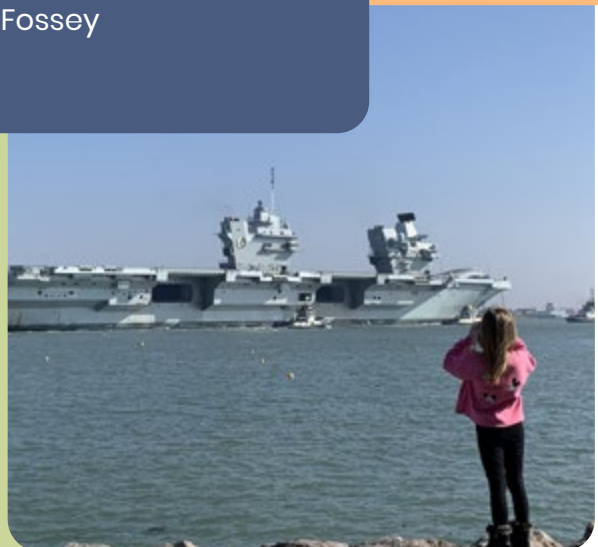


The Impact of Service Life on the Military Child:

The Overlooked Casualties of
Conflict – Update and Review Report

May 2021

Lauren Godier-McBard, Abigail Wood & Matt Fossey



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About the Authors

The Veterans and Families Institute for Military Social Research (VFI) was established in 2014 to provide research, consultancy and impact within the military and veteran's community. To date, the VFI has produced over 100 peer reviewed papers and reports and has contributed to a range of national and international panels, boards and commissions. Staff within the VFI are drawn from a wide range of research and policy backgrounds.

Lauren Godier-McBard is a Senior Research Fellow and the VFI lead on Women and Equalities Research.

Abigail Wood is a Research Assistant in the VFI with a background in public policy, philosophy and ethics.

Matt Fossey is an Associate Professor and the Director of the VFI with a background in social work practice, service improvement and health policy.

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Acronyms	
AFF	Army Families Federation
BFPO	British Forces Posted Overseas
CEA	Continuity of Education Allowance
DCYP	Directorate Children and Young People
DOD	Department of Defense
ECHP	Education, Health and Care Plan
FAM	Future Accommodation Model
FAMCAS	Families Continuous Attitudes
LA	Local Authority
MOD	Ministry of Defence
NATO	North Atlantic Trade Organization
NAO	National Audit Office
NCC	Naval Children's Charity
NCO	Non-commissioned Officer
NFF	Naval Families Federation
NSPCC	National Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
RAF	Royal Air Force
RAFFF	Royal Air Force Families Federation
RN	Royal Navy
RN/RM	Royal Navy/Royal Marines
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
SCE	Service Children's Education
SCiP	Service Children's Progression Alliance
SCiSS	Service Children in State Schools
SFA	Service Family Accommodation
SLA	Single Living Accommodation
SME	Subject Matter Expert
SPP	Service Pupil Premium
SSCE	Supporting Children in Education Cymru
SWDC	Serving Couple with Dependent Children
TAPS	Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors
TBI	Traumatic Brain Injury
TCK	Third Culture Kids
VFI	Veterans and Families Institute for Military Social Research

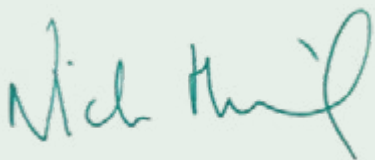
Foreword

In 2009 the then 'Royal Navy and Royal Marines Children's Fund' commissioned some ground-breaking research into the effects of Service life on children. The key findings from this research, the 'Overlooked Casualties of Conflict', among other things led to early day motions in the House of Commons, OFSTED revising their guidelines for all schools and the Service Pupil Premium being introduced.

The landscape 11 years ago was of course different, particularly given that it was the height of operations in Afghanistan, but many other things have changed since too; the use of social media, for example has grown exponentially and is now regularly used by well over half the world's population, and the Royal Navy's tempo of operations has steadily increased in that period too.

So, it was entirely appropriate that the Naval Children's Charity commissioned some new research in early 2020 looking at what has changed over the intervening 11-year period. Reassuringly the 10 original key findings from 2009 were reinforced but some new findings have emerged focused on the needs of today's Service Children with some 27 additional recommendations for future research which will ultimately help identify the resources and support which can be developed and deployed to support the unique need of Service parents and children, particularly during periods of separation.

I commend the Naval Children's Charity for initiating this pioneering research which continually strives to put the needs of our children first.



Vice Admiral Nick Hine CB

Second Sea Lord





Introduction

In 2009 the Royal Navy Royal Marines Children’s Fund (now known as the Naval Children’s Charity) published **the Overlooked Casualties of Conflict Report**¹. This ground-breaking document brought together research and expert opinion to highlight the **experiences and challenges faced by military children**. Importantly the report identified **10 key areas** that were of particular relevance.

Prior to Overlooked Casualties of Conflict Report very little was known about children in military families in the UK and consequently this piece of work was instrumental in shaping policy and provision for these young people, including the **introduction of the Service Pupil Premium in England**. This report was especially pertinent with the Armed Forces Covenant² beginning to take shape and with the Armed Forces Covenant’s focus on the **whole “military family” not just Service Personnel**.

However, the Overlooked Casualties of Conflict Report was researched and written at the height of Op Herrick (20 June 2002 – 12 December 2014), the UK military’s 12-year mission in Afghanistan. It is inevitable that this **emotive and controversial conflict had an impact on the Service children**, whose parents were involved in the war, and on the respondents, who were involved in the original research. It has now been 6 years since the drawdown from Afghanistan and although UK Service Personnel are still engaged in operations overseas these are not fought out so much in the public eye. Arguably the challenges faced by the current Covid-19 pandemic have shifted the public attention from the military to other public servants working domestically in health, social care and education. However, **military life will continue to have an impact on military families and children**, and it continues to remain important that we provide the best that we can for children who are raised in military families.

Consequently, this **new report was commissioned by the Naval Children’s Charity (NCC)** with the aim of considering the changes in the research landscape and to assess the opinions of a range of key stakeholders, subsequent to the original publication in 2009.

In the extensive literature review that is the foundation of this report, the authors identified **47 UK papers for inclusion published between 2000 and 2020** of which 11 were peer reviewed papers. To support this, **15 papers from culturally aligned countries** were also included and papers were selectively drawn from a **pool of 187 US papers**. However, this is not an exhaustive list of the U.S literature available, as full backward and forward citation searching was beyond the scope of this project.

The majority of the academic research and literature has been undertaken and published in the U.S. Whilst this is of relevance to this work, the authors are very mindful that there are **considerable cultural and structural differences between the US and**



1 The Royal Navy and Royal Marines Children’s Fund. [The Overlooked Casualties of Conflict](#). 2009

2 Ministry of Defence. [The Armed Forces Covenant: Today and Tomorrow](#). 2011.

the UK that make direct comparisons difficult. We have therefore focused the analysis of the literature on research that has been undertaken in the UK and other Five Eyes nations that are more culturally aligned to the UK: Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

We have also taken the decision to share the details of all the papers and reports that we identified in the process of undertaking this work. We hope that making these details available for others with an interest in this important area we hope will stimulate even more awareness, research and improvements in service provision. The details of all of the papers have been uploaded onto the [Veterans and Families Research Hub](#), a portal for research and discussion funded by the Forces in Mind Trust. A guide to using the VFR Hub and how to access the papers can be found at [Appendix I](#).

Current Policy Context

At the time of writing the Ministry of Defence (MOD) are **remodelling their families' strategy**³, and this will be an important barometer for how the MOD aims to shape the agenda for military families and their children over the coming years. The MOD's new family strategy is positioned within a raft of strategy and innovation that has emerged over the last decade regarding military families. It is not the intention of this paper to discuss and analyse all the policy as this has been captured far more articulately within the recent Selous report, **'Living in our Shoes: Understanding the needs of UK Armed Forces families'**⁴. However, there are some key pieces of policy and strategies that impact upon family life that are currently subject to MOD and specific Service branch review.

One such policy is the proposed changes to accommodation under the new **Future Accommodation Model (FAM)**⁵. Alongside subsidised Service Family Accommodation (SFA), families will have the option of **subsidised private renting, and financial support for home ownership**. These changes are being trialled in three pilot areas (HMNB Clyde, Aldershot Garrison and RAF Wittering) with a decision set to be taken in 2022 as to if and how this policy is to be rolled out military wide. Further to this, several subject matter experts interviewed for this report made references to a proposed **Naval transformation**, often mentioning changes to how ships will be crewed, and the length of time personnel will be deployed. The potential impacts of both the FAM model and Naval transformation are discussed in this report.

It is very important to note at this juncture, that although the **MOD has responsibility for policy relating to military families in general**, policies associated with and affecting *inter alia* the education of children of military families, their **health and social care are often the responsibility of the devolved administrations**. As such there are differences across the UK. An up-to-date synthesis of the current policy and research evidence landscape relating to military families, housing, health and employment can be found on the VFR Hub⁶.

3 Ministry of Defence. UK Armed Forces Families' Strategy 2016–2020. 2016.

4 Walker J, Selous A and Misca G. [Living in our shoes: understanding the needs of UK armed forces families](#). 2020.

5 Ministry of Defence. [What you need to know about the Future Accommodation Model](#). 2020. (accessed 22.10.20).

6 Veterans and Families Research Hub. [Research Summaries](#). 2020

What constitutes a military family?

The nature and composition of families continues to develop in our society. Since the publication of the Overlooked Casualties of Conflict report in 2009 societal attitudes in the UK have changed and there has been a **shift in the UK military position regarding same sex relationships and blended families**^{7,8}. Ideas of what constitutes a family are subject to some debate. In a recent NATO research panel chaired by Prof Carl Castro of the University of Southern California (reference HFM-RTG-263) it was proposed that the changing societal landscape and cultural diversity means that **militaries need to consider how they should re-define families**. Importantly these definitions should not be based around anachronistic nuclear family models, and definitions should not be shaped by entitlement and access to services⁹. Although predominantly **“the children of military families”** are considered to be **those cared for by the family** (usually within a legal capacity), the discussion in this paper illustrates that “the children” may well be **younger siblings or other relations** who are not necessarily within the immediate family unit. It is important that these broader relationships are not ignored, even though they may not have the same legal status.

Military life is a unique phenomenon, with military families experiencing parental deployments, periods of non-deployment separation, heightened mobility, and the risk of parental injury or bereavement during service. The literature surrounding Service children suggests that a parent’s service can bring **additional challenges and specific benefits**. We will briefly summarise some of these the challenges for Service children now, taking a more in depth look at each theme in the main body of the report.

How many Service children are there?

Since the Overlooked Casualties of Conflict report¹⁰ was published in 2009, the number of Service personnel with children reported by MOD surveys has increased from 48% to 79% (statistics correct as of April 2020)¹¹. Based on the current strength of the UK Regular Forces¹², this reflects **an increase from approximately 91,000¹³ to 115,000 Service personnel with children since the previous report**. Thirty-six percent of families report

7Fossey M, Copper L and Raid K. [The transition of military veterans from active service to civilian life: impact of transition on families and the role of the family, support, and recognition](#). 2019.

