occurs in conjunction with related disorders such as depression, substance abuse, problems of memory and cognition, and other problems of physical and mental health. It therefore can have a distinct impact on children whose parents have served in combat.

Little research has been done in the mental health of Armed Forces personnel in the UK as compared to other countries like the United States, but knowledge which does exist includes:

- Research conducted in 2007 by Kings College London and published in the British Medical Journal³⁹ found that Armed Forces personnel who were deployed for 13 months or more in the past three years were more likely to suffer from PTSD
- 1,897 British Service personnel were treated for problems regarding their mental health because of their deployment to Iraq (as of June 2006)
- 22% of the sample from Falklands War veterans showed that they have symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). This is of higher percentage when compared to the general population
- 50% of body handlers in the Gulf War experienced PTSD symptoms
- The National Vietnam Veterans Readjustment Study estimated in 1988 that the prevalence of PTSD was 15.2% at the time amongst US personnel and that 30% had experienced the disorder at some point since returning from Vietnam. It is also thought that PTSD was a major contributing factor to the fact that more US Vietnam veterans committed suicide after the war than the number of those who died during the war
- The psychological difficulties gathered in a small sample of British troops were shown to have increased by 50% even after their return from active duty in the conflict from Northern Ireland

CASE STUDY - PTSD



Dear Children's Fund,

Once again I would like to sincerely thank you on behalf of my family, and feel privileged to be able to know that my Service family are still there supporting me after all this time. It gives me great comfort to know that when the chips are down, you still have my best interests at heart, and I feel very honoured that when contacted you have been there for us."

Many many thanks
James Connor

Sally (age 17) and Karen's (age 13) Dad fought in the Falklands War in the Royal Navy. Unfortunately, as a result of the War, for the last 25 years he has been suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, which has been building over time but only recently been diagnosed. Before his diagnosis, the Dad made a series of unwise financial decisions, and many problems have stemmed from this, including the need to sell the family home and move into rented accommodation. Sally and Karen also had to give up their singing lessons, which meant a great deal to them. The charity has been able to help Sally and Karen continue their lessons, and also provide a donation to buy Christmas presents for the girls.

8. DEALING WITH A PARENT'S ILLNESS OR INJURY

HELPING THOSE WITH MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

The main challenge with mental health problems is not treating them, it is getting people to come forward for help, or to even recognise that they might need help. The charity, Combat Stress, finds that veterans take, on average, 14 years between leaving the military and referring themselves to one of their treatment centres, with the average age of new referrals during 2007-08 being 42 years-old. It is estimated by the Hamlet Trust that only 50% of those who have mental health issues during their active duty will seek medical help from the NHS. The US Army's first study (2004) of the mental health of troops echoed this estimate, finding that less than half of those with problems sought help, mostly out of fear of being disgraced or hurting their careers.

Stigma surrounding mental health issues has also historically been a problem in society, and this includes the military, where people are trained and expected to be strong and resilient. This unwillingness to step forward when someone has a concern for their mental health inevitably impacts on the children.

CASE STUDY - PTSD

Brian served in the Falklands War and due to his exposure to such traumatic events, he developed PTSD but this was not diagnosed. Within 12 months of returning from battle, his marriage had failed and he felt he could not continue in the Naval Service. Upon entering civilian life, he remarried and had three children, Charlie, Alice and Jane.

Unfortunately, because his PTSD had still not been diagnosed or any form of treatment or assistance provided, he continued to have relationship difficulties and his second marriage failed. This time, Brian was effectively diagnosed as having PTSD – some 20 years after returning from the Falklands.

Sadly, by now he had also become ill with a life-threatening illness. As time went on and he got worse, he tried to balance his medication for his psychological problems and his physical illness, but the two formed a conflicting mixture which made his moods volatile and erratic. This was very distressing for the three children, who wanted to spend time with their father in hospital, but ultimately ended up more distressed after their visits. After years of struggling, the children (age 19, 17 and 9) lost their father to his illness at the beginning of 2009. The Charity were proud to support Charlie, Alice and Jane where they could, including with ensuring stability and continuity of their education.

CASE STUDY - PTSD

Anthony Montgomery was a 21-year-old Royal Marine when he was ambushed by his own side on regular reconnaissance in the Falklands. Minutes later, he was trying to revive his friend who had been cut in half by British guns. The incident was dealt with brusquely. "Back to business," the commander said the next day. Two years on Mr Montgomery was discharged with deafness and asthma brought on by stress, having been offered no treatment for trauma.

Back in the civilian world, he quickly developed symptoms of PTSD. His doctor said that they would go away, but they didn't. Anthony says: "I couldn't handle any emotion, or show any, and my marriage became very numb. It took me 13 years to seek help. Now I still have the symptoms but I can cope." Having said this, Anthony's health may never recover. His military career over, he cannot work, he suffers daily from nightmares and flashbacks so severe that he pictures his two sons fighting and dying alongside his comrades - even though they were born years after fighting ceased.

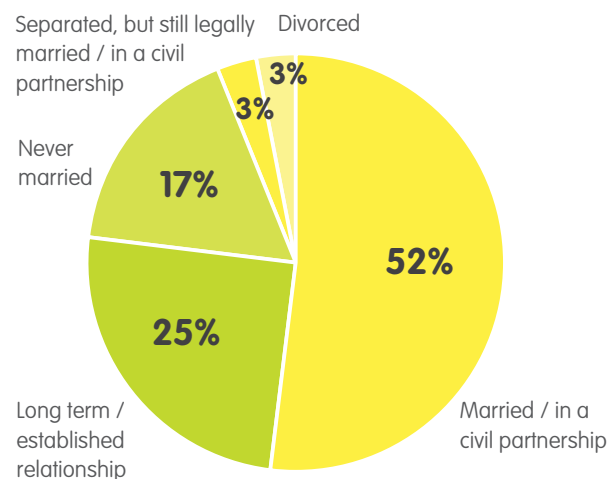
9. DEALING WITH THE DIVORCE AND FAMILY BREAKDOWN

The military lifestyle and enforced separation on Service couples due to frequent operational deployments can place many marriages and relationships under stress, and unfortunately, under these conditions, some can shatter.

77% of Service personnel are either married or in established, long-term relationships.

48% of Armed Forces personnel have children.

PERSONAL STATUS OF ARMED FORCES PERSONNEL

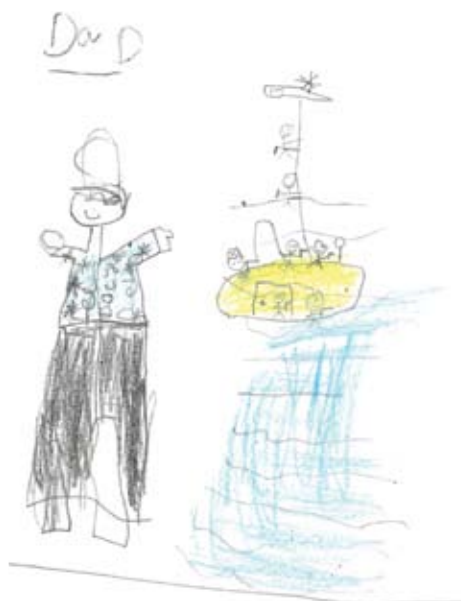


[MoD Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey, 2008]

Interestingly, the RN RM Families' Continuous Survey (2006) revealed that 91% of Naval couples were not married or in the serious relationship when their partner joined the Naval Service. This means that they have had to build the foundations of their relationship whilst juggling the challenges of Service life.

As one Service wife says:

*"We are in the early stages of our marriage. My husband is a well-respected officer with more than 10 years' Service under his belt. I knew he would deploy when I first met him – but I didn't realise he would be away for 17 months out of 30. I know that thousands of other women are soldiering through similar difficulties and I am not alone if I admit that we have twice discussed separating on his return from deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan."*³⁹



CASE STUDY - FAMILY BREAKDOWN

Dear RNRM Children's Fund,

I write to thank you on behalf of myself and my daughters for the extremely kind and generous support that you have recently bestowed upon us. Since my partner walked out on us a year ago, the effects of which, I am sure you can appreciate, have been devastating for us all, life has been tremendously difficult. The children have been traumatised and it has been an unbelievable battle to survive every day without any financial support from my partner whilst I try to drag my little family back onto our feet.

Your generous financial assistance has made all the difference to us and this small thank you note, in no way can reflect the enormous gratitude we feel.