8 Gribble R, Mahar A, Godfrey K and Muir S. [What does the term “military family” mean? A preliminary comparison across four countries](#). 2018. Military Families Working Group, Canadian Institute for Military and Veteran Health Research.

9 Dursun S and Castro CA (eds) [Military Veteran Reintegration: approach management, and assessment of military Veterans transitioning to civilian life](#). 2019

10 The Royal Navy and Royal Marines Children’s Fund. [The Overlooked Casualties of Conflict](#). 2009

11 Ministry of Defence. [UK Tri-Service Families Continuous Attitude Survey Results 2020](#). 2020.

12 Ministry of Defence. [Quarterly service personnel statistics 1 April 2020](#). 2020.

13 The Royal Navy and Royal Marines Children’s Fund. [The Overlooked Casualties of Conflict](#). 2009

having at least one child under the age of 5 years, and 54% have at least one child of school age¹⁴.

The proportion of Service personnel with children is **broadly similar across the service branches** (Royal Navy and Royal Marines [RN/RM]: 78%; Army: 80%; Royal Air Force [RAF]: 78%)¹⁵. In relation to the general population, Service families are proportionately more likely to report having children than civilian married couples (79% vs 52%)¹⁶.

Table 1 provides a conservative estimate of the number of Service children of UK Regular Personnel in the UK, based on MOD statistics (FAMCAS 2020, MOD Quarterly Service Personnel Statistics April 2020), of just under 180,000. Despite a decrease of approximately 44,000 full-time regular Service Personnel since 2009, this represents a small increase in the number of Service children estimated in the previous report (175,000)¹⁷.

Table 1. Estimated number of Service children in the UK

	Number of Service Personnel	Number of Service Personnel with children (%)	% with 1 child	% with 2 children	% with 3 children or more	% with 4 or more children	Estimated number of Service children
RN/RM	32,760	25,553 (78)	23%	39%	11%	4%	38,328
Army	79,620	63,696 (80)	21%	39%	14%	5%	103,824
RAF	32,940	25,693 (78)	24%	40%	11%	2%	37,254
Total	145,320	114,942 (79)	22%	39%	13%	4%	179,406

The above estimate includes only the children of currently serving regular personnel, based on the number of children reported by a self-selecting sample of Service families in the Families Continuous Attitudes survey. As such this may not be a true reflection of the entire population and does not include the children of Armed Forces veterans. The Maritime Charities Group provided a projected estimate in 2016, suggesting that there would be 104,670 dependent children of current and former Royal Navy personnel alone in 2020¹⁸.

14 Ministry of Defence. [UK Tri-Service Families Continuous Attitude Survey Results 2020](#). 2020.

15 Ministry of Defence. [UK Tri-Service Families Continuous Attitude Survey Results 2020](#). 2020.

16 Office for National Statistics. [Labour Force Survey: Families and households](#). 2019.

17 The Royal Navy and Royal Marines Children’s Fund. [The Overlooked Casualties of Conflict](#). 2009

18 Maritime Charities Group. [The needs and aspirations of the dependant and families of seafarers under retirement age](#). 2016.

Service Children's Well-being

There is now significant international literature surrounding the impact of military service on Service children. A NATO report investigating the impact of parental service across NATO countries found that **parental deployment was a “key factor” that impacted on children’s well-being**. Parental deployment presents challenges to children through separation, increased household responsibilities, more intense emotions, anxiety over the well-being of their parent, missing their parent and is intensified by missed traditions or events. They found that length of deployment was associated with increased negative outcomes regarding attachment, depression, psychiatric hospitalisation, academic performance and overall mental health.

Williamson et al¹⁹ undertook a systematic review of well-being of Service children compared with civilian children. Overall, the review found that the **well-being of Service and non-Service children was broadly comparable, with some notable exceptions. Family deployment was associated with lower well-being**, with some studies showing that children with deployed family members were more likely to use drugs than civilian children or Service children with no family deployed. This association was stronger in older children. Other studies showed that parental or sibling deployment was associated with worsened mental health, particularly for boys. Children with any military family member were more likely to engage in fights and carry weapons at school than civilian children. Finally, there was some evidence that those with a deployed sibling were more likely to use alcohol. Overall, evidence suggests that when assessing Service children’s well-being, special attention must be paid to whether their parents or family are currently deployed.

Non-deployment factors also shape Service children’s lives, such as mobility, non-operational separation, illness and injury or bereavement. The frequent relocation that is experienced by some Service families can have a negative impact on children’s educational performance, friendships and access to healthcare. Non-operational separation can impact family functioning, with family dynamics changing as the Serving parent leaves and returns. Additionally, this may impact negatively on the non-Serving spouse’s health and well-being, due to additional responsibilities and stress when the Serving parent is away²⁰.

Parental illness and injury may also have a negative impact on Service children’s well-being. However, findings that relate to parental illness are inconsistent, and are mainly focused on the impact of parental PTSD on Service children’s mental health.



19 Williamson V, Stevelink SA, Da Silva E and Fear N.T. [A systematic review of wellbeing in children: a comparison of military and civilian families](#). Child and adolescent psychiatry and mental health 2018; 12: 46.

20 Gribble R and Fear NT. [The Effect of non-operational family separation on family functioning and well-being among Royal Navy/ Royal Marines Families](#). 2019.

Evidence on the effects of parental injury^{21, 22} is only available outside of the UK. However, research findings suggest that parental injury can lead to child distress and can impact on children’s healthcare outcomes. Service children facing bereavement suffer from the same challenges that all children face when grieving and are sensitive to the same factors that can affect children’s ability to adapt to their loss: a parent’s pre-existing mental health condition, family cohesion and routine consistency following bereavement²³. There is, however, some evidence that Service children may benefit from military-specific support following bereavement and that military culture may help children make sense of their loss.

This report sought to understand what we know about the impact of parental military service in Service Children in the UK and culturally aligned countries, and to identify where there are gaps in this understanding.

How we undertook the review

The authors searched for academic and policy papers both from the UK and internationally. Following a thorough check for relevance, **62 papers were reviewed and are discussed** in the body of the report. The authors also conducted a series of **12 interviews with subject matter experts (SMEs)** who work with UK military families. The interviews were transcribed and thematically analysed. The key points that emerged from these interviews are also discussed and they are considered with reference to the 10 challenges that were outlined in the 2009 Overlooked Casualties of Conflict Report. More details of how we undertook the literature review, interviews and analyses can be found at [Appendix 2](#).

The following sections outline the challenges and issues faced by Service children based on our findings. Throughout these sections we have considered the most up-to-date and relevant literature as well as our analysis of SME interviews. Within this technical report we have included examples of quotes from papers, interviews and reports that help illustrate the findings. Where appropriate we have also included recommendations for research and for those providing services for military children and their families. The authors are conscious that the recently published ‘Living in our Shoes’ report²⁴ contained over 100 recommendations for the Government to consider. It is not our intention to duplicate what has already been highlighted, rather that any recommendations made will be specifically related to gaps in the research knowledge and unique to this study and its findings.



21 Cozza SJ et al. [Combat-injured service members and their families: the relationship of child distress and spouse-perceived family distress and disruption](#). Journal of Traumatic Stress 2010; 23: 112-115.

22 Hisle-Gorman E, Susi A and Gorman GH. [The Impact of Military Parents’ Injuries on The Health And Well-Being Of Their Children](#). Health Affairs 2019; 38: 1358-1365.

23 Holmes AK, Rauch PK and Cozza SJ. [When a parent is injured or killed in combat](#). Future Child 2013; 23: 143-162.

24 Walker J, Selous A and Misca G. [Living in our shoes: understanding the needs of UK armed forces families](#). 2020.

1. The impact of deployment-related separation on Service children

Deployment and separation are integral parts of military life. At the beginning of 2020, 11,000 Service Personnel were deployed overseas²⁵. This is significantly less than were deployed a decade ago, at the time of the previous report; between April 2009 and April 2010, approximately 46,000 personnel were deployed overseas²⁶.

Since combat operations ended in 2014, following the end of the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, the UK Armed Forces have continued to be engaged in a number of overseas peacekeeping, training exercises and humanitarian operations. This means a **significant number of UK Service families are still impacted by separation**. Indeed, two of the SMEs we interviewed noted there is an incongruence between the general public's perception of military separation and the sustained operational tempo some Service branches and units experience. This, however, was not a solely Naval phenomenon and high operational tempo was the case for all:

“Operational tempo has not slowed down, in fact, if anything, it’s maybe even accelerated since we pulled out of Afghanistan. But the public perception of that is just that they don’t know what the Navy does. So, we’ve got operations, operational tempo running hot but then there is no public awareness or support attached to that” Interviewee 5

“I think the changes in the last 10 years where the Afghan conflict ceasing in its current, its original form. I think what’s happened is the media and national attention is come away from that. You know, we had all these, “Aren’t we proud to be British”, sort of thing for years and years and homecoming parades and all this sort of the thing and that’s gone. And yet there are children in my school, you know, and my staff. We were constantly dealing with deployments, you know, every 18 months, 600 Service Personnel are going away and we have a company that the company workers that are away all the time on and off.” Interviewee 12

The MOD Harmony Guidelines outline how long Service Personnel can be away from base. These guidelines differ across the Service branches and specify the maximum



25 Ministry of Defence. [A decade of deployments: 2010 to 2020](#). 2020.

26 Ministry of Defence. [Freedom of Information Request FOI 2015 01104](#). 2015.

time away for Service Personnel over 36 months as follows²⁷:

- **660 days for the Royal Navy/Royal Marines (RN/RM).**
- **498 days for the Army.**
- **468 days for the Royal Air Force (RAF).**

The MOD’s Tri-Service Families Continuous Attitudes Survey (FAMCAS) 2020²⁸ reports that **over 30% of Service spouses were separated from their partner for over 3 months during the last year.** Separation is particularly high for RN/RM families, with 41% reporting separation for more than 3 months in the past year, compared to just 28% of Army and RAF spouses. RN personnel are deployed more often than personnel in the other Service branches, and deployments tend to be longer, reaching up to 9 months²¹.