Yours faithfully
The Clarke Family

Marian was left with two children (aged 1 and 3 years-old) and a great deal of financial problems when her marriage to John broke down when he suddenly walked out on the family one day. Marian was hoping to return to work as a teacher, but until she found work she was financing her family with benefits but struggling with cash flow problems. The Charity was able to provide a grant for children's clothes to temporarily ease the family's strain.

9. DEALING WITH THE DIVORCE AND FAMILY BREAKDOWN

STRAIN ON FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

In July 2009, the first UK 'Marriage Conference for the Armed Forces' was held, demonstrating the concern that currently exists surrounding the future of Service marriages.

"Many families and marriages have unfortunately fallen victim to the relentless pace of operations. We have seriously stretched our soldiers, their goodwill and their families."

General Sir Richard Dannatt, the then Chief of General Staff, 2009

A recent MoD survey found that 70% of Service spouses said that military operations in the past two years have had a negative impact on their relationships.

Some couples have had to face frequent tours to war zones, with just a few months off in between. Over the last decade it has been a common tale that women with young children are watching their husbands deploy to Iraq for six months, only to return for a few months before being sent on another six month tour to Afghanistan.

This consistent stream of deployments and separation – especially over the last few years with significant British presence in both Iraq and Afghanistan – has placed extreme pressure on many relationships. Paula Hall, a counsellor with Relate has highlighted: "there can be jealousy and insecurity. A lot of men are putting in phenomenal hours and feel as though that's perhaps not appreciated or understood. And because they're not having the catch-ups every day, they can lose perspective on each other's worlds". During 2008, Relate saw a 30% increase in counselling hours on this issue alone.

Whilst relationships are under strain and couples are struggling to get used to living under the same roof again, some Servicemen are also battling mental scars from their time in war.

A recent book⁴⁰ interviews various couples who were reunited after World War 2. Marjorie Hanstock explains that her husband John experienced "shattering" nightmares in which he grabbed hold of her for grim life. James Bellows, who had served with the Royal Hampshire Regiment, couldn't put his arm around his wife at night because he tossed and turned so violently.

The single biggest mental health problem which manifests in Servicemen is alcoholism: according to recent studies, 27% are heavy drinkers, and 15% are problem drinkers. Sufferers from mental illnesses, such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, can also experience recurring nightmares, depression, anxiety and moodswings. This can lead to unemployment, homelessness and violence – which often comes hand in hand with divorce and family breakdown.

The divorce rate in the Armed Forces is now double that of couples in civilian life.

Looking at the impact of divorce and family breakdown on Service children, research on the subject has indicated that it may not be the actual separation itself that causes difficulties for children, but it is them experiencing the conflict and troubled times which precedes the split. Studies have found that most children take two to three years to adjust to living in a single parent home following the permanent separation.

In a study of children in the US, one teenage boy felt his returning Dad didn't recognize the sacrifices that he and his family made during the time he was deployed, and this was causing an increased amount of family conflict:

"I think when he came back, the first argument between Mum and Dad that I ever heard for 2 years is, "you don't know what I have been through." And half of me wants to just go up there and say, "you don't know what we have been through; we have done so much for you and you just come home and start to yell already." . . . So they are both clashing, my mom is yelling at my dad about us and the kids, and then my dad is like, "what about me, what about what I've been through?"

Child of Army personnel, USA (Interviewed in 2009 by Dr Mmari et al. for academic study 'When a parent goes off to war')

Much of children's post-divorce adjustment is dependent on three factors:

- The quality of their relationship with each parent before the divorce
- The intensity and duration of the parental conflict
- The parents' ability to focus on the needs of the children in the divorce

Taking these three factors into account, there is a broad pattern of emotions which children go through during family breakdown:

1. Denial
2. Abandonment
3. Preoccupation with information
4. Anger and hostility
5. Depression
6. Immaturity or hypermaturity
7. Preoccupation with reconciliation
8. Blame and guilt
9. Acting out

10. LIVING WITH SPECIAL NEEDS OR A DISABILITY

When a child has special needs or a disability, it inevitably affects family life. When the child's parent is in the Armed Forces, life can become even more complicated. Not only can the child's disability or needs influence their emotional and social well-being, but the child can frequently be left under the care of one parent if the serving parent is deployed. For the remaining parent (most likely the Mum), this can be quite a task, especially when taking into account that Service families typically live in 'military areas' and not near any immediate family.