RN personnel are much more likely to feel that their operational deployments are too long (RN: 30%, RM: 9%, Army: 9%, RAF: 24%) and occur too frequently (RN: 32%, RM: 10%, Army 11%; RAF: 20%)²⁹. One SME discussed the differing harmony guidelines between Service branches and the impact that could have in areas where the Naval and other Services co-exist:

“Because I could see the Navy going on, they’re no different, 660 over 3 and we’ll go on a 6-month deployment no issues and then come back. If suddenly the RAF people swap over half way through and a new set come on, then that is going to cause a whole world of hurt especially if they are living and going to the same schools back in [location] – the kids of the RAF families and the kids of the Navy families.” Interviewee 2

A number of SMEs noted that the longer deployment associated with the Naval Service presents a unique challenge:

“I would certainly say those long periods of separation are obviously the things that are real challenges for Naval Personnel” Interviewee 11

27 Ministry of Defence. [Quarterly service personnel statistics 1 April 2020](#). 2020.

28 Ministry of Defence. [UK Tri-Service Families Continuous Attitude Survey Results 2020](#). 2020.

29 Ministry of Defence. [UK Regular Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey Results 2020](#). 2020.

“[The Royal Navy] realise that 9 months is too long to keep people away and really that they need to reduce the amount of absence from home that people have” Interviewee 5

“It’s almost created... the worst of all worlds for everybody because they’re kind of there long enough... that the family at home establish a new pattern in a routine.” Interviewee 10

Furthermore, RN families are unable to accompany their Service person on ship, leading to more separation, and fewer families accompany RN personnel on overseas assignments compared to the other two services³⁰. This means **RN children are likely to experience greater separation** compared with children of Service Personnel in other Service branches. Indeed, a report for the Maritime Charities Group in 2016³¹ emphasised the high levels of separation experienced by maritime families in particular, and recommended emotional support for children during separation. Uncertainty around when the Serving parent would be back from deployment was another challenge raised as a particularly acute problem for Naval Service families:

“Young persons from Naval families in particular will say it’s difficult not having a date to work to.” Interviewee 1

“The uncertainty and inability to plan is significant and it’s not knowing when -, and now very much so the mother or the father - is likely to return, is a big issue.” Interviewee 8

However, SMEs highlighted the current ‘Transformation Programme’ that is being implemented within the Naval Services. This programme involves a restructure of how ships are crewed that will reduce the amount of time that Naval Personnel are away from home. The benefits of this for Service families was highlighted by a number of SMEs:



30 Ministry of Defence. [UK Tri-Service Families Continuous Attitude Survey Results 2020](#). 2020.

31 Maritime Charities Group. [The needs and aspirations of the dependant and families of seafarers under retirement age](#). 2016.

“So, to get around that we are looking at trying to develop a two-crew structure, so each ship had two crews, and one crew is going to be on for 4 months and then the next crew is going to be on for the next 4 months. And that will allow parents and children and families to plan their life better.” Interviewee 2.

“They realise that 9 months is too long to keep people away and really that they need to reduce the amount of absence from home that people have, whether that now gets carried through, because retention will be less of a problem. I mean I hope it does because what will happen is that you’ll end up retaining all these people who possibly should have left because their personal lives and family lives are incompatible with Naval Service” Interviewee 5

The Transformation Programme will enable ships to use air bridges to rotate crews in a way that means they no longer need to dock back in the UK as often. Whilst some SMEs highlighted the positive impact of shorter Naval deployments on families, others were concerned that the restructure would result in less job stability:

“I think there’s a lot of worry, certainly with families... is this transformation going to result in me losing my job and how does that work? So, I think stresses on a family and therefore on the children... as with any change program.” Interviewee 8.

It will be important for the MOD to monitor and evaluate the impact of this restructure on Naval children and families.

Emotional and behavioural reactions to deployment

The impact of deployment-related separation on children has been the focus of a number of UK research studies since the previous report was published in 2009. A survey carried out by the Naval Families Federation (NFF) in 2018³² found that 56% of the Service personnel and spouses felt that being part of a Service family had a negative impact on Service children and young people. The main reason provided for this was **the unpredictable and disruptive nature of separation due to deployment**, which led to **emotional difficulties, anxiety and behavioural problems** in Service children.

.....
32 Naval Families Federation. [Naval Service Families Mental Health Survey](#). 2018.

Separation or parental absence is highlighted by recent UK studies as **one of the worst aspects or challenges associated with having a serving parent**^{33 34 35}. A study published by the Children’s Commissioner in 2018 in the UK³⁶ highlighted increased feelings of isolation and worry, the breakdown of the remaining parent-child relationship, increased arguments with siblings and missing the absent parent. Qualitative research with the parents of Army children found that parental absence during deployment was associated with a range of negative emotional responses: challenging behaviour at home, anxiety, confusion, stuttering, difficulty understanding length of time parent will be deployed, refusing to talk about parent(s) being away and “clinging” to current friends³⁷. This study had a small sample size of 4 practitioners, 6 Army parents and 6 Non-Army parents (for comparison) and the focus on Army children limits the extent to which we can generalise these findings. However, a larger qualitative study³⁸, in which researchers spoke to 95 RAF children and young people, also reported a change in children’s emotional well-being associated with deployment. Children reported increased stress, sadness and upset associated with missing the serving parent during their absence.

Studies that have looked directly at whether the deployment of the serving parent is associated with poorer behavioural and mental health outcomes in UK Service children have produced **inconsistent results**. Data collected from children of British Army personnel aged between 8–11 years in 2011–2012³⁹ suggests that those with fathers deployed to Afghanistan experienced **clinically elevated levels of anxiety and stress at all stages of deployment**. However, levels of depression and behavioural difficulties were found to be low. PhD research findings published in 2018⁴⁰ also report that children have a negative emotional reaction to deployment. This study described how children often attempted to use distraction techniques to combat this with varying degrees of success.

UK Service Personnel also report feeling that deployment has a negative impact on their children. In a large study of personnel across the Service branches who had deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan⁴¹, over half (55%) perceived a negative impact of deployment



33 McCullough J and Hall M. [Further and Higher Progression for Service Children](#). 2016.

34 Jain V, Stevelink S and Fear N. [What are the best and worst things about having a father in UK Armed Forces? Analysis of free text responses](#). Journal of the Royal Army Medical Corps 2017; 163: 115–118.

35 Children’s Commissioner. [Kin and Country](#). 2018.

36 Children’s Commissioner. [Kin and Country](#). 2018.

37 Paradis P. [An exploration into the risk and protective factors to school adaptation as experienced by children living in army compared to non-army families](#). 2014.

38 Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund. [Growing up in the RAF: The wellbeing of children and young people who have serving parents](#). 2021.

39 Pexton S, Farrants J and Yules W. [The impact of father’s military deployment on child adjustment. The support needs of primary school children and their families separated during active military service: A pilot study](#). Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry. 2018;23(1):110–124.

40 Bowes R E. [Researching the experiences of children and young people from Armed Forces families](#). 2018.

41 Thandi G, Greenberg N, Fear N, and Jones N. [Perceived effect of deployment on families of UK military personnel](#). Occupational Medicine 2017; 67: 562–568.

on their children. Furthermore, those who had deployed for 13 months or more within a 3-year period were more likely to feel that their military career had negatively impacted on their children⁴². However, another study published in 2018⁴³ reported that parental deployment to Iraq or Afghanistan was **not related to any difference in childhood emotional or behavioural difficulties** in Service children across a large tri-Service sample.

Despite these inconsistencies in research findings, SMEs emphasised the emotional impact on children, echoing the potential for poor mental health in Service children discussed in the literature:

“That worry and that anxiety when their parent is away definitely places... additional pressures on them in terms of the mental health and well-being, [in] addition to all those that all young people are sort of growing up with at the moment.” Interviewee 6’

“More and more youngsters are telling us that they feel depressed and sad and have poor concentration at school, especially at times of separation.” Interviewee 1

The behavioural impacts associated with separation were also discussed:

“So, either you know sort of rejecting a parent or other kind of like sort of behaviours, bedwetting and so on depending on the age of the child.” Interviewee 10

“She had had 2 and a half years with dad at home, although we were overseas. But as soon as he went away she then wouldn't sleep. There were effects of teatime she wouldn't eat and different things like that, because actually daddy had been there to do the teatime and bedtime routines. So, psychologically, it does affect them as well.” Interviewee 9

42 Rowe SL, Keeling M, Wessely S and Fear NT [Perceptions of the impact a military career has on children](#). Occupational Medicine 2014; 64: 490–496.

43 Fear NT, Reed RV, Rowe S, et al. [Impact of paternal deployment to the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan and paternal post-traumatic stress disorder on the children of military fathers](#). The British Journal of Psychiatry 2018; 212: 347–355.



Furthermore, when a parent is deployed, they may miss important events, such as children’s birthdays, father or mothers’ days and Christmas. This feeling was shared by adolescent tri-Service children and RAF children in the UK^{44 45}.

“Missing important events, especially for the younger ones is huge. Missing birthdays, missing Christmas, missing important events, the annual football match or whatever it is.” Interviewee 1

The international literature has produced similarly mixed results (See Table 2; example studies, not an exhaustive list). However, a review of US and UK peer-reviewed literature in 2017⁴⁶ suggested that **as the number of months deployed increased** (taking into account the length and number of deployments of the serving parent), **so did the occurrence of attachment problems, depression, mental health diagnoses and hospitalisation in military children**. Shorter lengths of deployment, being the child of a Reservist, and increased communication with the deployed parent acted as a **buffer to the adverse impact of separation**.



44 Children’s Commissioner. [Kin and Country](#). 2018.

45 Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund. [Growing up in the RAF: The wellbeing of children and young people who have serving parents](#). 2021

46 Blamey H, Fear N and Hess DC. The impact of parental military service on child well-being: A review 2019 In: NATO, (ed.). [Impact of Military Life on Children from Military Families: Final Report of NATO RTG HFM-258](#). Science and Technology Organisation, NATO.

Table 2. International studies investigating the emotional and behavioural impact of deployment on Service children

Country	Impact of deployment on emotional health/mental health/behaviour	No impact of deployment on emotional health/mental health/behaviour
Australia	<p>Siebler et al (2014)⁴⁷ – all stages of deployment associated with negative impact on children’s physical and mental health. Many behavioural difficulties reported.</p> <p>McGuire et al (2016)⁴⁸ – increased behavioural problems associated with two or more deployments.</p>	<p>Kaczmarek & Sibbel (2008)⁴⁹ – no significant differences in children’s well-being associated with military deployment of father.</p>
Canada	<p>Bullock & Skomorovsky (2016)⁵⁰ – deployment has a negative effect on the physical and emotional well-being of Service children.</p>	<p>Bullock (2017)⁵¹ – deployment was not significantly associated with adolescent well-being. However, increased emotional reactivity to deployment was related to well-being.</p>
The Netherlands	<p>Andres & Moelker (2011)⁵² – an emotional and behavioural impact of deployment observed in Service children: separation anxiety, disobedience, difficulty sleeping.</p>	

47 Siebler P and Goddard C. [Parents’ Perspectives of their Children’s Reactions to an Australian Military Deployment](#). Children Australia 2014; 39: 17-24.

48 McGuire ACL, Kanesarajah J, Runge CE, et al. [Effect of multiple deployments on military families: A cross-sectional study of health and well-being of partners and children](#). Military Medicine 2016; 181: 319-327.

49 Kaczmarek EA and Sibbel AM. [The psychosocial well-being of children from Australian military and fly-in/fly-out \(FIFO\) mining families](#). Community, Work & Family 2008; 11: 297-31

50 Bullock A and Skomorovsky A. [Children’s positive experiences growing up in Canadian military households](#). Journal of Military, Veteran and Family Health 2016; 2: 21-28.

51 Bullock A. [Military Stressors and the Well-Being of Adolescents in Canadian Armed Forces Families: The Roles of Relationships with Parents and Peers](#). Carleton University, 2017.

52 Andres MD and Moelker R. [There and back again: How parental experiences affect children’s adjustments in the course of military deployments](#). Armed Forces & Society 2011; 37: 418-447.

<p>United States</p>	<p>Nicosia et al (2017)⁵³ – Long deployments (>180 days) were associated with decreased independence and responsibility, but only in male children. Shorter deployments were less likely to cause decreased independence, fear or anxiety.</p> <p>Mustillo, Wadsworth & Lester (2016)⁵⁴– In Service children aged 3–5 years, long deployments were associated with increased generalised anxiety and total % of life that parent is deployed was associated with increased social anxiety. For those aged 6–10 years, long deployments were associated with emotional problems, and parental deployment at birth was associated with increased total and peer problems.</p> <p>Sullivan et al (2015)⁵⁵ – Experiencing 2 or more deployments was associated with increased depression symptoms in Service children; having a mother rather than a father deployed was associated with further increased symptoms in Service children.</p> <p>Acion et al (2013)⁵⁶ – Children in 6th, 8th or 11th grade with deployed parents were more likely to drink or smoke marijuana. This likelihood increased if not living with a parent or relatives.</p> <p>Aranda et al (2011)⁵⁷ – Parents and children both report increased psychosocial symptoms compared to those whose parents are not deployed. Parents report increase internalising and externalising symptoms, attention and school issues in children with a deployed parent. Children self-report the same, with the exception of attention issues.</p> <p>Jaycox et al (2006)⁵⁸ – In Service children (<11yrs) deployment was associated with emotional problems and increased depressive symptoms. In teens (>11) deployment was associated with an increase in drug use. Relationship quality with serving parent improved from pre-deployment to deployment, then decreased when reunited.</p>	<p>Mustillo, Wadsworth & Lester (2016)⁵⁹ – No evidence of social or emotional differences due to deployment in children aged 0–5 years.</p> <p>Sullivan et al (2015)⁶⁰ – 2 or more deployments were associated with higher well-being scores compared to Service children who have never experienced parental deployment.</p>
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53 Nicosia N, Wong E, Shier V, et al. [Parental deployment, adolescent academic and social-behavioral maladjustment, and parental psychological well-being in military families](#). Public Health Reports 2017; 132: 93–105.

54 Mustillo S, Wadsworth SM and Lester P. [Parental Deployment and Well-Being in Children: Results From a New Study of Military Families](#). Journal of Emotional and Behavioural Disorder 2016; 24: 82–91.

55 Sullivan K, Benbenishty R, Astor RA, et al. [The Impact of Maternal and Paternal Deployment on Depressive Symptoms and Well-Being Among Military-Connected Youth](#). Military Behavioral Health 2015; 3: 182–189.

56 Acion L, Ramirez MR, Jorge RE, et al. [Increased risk of alcohol and drug use among children from deployed military families](#). Addiction 2013; 108: 1418–1425.

57 Aranda MC, Middleton LS, Flake E, et al. [Psychosocial screening in children with wartime-deployed parents](#). Military medicine 2011; 176: 402–407.

58 Jaycox LH, Trail TE, Ayer L, et al. Child & Teen Outcomes. In: Meadows SO, Tanielian T and Karney BR (eds) The Deployment Life Study: Longitudinal Analysis of Military Families across the Deployment Cycle. 2006.

59 Mustillo S, Wadsworth SM and Lester P. [Parental Deployment and Well-Being in Children: Results From a New Study of Military Families](#). Journal of Emotional and Behavioural Disorder 2016; 24: 82–91.

60 Sullivan K, Benbenishty R, Astor RA, et al. [The Impact of Maternal and Paternal Deployment on Depressive Symptoms and Well-Being Among Military-Connected Youth](#). Military Behavioral Health 2015; 3: 182–189.

The RN, the Naval Children’s Charity (NCC)⁶¹ and the NFF have adopted the **Emotional Cycle of Deployment, developed by Kathleen Logan in 1987**⁶², to help Service families understand their reactions to the deployment of their serving family member. This cycle has 7 stages from pre- to post-deployment, and focuses on common emotions and behaviours experienced during these stages as a result of having a deployed parent. The models underpinning the emotional cycle of deployment, however, are now over 2 decades old and two SMEs noted ways that perhaps modern life and technology might have altered how the emotional cycle is experienced:

“I think it’s changed because the way communication is now in place and also expectations and also, dare I say, a new generation that’s coming through. And the emotional cycle of deployment. I suspect, is at least 20 years old hasn’t really been reviewed since.... And 20 years ago, people in the Navy were very different and terms and conditions in the Navy were very different than they are now.” Interviewee 8

“And that [modern technology] doesn’t allow for children or adults to do that bit where they kind of emotionally distance themselves from that person, because you know that is kind of a thing that has been observed lots of times,” Interviewee 5

One UK study was identified looking at spouses and children’s perception of family functioning across the deployment cycle⁶³. This study found **problematic family functioning, poor communication and satisfaction in currently deployed families** and post-deployed families (i.e. had experienced deployment in the past 12 months), compared to pre-deployed (i.e. no deployment in the past 12 months) and non-military families. An analysis of pre-adolescent children’s drawings was also carried out in this study and further suggested poor family functioning in currently deployed families, with children drawing their deployed parent as far away or a different size to other family members. The authors of this study highlight the importance of the effect of deployment on children in mediating the impact on overall family functioning.

Further research is needed to reconfirm or update the ways in which the emotional cycle of deployment is experienced by families, taking into consideration changes to modern life and communication during the past two decades.

61 This concept is deployed in their [Knit the Family book series](#).

62 Logan KV. [The emotional cycle of deployment](#). In: US Naval Institute Proceedings 1987, pp.43–47.

63 Pye RE and Simpson LK. [Family Functioning Differences Across the Deployment Cycle in British Army Families: The Perceptions of Wives and Children](#). Military Medicine 2017; 182: 1856–1863.

Age and gender-related differences in reactions to deployment

Little is known about the emotional/behavioural reactions of UK Service children at different stages of deployment, as research has tended to look at the impact of deployment or number of deployments on the military family as a whole. However, it has been suggested that the **impact differs at each stage depending on the child's age**. A resource for military families was recently developed by the NFF⁶⁴, outlining how children of different ages may react to the different stages of deployment, and offering strategies for parents to overcome this.

There is some research in the UK that provides evidence for the suggestion that **children of different ages are impacted differently by separation**. A report from the Children's Commissioner in 2018⁶⁵ found that for **primary school children**, both short- and long-term **deployment of a parent was associated with sadness, worry and general unease**. The physical absence of the parent appeared to be causing distress to children at this age. This is supported by research that found that for younger children, the experience of parental separation was characterised as embodied, with an emphasis on smell, and children often using physical items such as a parent's shirt to remain connected to them⁶⁶. **Older children** also experienced this upset at their parent's absence, however, they also experienced **intense fear and concern for the welfare of their deployed parent**. The increased understanding that comes with being older may exacerbate the fear and concern experienced as a result of deployment. This is supported by research carried out with British Army families in 2013⁶⁷, which reported that younger children's (Year 6) experience of deployment centred around missing their parent, whereas for older children (Year 10 & 11) missing their parent was combined with significant concern and worry for their safety.

UK Naval spouses report⁶⁸ that **younger children experience more disruption** as a result of separation, resulting in short-term displays of increased dependence/clinginess to non-serving spouse, and increased irritability/arguments with siblings. At the extreme, longer term problems such as toileting issues and externalising behaviours developed in younger children. However, **older children**, especially those who have previously experienced deployment, are described by their non-serving parent as having a **better understanding of their parent's military service**.

A number of SMEs underscored the impact on younger children's developmental milestones:



64 Naval Families Federation. [The Experience of Parental Absence in Royal Navy and Royal Marines Families](#). 2019.

65 Children's Commissioner. [Kin and Country](#). 2018.

66 Bowes RE. [Researching the experiences of children and young people from Armed Forces families](#). 2018.

67 Noret N et al. [The Educational Attainment of Army Children](#). 2013.

68 Gribble R and Fear NT. [The Effect of non-operational family separation on family functioning and well-being among Royal Navy/Royal Marines Families](#). 2019.

“Very young, pre-school children, are impacted differently because it tends to impact on their developmental stages. So that fact that perhaps we’ve had children in nursery school who were blossoming, meeting their developmental milestones and then Dad goes away or Mum goes way, or in the rare cases both Mum and Dad go away, and then suddenly we are back to toileting issues again, we are back to bedwetting, we are back to eating differences. So, it tends to impact on their emotional – the emotional impact is on their development stages and milestones” Interviewee 1

“So, either you know sort of rejecting a parent or other kind of like [that] sort of behaviours, bedwetting and so on depending on the age of the child.” Interviewee 10

For older children, SMEs spoke of the impact on their mental health:

“You’ve got a relationship with your kids when they are older and they worry more because they’ve got that relationship and that does add even more anxiety and that generally means at school, they are all a bit fractious potentially.” Interviewee 2

International research supports age-related differences in the impact of deployment. A research study with Dutch Service children⁶⁹ suggests that behavioural difficulties and separation anxiety are more severe in children ages 0-11 years, as parents struggle to explain deployments to children of this age. Furthermore, research from Australia⁷⁰ and Canada⁷¹ suggests that older children are more likely to take on more responsibility as a result of deployment. For example, acting as caregivers for the remaining parent or siblings, or taking on more chores at home.

We found no research that looked at gender differences in the impact of deployment on Service children. However, some SMEs commented on the differing expectations of boys and girls during interviews:



69 Andres MD and Moelker R. [There and back again: How parental experiences affect children’s adjustments in the course of military deployments](#). Armed Forces & Society 2011; 37: 418–447.

70 Siebler P and Goddard C. [Parents’ Perspectives of their Children’s Reactions to an Australian Military Deployment](#). Children Australia 2014; 39: 17–24.

71 Bullock A and Skomorovsky A. [Children’s positive experiences growing up in Canadian military households](#). Journal of Military, Veteran and Family Health 2016; 2: 21–28.

“Almost 10 years ago now, boys were saying that they were expected to get on with it more than they thought their sisters were. It was ok for their sisters, and it was ok for the sister to crawl into Mum’s bed when Dad was away to sleep, but the boy was saying we need to go there as well we need our turn to sleep in Mum’s bed.” Interviewee 1

“If the Dad was going away then I’m sure you’ve heard “You are the man of the house now” so the expectation weighed heavily on their shoulders. You know even if the Mum was away you never heard them being told “Ok you are the woman of the house now”. But certainly, you are the man of the house and certainly some boys took that to the extreme.” Interviewee 1

“They sell these lovely little T shirts that say I’m a junior soldier, I’m Daddy’s little boy, I’m a junior, all these dreadful stereotypes and all the girls are standing there looking pretty in pink Disney dresses when makes you want to cringe really. And I think, I think a lot of boys buy into this exciting kind of action man commando Joe type of thing. And then when Daddy is not as well and they see Daddy upset. They don’t know what to do.” Interviewee 12

Communication during separation

Communication during separation has changed significantly since the original Overlooked Casualties of Conflict report was published in 2009. Where children would previously have been limited to telephone and email contact with their deployed parents, **the rise of social media, instant messaging and video calls** in the past few decades have **increased the possibility of regular communication**. The most commonly reported method of communication between Naval children and serving parent during non-operational separation is still by phone however; online services such as Skype, FaceTime and Facebook now come a close second⁷². Increased use of social media for communication was also discussed by SMEs:

“Now that was more so when I was growing up than today, because of Facebook, the social media, allows that contact a little bit more.” Interviewee 2



72 Gribble R and Fear NT. [The Effect of non-operational family separation on family functioning and well-being among Royal Navy/ Royal Marines Families.](#) 2019.