CASE STUDY - CHILD'S ILLNESS

Ken was still serving in the Royal Navy when he got married to Laura. They already had two daughters together – Charlotte (3 years-old) and baby Penny, who needed to have a great deal of specialist attention, which required travel. This was difficult for the family because of Ken's Naval commitments, so the Royal Navy and Royal Marines Children's Fund was able to help with the cost of travel. Worryingly, baby Penny's health was still fluctuating, and with no marked improvement, the consultant decided to carry out a bone marrow transplant from sister Charlotte to baby Penny.

Sadly, this was not successful and Penny died just after her first birthday. By this time, the couple (even with financial assistance from the charity) found themselves in debt and Laura and young Charlotte needed to have counselling. The family fell apart and Ken left the Navy and moved away. Mum and Charlotte moved closer to the grandparents to start a new life. Laura is still receiving counselling.

SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

Around one in five children in England (up to 2 million children) are categorised as having some sort of special educational need (SEN). When the House of Commons Education and Skills Committee published its report⁴¹ on the issue in 2006, around 3% of all children (250,000) had a 'statement' of SEN and around 1% of all children were in special schools (90,000).

A 'statement' of SEN is a specialist report produced from an education psychologist, health and social care professionals and others which sets out in detail the special educational provision to be made for the child. Once a statement is made, the 1996 Education Act requires the relevant Local Authority to arrange the special educational provision specified in it.

The latest statistics (from 2006) show there were **2,014 Service children with special education needs on the MoD database⁴²**, which is maintained by the Children's Education Advisory Service (CEAS). About 700 of these children move schools in any one year.

Evidence from Wiltshire County Council also suggests the percentage of Service children with SEN is higher than average, with 5% of Service children in Wiltshire having a 'statement' of SEN, compared to the average percentage in Wiltshire of 2.1%.

The number of children in the UK with special educational needs and disabilities has grown by 60% over the last 30 years.

SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND MOVING SCHOOLS

Service families experience problems in the continuity of support for their children and this is becoming an increasing problem as Local Authorities are required to delegate the funding for SEN directly to schools, who are then required to make provision. A child might be about to receive their help, but then they can be relocated and drop to the bottom of the administrative list in the new LA. This interrupts the child's continuity of support.

Service Families frequently express the feeling that they are always pushed to the back of the queue or that their children have to go back to the start of the monitoring and assessment process every time they move. This results in many children getting overlooked and not receiving the assistance they are entitled to by law. Statements of SEN are also not transferable between schools and it can take anything from six months to two years to be officially re-assessed⁴⁷.

The Defence Select Committee heard the following statements regarding the issue:

"You might be getting to the root of a problem with a child who has had an on-going problem and then you are posted elsewhere and have to go through the whole rigmarole again."

Mrs Heather Wheeler, a Service wife

"My experience with regard to special needs—my son has special needs—has been quite poor on the whole with regard to having to move round different counties and trying to get a statement of educational needs. You have to start the whole process over again depending on which county you are in."

Mrs Maria Barber Riley, a Service wife

10. LIVING WITH SPECIAL NEEDS OR A DISABILITY

The main issues for SEN children who move – as identified by the Children's Education Advisory Service (CEAS) are:

- The different criteria used by each Local Education Authority for the trigger of an assessment
- The availability of support systems, such as speech and language therapy in different areas
- The availability of educational psychologists to assess children who move into an area
- The availability of funding for a child who moves into an area once resources have been delegated to schools
- Concerns about the impact on the Service person's career



DISABILITY

There are around 770,000 disabled children in the UK⁴³, and children aged 0–16 are the fastest growing group amongst the population of disabled people⁴⁴.

Many of the disabled children need targeted and specialist health services. In contrast to universal health services, these are services that usually require an assessment to determine entitlement and the level of service to be provided. The Healthcare Commission's report 'The State of Healthcare 2008' recognised that disabled children often face a range of challenges: 'Children and young people with complex needs, including children with disabilities or those in situations that make them vulnerable, do not always get the attention and care from healthcare Services that they need...the funding and provision of Services for children and young people with learning and/or physical disabilities varies throughout the country.'

This viewpoint was also highlighted in submissions to the parliamentary hearings on Services for Disabled Children held in 2006, which saw a high level of dissatisfaction with health services. Almost half of disabled children's parents (48%) and over a third of professionals (35%) described them as 'poor'.