“Is that a good thing? It is. It’s actually keeping them in contact and hopefully in the long run will help when that parent comes home.”

Interviewee 9

Research carried out with Portuguese military families⁷³ highlights the need for communication technologies to enable the deployed parent to be present for their children both psychologically and emotionally. This resource is suggested to **buffer the adverse effects of separation**. This is supported by a review of the international literature on the well-being of Service children⁷⁴. It is also partly supported by research with UK Naval spouses and children⁷⁵, which concluded that **those who lacked the resources for good communication during non-operational separation may be at risk of poorer outcomes**. However, half of the Naval spouses in this study reported that communication between their child and serving partner was difficult, and two thirds perceived insufficient contact between parent and child.

Furthermore, the use of online services may lead to **increased communication difficulties associated with poor internet quality or phone reception**, particularly for personnel serving at sea⁷⁶. A report by the Children’s Commissioner⁷⁷ highlighted that whilst social media contact allowed Service children to maintain regular contact during deployment, this could be difficult for serving parents in ‘hard to reach’ environments. Waiting for a response under these circumstances has the potential to cause anxiety for children. This problem was also highlighted in a report for the Maritime Charities Group⁷⁸, in which a lack of internet connectivity on ships was emphasised, as well as a lack of guidance as to how to effectively manage virtual family relationships. This latter point is important, as US research suggests that adolescent Service children feel that the **quality of communication is more important than the quantity**⁷⁹.

However, SMEs raised a number of concerns about increased internet-based communication. One SME highlighted that video communication can be challenging because



73 Bóia A et al. [International Missions, Marital Relationships and Parenting in Military Families: An Exploratory Study](#). Journal of Child and Family Studies 2018; 27: 302-315

74 Blamey H, Fear N and Hess DC. The impact of parental military service on child well-being: A review 2019 In: NATO, (ed.). [Impact of Military Life on Children from Military Families: Final Report of NATO RTG HFM-258](#). Science and Technology Organisation, NATO.

75 Gribble R and Fear NT. [The Effect of non-operational family separation on family functioning and well-being among Royal Navy/ Royal Marines Families](#). 2019.

76 Naval Families Federation. [Naval Service Families Mental Health Survey](#). 2018.

77 Children’s Commissioner. [Kin and Country](#). 2018.

78 Maritime Charities Group. [The needs and aspirations of the dependant and families of seafarers under retirement age](#). 2016.

79 Friedman SL et al. [Quantity and quality of communication during parental deployment: Links to adolescents’ functioning](#). Applied Developmental Science 2017; 21: 285-300.

“it can be more painful really to see someone and then just hear their voice. If you are missing them” (Interviewee 10).

Many SMEs spoke about the potential impact of parental communication and the difficulties around knowing what problems to share with your serving person:

“And I think it’s don’t tell Mummy or Daddy that you’ve had a bad day, because they’ve got enough on their plates and that’s awful isn’t it... I can always see them in the background of a Skype meeting or a Zoom meeting or FaceTime and going no don’t tell Dad that.” Interviewee 8

“There is that old adage that a problem shared is a problem halved, but how big a problem do you need to share when one person is away having to face what they are facing with their job, and one person is at home having to face what they are facing with their family.” Interviewee 2

“Whereas now, because everything is quite immediate, you can be going through some sort of catastrophic thing at home and immediately report that to your serving person in some sort of cases, and so then you end up with individuals who are at sea stressing because they’ve got a situation going on at home, which they never normally would have been aware of and it would have been resolved probably before they got to hear anything about it.” Interviewee 5

Due to the increased connectivity of social media, many SMEs remarked on the increased expectations of Service families and the potential negative impact of this if these expectations are not met due to technical, security or personal reasons. This is a particular challenge for submariners, whose communication is severely limited:

“So, let’s say this happens 2 or 3 times, when your kid wants to see Mum or Dad and it’s starting to build up. Where is Dad? Why is he not talking to us? Why can’t we get him on the phone? Is there a real problem? How are we dealing with this? Can’t do this we are on an exercise, well what exercise? Well we can’t tell you that.” Interviewee 2

“It’s that constant connectedness that people sort to expect to have around social media now and you just don’t have that necessarily. If that’s your way of keeping in contact with your friends and with your family members and other people, but you can’t access it because say your Mum or Dad’s working as a submariner where there is no contact. How do you keep in contact if that

is your go to method and you haven't found some sort of other way to do it? How do you respond to it if you know that your parent is somewhere, and you think that they could possibly contact you but they don't?" Interviewee 5

"But the problem is, again, with expectation management, we're talking about ship that's bopping around at sea and suddenly they need to go silent, we call it silence. So, they need to turn off all communications very, very quickly. So again, expectation management for the children." Interviewee 8

The Influence of parental relationships and coping

Parental coping and the quality of the parent-child relationship both appear to impact on the Service child's reaction to deployment. Research with UK^{80, 81} and US⁸² Army wives has shown that separation has an adverse impact on the well-being and coping ability of the non-deployed spouse. As a result, poor functioning of the remaining parent is likely to impact on the adjustment and well-being of Service children. Indeed, research in a sample of Dutch military families⁸³ found that the **well-being of the mother was related to the adjustment of the child** during paternal deployment. US research also suggests a link between higher levels of distress in the remaining parent, and affective and behavioural problems in Service children^{84, 85}. Furthermore, a Canadian study⁸⁶ found that when there was a positive and supportive relationship between an adolescent Service child and both their serving and non-serving parent, this buffered the negative impact of emotional reactivity to deployment on well-being.

Research in the UK is limited in this area, and SME interviews did not highlight the influence of coping or the well-being of the remaining parent on Service children. However, a report by the Children's Commissioner⁸⁷ found that some Service children

80 Gribble R and Fear NT. [The Effect of non-operational family separation on family functioning and well-being among Royal Navy/ Royal Marines Families](#). 2019.

81 Dandeker C, Eversden C, Birtles C. [The British military family: The experiences of British Army wives before, during, and after deployment, their satisfaction with military life, and their use of support networks](#). 2015, p.107-127.

82 Burrell LM, Adams GA, Durand DB and Castro CA. [The impact of military lifestyle demands on well-being, army, and family outcomes](#). *Armed Forces & Society* 2006; 33: 43-58.

83 Andres MD and Moelker R. [There and back again: How parental experiences affect children's adjustments in the course of military deployments](#). *Armed Forces & Society* 2011; 37: 418-447

84 Chandra A, Lara-Cinisomo S, Jaycox LH, et al. Children on the homefront: The experience of children from military families. *Pediatrics* 2010; 125: 16-25.

85 Lester P, Aralis H, Sinclair M, et al. [The impact of deployment on parental, family and child adjustment in military families](#). *Child Psychiatry & Human Development* 2016; 47: 938-949.

86 Bullock A. [Military Stressors and the Well-Being of Adolescents in Canadian Armed Forces Families: The Roles of Relationships with Parents and Peers](#). Carleton University, 2017.

87 Children's Commissioner. [Kin and Country](#). 2018.

spoke of the **additional difficulties they experienced during deployment if the remaining parent was unwell or unable to care for themselves** or their siblings properly. Children felt additional responsibility associated with helping out in these circumstances, which has the potential to lead to poorer well-being in these children. Conversely, in a report for the NFF⁸⁸, Service children reported that their **remaining parent provided stability and reliability** in support at home whilst their serving parent was deployed.

One SME described the impact on children of mental health and associated substance abuse in the remaining parent:

“Like I cook a meal for Mommy because she’s really tired and needs to go and lie down. In fact, she’s completely out of her head on drink or drugs is another issue.” Interviewee 8

The impact of taking on more responsibility and becoming a young carer is discussed in the [Young Carers](#) section later in this report.

Key Findings

- The literature presents an inconsistent picture of the impact of deployment-related separation on Service children’s emotions and behaviour. Evidence of a negative impact of deployment consists mainly of emotional and behavioural difficulties, particularly anxiety.
- The impact of deployment appears to differ depending on the age of the child. Younger children’s experiences were characterised by sadness, missing their serving parent’s physical presence and, at the extreme, impacts on toileting and externalising behaviours. Older children were more impacted by concerns for parental safety.
- Evidence suggests that increased social media communication may aid families and buffer the adverse effects of separation. However, problems may arise if these new expectations for communication cannot be met due to connectivity issues or operational demands.
- There is limited UK research concerning the impact of the remaining parent’s well-being on children during deployment-related separation.

Our Recommendations

1. The Emotional Cycle of Deployment Model is now over 20 years old. We recommend that further research is carried out to reconfirm or update how the



88 Gribble R and Fear NT. [The Effect of non-operational family separation on family functioning and well-being among Royal Navy/Royal Marines Families.](#) 2019.

deployment is experienced by families, taking into consideration changes to modern life and communication during the past two decades.

2. In order to achieve Recommendation 1, we recommend that further research is carried out to increase our understanding of the impact of increased communication via social media during deployment on the parent-child relationship.
3. The Naval Transformation programme will impact on the amount of time that Naval personnel spend separated from their families due to deployment. It will be imperative for the MOD to monitor and evaluate the impact of these changes on Service children and families.
4. In light of suggestions from subject matter experts, the impact of gender (of both the Service child and serving parent) on reactions to deployment is an area that requires further investigation.
5. There is a significant gap in our understanding of how parental coping and well-being during deployment impacts on Service children in the UK. We recommend that research is commissioned to investigate this further, and how support for the remaining parent may also benefit Service children.

2. The impact of lone parenting

The deployment of a serving parent inevitably leads to **temporary one parent families, or no-parent families** for dual-serving couples or single-serving parents. For those remaining at home, the absence of a parent leads to a **change in family dynamics**, and UK Service children report increased expectation that they will **take on more responsibilities around the house**^{89,90}, including household chores and looking after siblings. During non-operational deployments, Naval spouses describe how teenagers can **sometimes take on the role of the absent parent**, to assist the remaining parent at home⁹¹. The impact of this additional responsibility on UK Service children is largely unknown. However, research with Canadian and Portuguese military families^{92, 93} suggests that temporary single parenting during deployment provided the opportunity for strengthening the remaining parent-child relationship.



89 Pexton S, Farrants J, Yules W. [The impact of father’s military deployment on child adjustment. The support needs of primary school children and their families separated during active military service: A pilot study.](#) 2018.

90 Gribble R and Fear NT. The Effect of non-operational family separation on family functioning and well-being among Royal Navy/ Royal Marines Families. 2019.

91 Gribble R and Fear NT. [The Effect of non-operational family separation on family functioning and well-being among Royal Navy/ Royal Marines Families.](#) 2019.

92 Bullock A. [Military Stressors and the Well-Being of Adolescents in Canadian Armed Forces Families: The Roles of Relationships with Parents and Peers.](#)2017.

93 Andres MD, Moelker R. [There and back again: How parental experiences affect children’s adjustments in the course of military deployments.](#) Armed Forces & Society. 2011;37(3):418-47.

The challenges facing dual- and single-serving parents

There are no official statistics available in the UK for the number of dual-serving or single-serving parents. However, the British Army reports that there are over 1,300 married couples serving together⁹⁴. Furthermore, surveys carried out by the NFF with Naval families^{95,96}, found that **between 5-13% of respondents were part of a dual-serving couple, and 3% of respondents were lone serving parents**. The US Department of Defense (DoD) reports that approximately 5% of married military personnel are in dual-serving families⁹⁷.

Dual- and single-serving families face the **additional difficulties** associated with juggling deployments, maintaining family relationships (both with their partner and children) long-distance and childcare, should both parents be deployed or working unpredictable hours. Indeed, dual-serving Naval couples in the UK **are more likely to report a negative impact of service life on their mental health**, due to the challenges of both co-parenting and maintaining a relationship whilst serving⁹⁸. The Living in Our Shoes report⁹⁹ published in 2020 highlights the additional difficulties experienced by dual-serving families in fulfilling both their military and family duties.

Having both parents deployed can result in **significant childcare issues for parents** (explored further in the [Childcare](#) section below). Indeed, UK military families report having to send their children to extended family members during deployment, and **some have been told to consider putting their child in foster care** when there is no other option for childcare^{100,101}. A survey carried out by the NFF¹⁰² highlighted that dual-serving Naval couples are currently only given Serving Couple with Dependent Children (SWDC) status until their children reach the age of 11 years, following which there is no assurance that both parents won't be deployed at the same time. Compared to the Army and RAF, this goes beyond the policies set out under *JSP 760 (24.93)*¹⁰³ which specifies (but does not guarantee) that efforts will be made to avoid deployment of both parents simultaneously where operational capability allows.

Disruption for Service children is significantly enhanced by both parents being away. If

94 Army and You Magazine, [Married to the Job](#) (accessed 5.11.2020)

95 Naval Families Federation. [Naval Service Families Mental Health Survey](#). 2018.

96 Naval Families Federation. [Childcare Report](#). 2016.

97 Department of Defense, [2015 Demographics](#). 2015

98 Naval Families Federation. [Naval Service Families Mental Health Survey](#). 2018.

99 Walker J, Selous A and Misca G. [Living in our shoes: understanding the needs of UK armed forces families](#). 2020.

100 Walker J, Selous A and Misca G. [Living in our shoes: understanding the needs of UK armed forces families](#). 2020.

101 Children's Commissioner.. 2018.[Kin and Country](#)

102 Naval Families Federation. [Childcare Report](#). 2016.

103 Ministry of Defence. [JSP 760: Tri-Service Regulations for Leave and Other Types of Absence](#)

moving away to stay with family members or family friends, this can cause **disruption to schooling**, with children moving back and forth between schools during the deployment cycle¹⁰⁴. This is likely to influence a child’s educational attainment and well-being, with increased emotional difficulties as a result of concern for both parents¹⁰⁵. However, there is a **lack of research** investigating the impact of having dual-serving parents on Service children in the UK and internationally¹⁰⁶.

Research suggests that Service children in **single-parent serving families’ fare poorly compared to those with dual-parent military and civilian families**. Recent work with Canadian single-parent military families suggested that they felt deployment had a negative impact on their child’s well-being, and reported attachment difficulties, emotional and behavioural problems, and academic difficulties¹⁰⁷. This is supported by research from the US suggesting that children in single-parent military families show lower educational attainment¹⁰⁸, and exhibit more attachment problems than those in dual-parent military families¹⁰⁹.

Impact on serving parent–child relationship

Being separated from the serving parent for significant amounts of time during childhood may result in **difficulties within the parent–child relationship** and the **lack of an appropriate role model**. Research by the NFF¹¹⁰ suggested that non-operational separation impacted negatively on the parent–child relationship, with Naval spouses reporting anger, resentment and rejection from children towards their serving parent. Importantly, however, Naval children themselves did not report a negative influence of separation on this relationship.

Whilst there is a lack of research specifically examining this issue in the UK, academic research from the US has identified a number of attachment-related behavioural problems in response to deployment of a parent¹¹¹. This appears to be a **particular problem for younger children**, who may have been born whilst their serving parent was

104 Children’s Commissioner. 2018. [Kin and Country](#)

105 Healthy Schools Wiltshire. [FAB Research \(from 2014\): Wiltshire Children and Young People’s Health and Wellbeing Survey 2020](#)

106 Naval Families Federation. [Childcare Report](#). 2016

107 Skomorovsky A, Norris D, Bullock A, Evans KS. [The impact of military life on the well-being of children in single-parent military families](#). Journal of Military, Veteran and Family Health. 2016;2(2):29–36.

108 Lyle DS. [Using military deployments and job assignments to estimate the effect of parental absences and household relocations on children’s academic achievement](#). Journal of Labor Economics. 2006;24(2):319–50.

109 Barker LH, Berry KD. [Developmental Issues Impacting Military Families With Young Children During Single and Multiple Deployments](#). Military Medicine. 2009;174(10):1033–40.

110 Gribble R and Fear NT. [The Effect of non-operational family separation on family functioning and well-being among Royal Navy/ Royal Marines Families](#). 2019.

111 Aranda MC, Middleton LS, Flake E, et al. [Psychosocial screening in children with wartime-deployed parents](#). Military medicine 2011; 176: 402–407.

deployed, and may not yet have developed a bond with their parent¹¹². Furthermore, SMEs commented on the interplay of gender on the parent-child relationship during parental absence:

“When I sort of think about young lads growing up with their Dads away and they are sort of going through all of their life changes and puberty and all the rest of it and the person they’ve got to talk to about that stuff... about their sexual relationships is their Mum very often” Interviewee 5

“From an emotional point of view where the serving parent was the Mum, the girls were more emotionally affected than boys. But girls weren’t so affected if the serving parent was the Dad.” Interviewee 1

Dispersed families and rise of weekending

Many Service families now **own their own home, and rather than moving from post to post** with their serving partner, may live apart from them during the week. These families are often referred to as **‘dispersed’**, defined by the RAF Dispersed Families Project as **living 10 miles or more away from their unit**¹¹³.

Dispersed families are often associated with a rise in **‘weekending’**, a term used to describe the situation in which the serving person is **away during the week and returns at the weekend**. This creates a family dynamic in which the non-serving partner becomes a temporary lone parent during the week. As such, children may experience a number of the same emotional and behavioural reactions to deployment-related separation, during separation from their serving parent during the working week. Indeed, a report for the NFF¹¹⁴ found that **non-operational separation has a negative impact on their children’s mental health and well-being**. Focus groups and interviews carried out in this study found that non-operational separation was also related to longer term adjustment issues in some children, with stress-related behavioural difficulties reported by families.

In 2019, the MOD began piloting the new **Future Accommodation Model (FAM)**¹¹⁵, with the aim of providing more choice to personnel on where and how they want to live. Alongside subsidised Service Family Accommodation (SFA), families will have the option of subsidised private renting and **financial support for home ownership**. The impact of



112 Jaycox LH, Trail TE, Ayer L, et al. Child & Teen Outcomes. In: Meadows SO, Tanielian T and Karney BR (eds) [The Deployment Life Study: Longitudinal Analysis of Military Families across the Deployment Cycle](#). 2006.

113 Royal Air Force Families Federation. [RAF Dispersed Families](#). 2019.

114 Gribble R and Fear NT. [The Effect of non-operational family separation on family functioning and well-being among Royal Navy/ Royal Marines Families](#). 2019.

115 Ministry of Defence. [What you need to know about the Future Accommodation Model](#) (accessed 22.10.20).

this is yet to be seen, but SMEs felt that this policy would lead to an **increase in military family dispersion away from the military community/support network**, and separation from the serving parent:

“I worry slightly that as we move away from people living in groups and people buying your own homes, and maybe pushing the kind of the weekending thing becomes more prevalent, just simply because people aren’t staying put in one area and you break up that military support network.” Interviewee 11

“Another point with the new housing model is that families are being encouraged more and more and more to disperse into the community. They are not behind the wire, they are not on the patch as it were.” Interviewee 1

“I hope that a FAM model does not force families to settle in an area so that the serving person can be away from families for longer periods of time and more frequently. So, I’m hoping that... families will stay in one place does not add greater pressure to the family structure.” Interviewee 4

Distance from the military support network could also lead to difficulty in accessing military-specific support available on base:

“Then family would have to go to find their own support networks and they might find that more difficult because they might feel that a local community doesn’t understand what they’re going through. So that sort of worries me.” Interviewee 11

“The further away you are from that centralised community support then obviously there are access issues. Either in travel or time or distance. So that can have an unintended consequence of families saying they enjoy being in the community, being part of a local community, but access to the wider support network, where there is maybe a community facility or a youth club specifically for the military, then the children aren’t accessing that in the same way.” Interviewee 1

Some interviewees feared that dispersed families would miss out on some the benefits of military community:

“It is a big support network and the families are [an] incredible network for each other in many ways. I think if you are living on a patch together. I think that’s an incredibly strong network.” Interviewee 11

“I think by them all being housed together at times [during] a deployment that actually is really, really helpful because all the neighbours [are] going through, all the children are going through the same experiences. I think where there’s... family from the RAF and Dad has been away and she’s the only one in her road and she’s not even on the Army patch as they call it, she’s got a private rented house. It’s a lovely house... she’d rather be with neighbours from a Service background.” Interviewee 12

The RAF Families Federation (RAF FF) carried out a project focused on dispersed families, with a report published in 2019¹¹⁶. Dispersed families reported that **regular separation had increased significantly** as a result of the serving partner remaining mobile. However, this study identified that a **common benefit of home ownership amongst dispersed families was stability**, and 71% of homeowners had not moved in the past 2 or more years, with a third not having moved in 5 years.

SMEs also highlighted the potential benefits this could bring in terms of increased stability for military families:

“So, on one hand they’ve lost that little bit of community, but for the children giving them that stability.” Interviewee 7

“I can see the stability element to it. I can see that creating a longer-term sort of set up in an area where children can go through school can experience what other people are going through.” Interviewee 11

One SME commented that increased stability may in turn help ease Service families’ transition, with the Help to Buy option of the FAM helping to ensure that transitioning families have a comfortable place to live pre-discharge and that children do not have to move from SFA, and potentially their school and social networks as part of transition.