CASE STUDY



Dear RNRM Children's Fund,

Thank you! I will never forget the kindness you have shown us. I hope one day to join the marines and help other familys and children the way you have helped us.

With many thanks
Jake Rivers

Thomas (age 9) has a rare condition known as Williams Syndrome. Thomas's Dad is serving as a rating in the Royal Navy and Thomas's parents wanted Thomas to have a bike so that he could play with his peers. They were not able to afford one suitable for Thomas' needs, so the RNRMCF agreed to provide a bursary to purchase the bike.

10. LIVING WITH SPECIAL NEEDS OR A DISABILITY

THE IMPORTANCE OF HELPING CHILDREN FROM YOUNG AGE

"Getting pupils with SEN the help they need is a moral imperative: by working together we can remove the barriers which hold some children back and stop them succeeding. And when you consider that **70% of young offenders and two-thirds of excluded children have a special educational need**, this is vital to any vision of a fair and cohesive society."

Ed Balls, Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families, 2009

In addition to children with special education needs or disabilities dealing with specific issues that are thrown up by having a parent in the Armed Forces (such as moving house and living in a temporary one-parent family for stretches of time), these children also have to battle the other problems which can be created by having a SEN or a disability.

One of the most significant factors surrounding this issue is the age of the child (or adult) when the special education need is diagnosed. Various studies, campaigners and charities have all argued that the earlier in life the SEN is identified, the better.

There are numerous studies which have found a link between special needs and negative consequences, such as crime, **alcoholism and drug use**. Research has found that on average, one third of prisoners in the UK are dyslexic, and that the rate of re-offending is much lower once their dyslexia had been treated accordingly. ADHD is another mental health problem which has been linked to criminality. The Home Office's 'Youth Crime Action Plan' notes children with ADHD are on average four times more commonly found amongst high-rate offenders than infrequent offenders.

It must, however, be acknowledged that there is no causal link between SEN and illegal behaviour. Often it can be due to **low confidence and poor self-esteem** which SEN people can develop. It can also be because people find it hard to gain qualifications or hold down a job (National Autistic Society figures show only 15% of adults with autism are in fulltime, paid employment), and they can also be ridiculed by peers when they struggle with something.

Children can also struggle with their education and experience at school, which also contributes to their behaviour later in life. Exam results have shown that only 15% of children with SEN, and 0.05% with SEN statements, gain five or more A*-C grades at GCSE, compared to 63% of other children.

Many teachers at both primary and secondary schools are not trained to identify special needs, or help these children, so often the resulting behaviour and learning problems are frequently viewed by schools as disruptive, naughty and unwelcome. A 2009 DCSF report found that children with SEN are eight times more likely to be **permanently excluded from school** (33 children in 10,000 with SEN, compared to four in every 10,000 without). In addition, once these children have been expelled from the educational system, they are not helped. Despite between one fifth and one third of Local Authority budgets being spent on serving special needs, a 2009 Ofsted report revealed that only half of Local Authorities are meeting the target of alternative provision for excluded pupils.

The responsibility for resolving these problems and helping SEN children falls to Local Authorities. Unfortunately, they appear to be struggling to make any impact on the situation. LAs have a legal responsibility for organizing the support outlined in each child's SEN statement, but the National Autistic Society has found that in 2006, only 31% of autistic children who have a statement did not receive all the support outlined in it.

All of this has evident implications for the parents of children with special needs and disabilities. There is very little help available for the parents and this issue was thrust into the spotlight following the 2006 suicide jump off the Humber Bridge by Alison Davies and her 12 year-old autistic son, Ryan. His condition had led him to be violent towards her physically and verbally, and as he grew older and stronger, she feared she would be unable to cope, and was determined he should not be taken into care. She spoke of feeling 'imprisoned' by Ryan's condition and the lack of assistance which was available to her. No parent should feel this is the only option left available to them.