Naval families have historically been more dispersed and more likely to live away from their serving partner. According to the FAMCAS 2020, **RN/RM families are more likely to own a home** than the other two Service branches (75%, compared to 51% in the Army

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116 Royal Air Force Families Federation. [RAF Dispersed Families](#). 2019.

and 68% in the RAF)¹¹⁷. However, they are also **less likely to live with their partner during the working week** (61%, compared to 80% Army and 78% RAF spouses)¹¹⁸. Compared with the last decade, home ownership has risen (in 2011, 65% of RN/RM, 43% RAF and 17% Army owned their own home)⁵⁷¹¹⁹, with the biggest rise seen in Army families (34% rise) followed by the RAF (25%) and RN/RM (10%) families. However, no comparative data is available from 2010 on personnel living with their partner during the week.

As a result of living away from their partner during the week, UK Naval spouses report **limited family time, last minute changes to duties and unpredictability** that was sometimes viewed as more difficult to manage than longer operational deployments¹²⁰. Spouses also reported **difficulty re-establishing co-parenting routines** at the weekend, following changes to family roles that enabled lone parenting during the week. It is possible that increased separation in Naval families may lead to poor adjustment and emotional/behavioural outcomes in Naval children. Indeed, the ‘Living in our Shoes’ report¹²¹ highlighted **separation anxiety in Service children as a result of weekending**, and difficulty accessing support for dispersed Service families. Much like deployment-related separation, the temporary single parent household created by weekending places additional responsibilities on the at-home spouse during the week^{122, 123}. A report for the NFF¹²⁴ found that this can be overwhelming and negatively impact the well-being of the at-home spouse.

Whilst there is a **lack of UK research looking specifically at this issue**, SMEs highlighted the impact of weekending on Naval families:

“It would appear, and I don’t have stats to back this up, but it certainly would appear that anecdotally weekending is having a bigger impact on Naval families than perhaps others. Army tends still to go away on mass as it were, but weekending appears or is appearing to impact more on Naval families.”
Interviewee 1

“I think in terms of the way [the] Navy set up... if we want people to have a

117 Ministry of Defence. [UK Tri-Service Families Continuous Attitude Survey Results 2020](#). 2020.

118 Ministry of Defence. [UK Tri-Service Families Continuous Attitude Survey Results 2020](#). 2020.

119 Ministry of Defence. [Tri-Service Families Continuous Attitude Survey](#). 2011.

120 Gribble R and Fear NT. [The Effect of non-operational family separation on family functioning and well-being among Royal Navy/ Royal Marines Families](#). 2019.

121 Walker J, Selous A and Misca G. [Living in our shoes: understanding the needs of UK armed forces families](#). 2020.

122 Gribble R and Fear NT. [The Effect of non-operational family separation on family functioning and well-being among Royal Navy/ Royal Marines Families](#). 2019.

123 Bowes RE. [Researching the experiences of children and young people from Armed Forces families](#). 2018

124 Gribble R and Fear NT. [The Effect of non-operational family separation on family functioning and well-being among Royal Navy/ Royal Marines Families](#). 2019.

support network that is not just a Naval support network and they want to live in Northampton - you are going to have to weekend” Interviewee 2

A number of SMEs highlighted the challenges of weekending as being the emotional impact of separation on Service children and the challenges it can have on the family dynamic:

“Weekending was not a word I used 10 years ago and now weekending is very much an issue for the youngsters, and the youngsters are telling us that actually the weekending is probably a bigger challenge for them than the long periods of deployment, because in the long period of deployment... there is a cycle, an emotional cycle and you get into a settled phased. But with the weekending you never get into that settled phase.” Interviewee 1

“Weekending comes with all sorts of different separation anxiety that we haven’t even mentioned, separate to being away for deployment. How do you have two routines as a family, one that goes from Monday to Friday 4pm and one that goes from Friday 4pm to Monday at 6am in the morning? And how do young children respond to who is disciplinarian during the week and who is the disciplinarian at the weekend?” Interviewee 2

“You get home, you’re tired on a Friday and you may not see the children. Saturday where do you spend a bit of time and that’s great. And then Sunday, you’ve got what we call our grip while bag is packed it by the front door and you’re ready to go. And the mood changes in the house. Very, very quickly in the home” Interviewee 8

Again, there is evidence of variation in how individual families react to this type of separation:

“Some of it depends on how well the family kind of adjust to that sort of cycle... What we see is that some families adapt very well to that and some children and young people adapt very well to that [but] some of them find it very sort of disruptive” Interviewee 10

“Certainly, when I spoke to some families, they kind of shrug and say, “Yeah

that's what we've become accustomed to". So, it you know it may be a problem for some and it may be, you know, other people are just [adapting] remarkably well to it." Interviewee 11

Young carers

As discussed earlier in the report, some Service children have to take on additional responsibilities when their serving parent is away. For some, this can include **caring for siblings or the remaining parent**, who may be affected by illness or disability. There are **limited statistics regarding young carers from military families** in the UK. A request to the Office for National Statistics by the Children's Society¹²⁵ reported that there were 521 Armed Forces families with young carers; however, this did not capture temporary/intermittent carers (i.e. those caring during deployments). SMEs highlighted this issue in the definition and lack of recognition of young carers in the military:

"I think that policymakers need to take a good hard look at the definitions of young carers, so it widens to include intermittent young carers. There are intermittent young carers in other areas, aspects of society. But in the military, it is very, very clear that youngsters themselves feel that they are not recognised." Interviewee 1

"For children who are young carers, some of them are young carers all the time and some of them become young carers when their serving parent goes away because they are either looking after the remaining parent who might need extra support or other family members." Interviewee 7

SMEs also discussed the fact that Service children themselves may not recognise that the additional responsibilities they take on make them a young carer:

"I think a lot of the children might not identify themselves as young carers but actually are." Interviewee 8

Despite difficulties in the definition and recognition of young carers, some research suggests that there may be an **increased prevalence of young carers in the military context**. A survey carried out with military families in North Yorkshire suggested that 9% of Service children in Year 6 and 10% of Service children in Years 8 and 10 (compared to

125 The Children's Society. [Young Carers in Armed Forces Families](#). 2017.

4% of civilian children) were young carers¹²⁶.

The Children’s Society (2017)¹²⁷ carried out a consultation to assess the needs of young carers in UK military families. This project identified this group as **particularly vulnerable to the adverse impact of caring**, as these are compounded by the impact of being a military child (i.e. mobility). This report recommended that robust data collection should be undertaken to identify the overall number of young carers in military families and direct support for these young carers should be set up to increase their well-being and ensure they are not disadvantaged by their caring responsibilities. Indeed, a survey carried out in schools and colleges in Wiltshire¹²⁸ (an area with a large proportion of military families) in 2014 found that young carers had **poorer health and well-being outcomes** compared to other children.

Additional discussion in regard to young carers of a serving parent affected by illness or injury is discussed below (Section 7. [The impact of parental illness or injury](#)).

Childcare

Childcare can be a significant issue for the remaining parent, especially to **enable continued employment and income during deployment**. Indeed, surveys carried out by the NFF and RAF FF in 2016^{129,130} identified childcare as a barrier to spousal employment, leading the non-serving parent to have to change their working arrangements or even leave employment in some cases. This was due to both **difficulties in accessing appropriate childcare** or finding that the **costs of childcare outweighed their income**. A significant variation in childcare costs between regions was highlighted, with families around London struggling the most to afford childcare. Furthermore, FAMCAS 2020¹³¹ highlighted that families who had moved in the past year were less satisfied with the cost of childcare and less likely to have accessed any forms of free informal childcare, compared to those who had not moved.

However, FAMCAS statistics^{132,133} suggest that **satisfaction with childcare appears to have increased over the past decade**, with an increase in satisfaction between the 2011 and 2020 reports for access (45% vs. 77%), quality (45% vs. 83%) and opening hours (38% vs. 70%) of childcare facilities. Cost has seen the least increase in satisfaction, with just under half (45%) of Service families reporting satisfaction with the cost of childcare, compared

126 The Schools and Students Health Education Unit. [Surveys, publishing and research for education and health](#). 2020.

127 The Children’s Society. [Young Carers in Armed Forces Families](#). 2017.

128 Healthy Schools Wiltshire. FAB Research (from 2014): [Wiltshire Children and Young People’s Health and Wellbeing Survey](#). 2020.

129 Naval Families Federation. [Childcare Report](#). 2016.

130 Royal Air Force Families Federation. [Childcare RAF FF Survey Report](#). 2016

131 Ministry of Defence. [UK Tri-Service Families Continuous Attitude Survey Results 2020](#). 2020.

132 Ministry of Defence. [UK Tri-Service Families Continuous Attitude Survey Results 2020](#). 2020.

133 Ministry of Defence. [Tri-Service Families Continuous Attitude Survey \(FAMCAS\)](#). 2011.

to 39% in 2011. Cost was identified by the RAF FF survey¹³⁴ as the most challenging issue when looking for childcare, followed by finding childcare out of normal working hours.

For **families who live apart from the serving parent during the week**, this may increase childcare needs further. Indeed, the RAF FF Dispersed Families Survey in 2019¹³⁵ identified **increased childcare needs and the associated cost** because of this additional separation.

One SME identified an issue with the UK government policy that entitles families to 30 hours of free childcare a week if both parents are in work (at least 16 hours per week)¹³⁶. This SME had encountered a situation during the deployment of the serving partner in which the spouse was no longer able to work and the family had lost entitlement to this scheme:

“I suddenly discovered that there's a big drop in attendance... And I asked why this has happened and they said basically, it's because a parent has deployed the other parent is now unable to work 16 hours a week... They're doing school run, for example, and they can't be as flexible... So, the other parent has reduced her hours say from 16 hours to 12 hours a week to allow the school run, which then means they've lost their 30 hours free childcare.”
Interviewee 12

This is an example of a scenario in which Service families may experience disadvantage as a result of their military lifestyle. Prior to October 2018, Service families could sign up to the MOD Childcare voucher scheme, a salary sacrifice scheme that provided savings on childcare dependent on the amount saved and total earnings¹³⁷. However, in both the NFF and RAF FF surveys, **only around half of respondents were using the MOD Childcare Voucher Scheme**, suggesting a lack of awareness of this policy. Naval respondents who used this scheme highlighted the positives of having childcare staff that understood the military lifestyle and its impact on children¹³⁸.

Childcare is highlighted by US research as being **associated with military operational readiness and retention**¹³⁹, suggesting that it may be in the interest of the MOD to continue to provide subsidised childcare schemes. Indeed, a free 'Wraparound

134 Royal Air Force Families Federation. [Childcare RAF FF Survey Report](#). 2016

135 Royal Air Force Families Federation. [RAF Dispersed Families](#). 2019.

136 UK Government. [30 hours free childcare](#). 2020.

137 Sodexo. [About the Armed Forces Scheme](#). 2020.

138 Naval Families Federation. [Childcare Report](#). 2016.

139 Zellman GL, Gates SM, Moini JS and Suttorp M. [Meeting family and military needs through military childcare](#). *Armed Forces & Society* 2009; 35: 437-459.



Childcare' pilot was launched in RAF High Wycombe and RAF Halton in September 2020¹⁴⁰, providing up to 20 hours of free childcare before and after school during term time for Service children aged 4-11 years. A further roll out of this scheme is anticipated in 2021.