The 2009 Lamb Inquiry into SEN and disabilities information (commissioned by the DCSF) revealed many parents are frustrated and feel they have to fight the system to get the high-quality provision their kids need and deserve. It is welcoming to see that the law is being changed so that schools will now be inspected on how they support children with SEN and disabilities, but the diagnosis process leading to an official 'statement' also has to be streamlined, especially if children are moving to another Local Authority.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CONCLUSION

This report has highlighted the multitude of challenges which Service children can face. Whilst we have found that children often take a great deal of pride, identity and belonging from their parent's role in the Armed Forces, we also know that 83% of Navy families say their children find it difficult when their serving father or mother has to go away for long periods of time. The Service lifestyle can have a distinct impact on the child's behaviour, emotional well-being, psychological development and even their educational attainment.

The Royal Navy and Royal Marines Children's Fund is committed to supporting the children of Naval personnel wherever there is a need. From our research for this report, and our experience of speaking with a considerable number of Service children each year, we can see that the need of Service children is growing. Whether it is funding respite care, or providing at-home support in times of crisis, the number of children which need our help has risen by 27% in the last year alone.

A series of recommendations has emerged from this report. Some are aimed to help mitigate some of the unavoidable consequences of having a parent in the Armed Forces (such as bereavement), whilst others argue some problems shouldn't exist in the first place (such as bureaucratic restrictions on special needs provision when children move schools).

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. We need to understand and better appreciate the impact of Service life on children, their development, and their long-term psychological health, since they are the future
2. We need to match the dedication to Service children that is currently being seen in the USA in terms of research and knowledge. Funding should be made available for studies to better understand British Service children
3. The MoD and DCSF need to work together to create a joined-up framework for the benefit of Service children, so they do not remain overlooked any longer
4. We need to better understand how many Service children are in the UK, including where they live, what schools they attend and how often they move
5. Local Authorities need to improve their outcomes in identifying and helping children with special educational needs
6. More assistance needs to be made available to Service children when they move schools, especially if the child has special educational needs
7. Schools should be more attentive to the needs of Service children, such as knowing when a Service parent has been deployed, or providing time off school for family bonding if a parent returns from a deployment during termtime
8. Dedicated counselling Services should be made available for children of Service personnel who have been away for a long time, injured or killed
9. More attention should be paid to assessing and helping the mental health of serving and ex-serving personnel, as the well-being of the parent directly influences the well-being of the child. Conditions such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder can be felt by the entire family, and more mental health problems amongst Servicemen are being diagnosed as time goes on
10. The availability and quality of Service accommodation needs to be improved. Despite 17% of properties currently sitting empty, families often have to go into rented accommodation at a higher cost because nothing is available. Almost a third of families also describe the condition of their MoD Service accommodation as 'poor'

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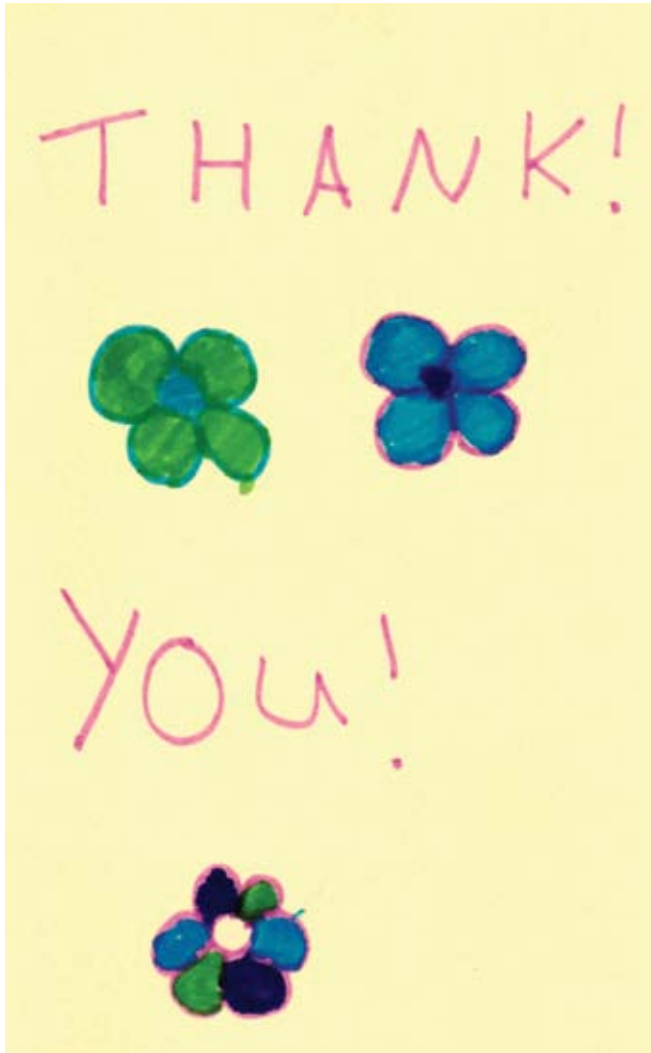
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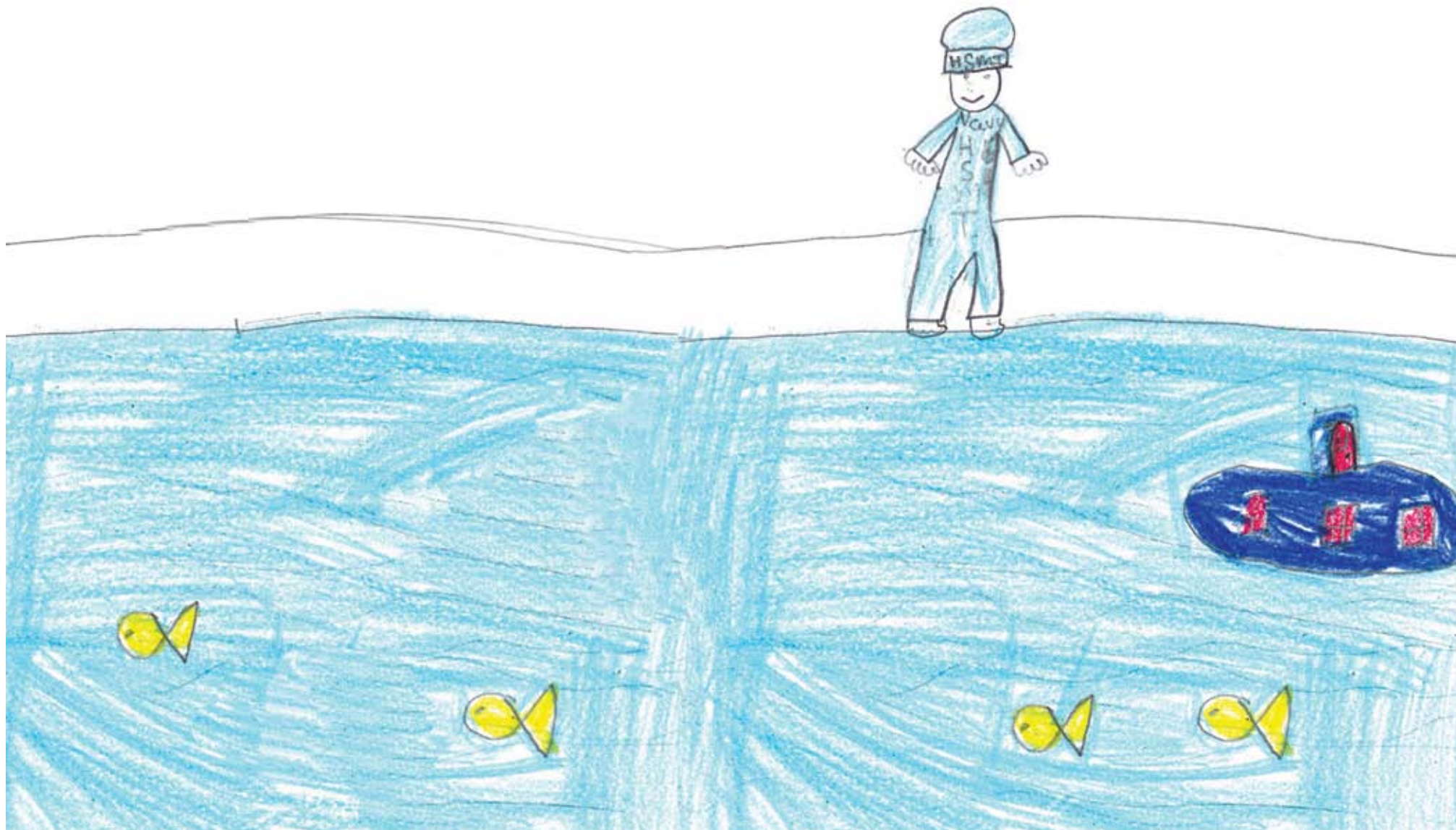
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