Key Findings

- Separation from the serving parent for significant amounts of time during childhood may result in difficulties within the parent-child relationship, and the lack of an appropriate role model.
- Dual serving and single parent families face additional difficulties associated with juggling deployments, maintaining family relationships long-distance and childcare. Children may face additional disruption if they are required to move to be cared for during both parent deployments.
- The increase in the number of families weekending has brought with it both benefits from stability for some families and unique challenges for others due to the changed family dynamics and frequent separation, which can have a negative impact of children's emotional wellbeing.
- Evidence suggests that dispersed living may lead to challenges accessing support and families missing out on some of the benefits of a strong military community.
- Some children may be required to take on additional caring responsibilities during deployment of their serving parent. These children may be particularly vulnerable to poor outcomes, due to a 'double whammy' of challenges associated with being a Service child and a young carer.
- Childcare presents a particular challenge for mobile families, due to variation in availability and cost across different regions.

Our Recommendations

1. There is a significant lack of UK research looking at the impact of lone parenting on Service children. We recommend that research be conducted to investigate the challenges faced by children of dual-serving and single-parent families, and how these families might be better supported. Additionally, research is needed to better understand the impact of temporary lone parenting during weekending, on the parent-child relationship.
2. Very little is known about the prevalence of military young carers, particularly those who take on temporary caring responsibilities during separation. We recommend that research is carried out to identify this hidden population and their unique support needs.
3. The MOD is currently trialling new policies around accommodation (the FAM) and childcare (wraparound services in two RAF bases). We recommend that the MOD facilitates

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¹⁴⁰ UK Government. [Free 'wraparound' childcare for the armed forces](#). 2020

independent evaluations of these policies to explore their impact on the well-being of military families. In particular, it will be important to determine the impact of the FAM on dispersed living and access to welfare support for military families.

3. The influence of the media

The previous NCC report¹⁴¹ identified the **media as a source of stress** for Service families and children when their serving person is deployed. This was mainly due to children seeing images and headlines regarding the conflict that their serving parent was involved in, and potentially hearing about combat incidents and injury/death of Service Personnel before they were officially notified. It is likely that this has become less relevant since the last report, as we are no longer at war. SMEs discussed the change in media over the past decade, following the end of the Iraq/Afghanistan conflicts, and the impact this may have on public awareness of the challenges faced by Service families:

“I think the changes in the last 10 years with the Afghan conflict ceasing in its current, its original form. I think what’s happened is the media and national attention has come away from that. You know, we had all these ‘aren’t we proud to be British’ sort of thing for years and years and homecoming parades and all this sort of the thing and that’s gone... So I think nationally, the headlines have changed. But I think like my school... where we’re still dealing with the same challenges we were 10 years ago.” Interviewee 12

“I think this came out during the time of the conflicts where families were being recognised at home and children were being recognised. I think we have to go back and revisit that because... the challenges aren’t just there when there is a deployment or when things are in the media or when there is that limelight.” Interviewee 4

Social media has become much more prevalent over the past decade and may present additional challenges for Service children and families. UK statistics suggest that over two-thirds of children in the UK use social media platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat¹⁴². Despite the fact that most platforms have minimum age requirements, it was estimated that **over half of children aged 9–13 years** used social media in 2013¹⁴³, and **5% of children aged 5–7 years had a social media**

141 The Royal Navy and Royal Marines Children’s Fund. [The Overlooked Casualties of Conflict](#). 2009

142 Statista. [Social media sites or apps used by children in the United Kingdom \(UK\) in 2019](#). 2019

143 Quinn S and Oldmeadow JA. [Is the i-generation a ‘we’ generation? Social networking use among 9 to 13 year olds](#)

account in 2018¹⁴⁴.

There is a lack of research looking at the influence of media or social media on Service children in the UK. However, longitudinal research carried out with UK children in the general population found that increased time spent on screen-based media was significantly associated with **social and emotional difficulties, and lower happiness**¹⁴⁵. The use of social media is also associated with increased risk of experiencing cyber-bullying¹⁴⁶, an area that was highlighted by SMEs:

“There are pluses and minuses with [social] media... some comments that are made, bullying, has always been seen as an issue raised by Armed Forces families when they move into a location.” Interviewee 4

A review of the literature in the US¹⁴⁷ identified a number of ways in which social media might impact on the common stressors experienced by Service children. In addition to using social media to keep in contact with a deployed parent, this review highlighted the **potential for social media to exacerbate concern for the deployed parent(s)**. Social media provides instant access to news articles, videos and pictures that may increase children’s exposure to conflicts/deployment that their parent may be involved in. Indeed, SMEs in this project discussed the impact of the **ease with which Service children can now access information** about conflicts and injuries using social media, in comparison to TV and newspapers:

“There are difficult things to explain that back in the day you would have been able to protect your children from, you wouldn’t have seen video footage of things. So for example... when drummer Lee Rigby was murdered, my kids had seen that on the television and we had to talk about that quite a bit in the week afterwards, because it was a case of “well are we safe, where we are?”, “could that have happened to our Dad?” and that never would have arisen. They never would have seen that and to see those sort of graphic images of things to realise that there is a sort of connection between your own life I think is... disturbing really..” Interviewee 5

[and belonging](#). British Journal of Developmental Psychology 2013; 31: 136–142.

144 Statista. [Social media sites or apps used by children in the United Kingdom \(UK\) in 2019](#). 2019

145 Booker CL, Skew AJ, Kelly YJ and Sacker A. [Media use, sports participation, and well-being in adolescence: Cross-sectional findings from the UK household longitudinal study](#). American journal of public health 2015; 105: 173–179

146 Sengupta A and Chaudhuri A. Are social networking sites a source of online harassment for teens? Evidence from survey data. Children and Youth Services Review 2011; 33: 284–290.

147 McGuire AB and Steele RG. [Impact of Social Networking Sites on Children in Military Families](#). Clin Child Fam Psychol Rev 2016; 19: 259–269.

Social media has also been suggested to help Service children feel more connected to others during times of stress¹⁴⁸. When required to relocate for their serving parent’s posting, social media may also **enable Service children to feel more connected to friends** from previous locations. Some SMEs highlighted how social media can be a support resource for families in the challenges of Service life and eventual transition:

“The fact that actually people can access information far more easily and it’s positive when they can share it in a positive way. I think that the military are very, very slowly getting better at sharing information, but we’ve obviously got to offset the need to share information with security and the balance of trying to make sure that actually we keep personnel safe and family safe while sharing appropriate information. We do share our reports with the families as much as we can, and we engage in networks. We use Twitter. So, to sort of broaden our reach” Interviewee 11

“I think it’s drawing on the strengths and highlighting for forces families those skills that they do have and giving them perhaps a platform to be coaching and helping and encouraging because I think our insecurities in new locations and new situations can be quite overwhelming” Interviewee 4

Additionally, it may allow them to **connect with other Service children** and share experiences and access information about support services/groups. Indeed, social media is shown to help improve social networks¹⁴⁹.

SMEs also commented on the role social media has to play in **connecting Service children with other children**:

“I think it needs more attention probably as of highlighting the good practice that’s out there and how to engage and promoting that... children who are mobile and having to make new friends and saying farewell to friends and all of that” Interviewee 4

“We’ve been running days where Service children are brought together by a range of different schools, including those who have very small numbers.

148 McGuire AB and Steele RG. [Impact of Social Networking Sites on Children in Military Families](#). Clin Child Fam Psychol Rev 2016; 19: 259–269. .

149 Grieve R et al. [Face-to-face or Facebook: Can social connectedness be derived online?](#) Computers in human behavior 2013; 29: 604–609.

Media, social media and the ease of interactivity through that had been mentioned... We need to look into [that], but there are mechanisms there that might provide possibilities for better connection, not only concerns about awareness or concerns about harms or risks of their parents. So, I think if you were to look at social media as a theme then I think probably needs a bit more balance.” Interviewee 3

Key Findings

- Social media use amongst children has become more prevalent over the decade since the 2009 Overlooked Casualties of Conflict report was published.
- Service children face the same risks as other children around social media such as the potential of cyber-bullying and the association of high usage with social emotional difficulties and lower happiness. However, they also face unique challenges, such as negative impact of accessing upsetting information around conflict, and potential benefits, such as staying connected with friends after moving.

Our Recommendations

1. Considering the high use of social media by children, we recommend further research to investigate the potential benefits and negative consequences of social media for Service children.
2. Associated with this and discussion in Section 1 ([The impact of deployment-related separation on Service children](#)), we also recommend that research is conducted to explore the positives and negatives of increased communication with deployed parent(s) via internet-based communication and social media, and its potential implications for operational readiness.

4. Family adjustment following deployment

The impact of separation on Service children **does not end with the return of the serving parent**. The Emotional Cycle of Deployment¹⁵⁰ posits that post-deployment challenges include the renegotiation of relationships and roles, and reintegration of the serving parent back into the family structure. Whilst little research has been carried out in the UK looking specifically at the impact of this reunion on Service children, **reintegration is found to be the most challenging period** of the deployment cycle for US Service children and families^{151, 152}. SMEs in this project emphasised the challenges experienced by Service children during this period of reintegration:

“I think that does come with its own challenges as well. Because I think quite often when a child or a young person has been used to somebody being away a huge amount of the time, and maybe a parent or somebody else has been their constant, it is a huge adjustment to having that person back in your life all of the time. Because actually for some young people that is going to be the first time they really get to know that parent very well. And there will be things that they like and things that they don’t because, people.”
Interviewee 5

Changing family roles

Changes in family dynamics when a parent is deployed can result in **difficulties when families try to adjust back to pre-deployment family roles**. Indeed, research from the US suggests that this period is characterised by **significant anxiety in regard to redefining roles and responsibilities**, particularly when an older child may have taken on greater responsibility in the home¹⁵³.

Research with UK RAF families in 2019¹⁵⁴ and RAF children and young people in 2021¹⁵⁵ reported difficulties for the serving parent when trying to settle back into their parenting roles following separation, and feelings of being an ‘outsider in the family dynamic’. This is supported by US research that indicates **uncertainty from the serving parent in**

150 Logan KV. [The emotional cycle of deployment](#). US Naval Institute Proceedings 1987, pp.43–47.

151 Chandra A, Lara-Cinisomo S, Jaycox LH, et al. [Children on the homefront: The experience of children from military families](#). Pediatrics 2010; 125: 16–25.

152 Lester P, Stein JA, Saltzman W, et al. [Psychological health of military children: Longitudinal evaluation of a family-centered prevention program to enhance family resilience](#). Military medicine 2013; 178: 838–845.

153 Huebner AJ and Mancini JA. [Adjustments among adolescents in military families when a parent is deployed](#). 2005

154 Royal Air Force Families Federation. [RAF Dispersed Families](#). 2019.

155 Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund. [Growing up in the RAF: The wellbeing of children and young people who have serving parents](#). 2021

reassuming their parenting role¹⁵⁶. This was reflected in one SMEs description of their own experience:

“It was a struggle, even though I didn’t go away any more after that, it was a struggle when there was any potential conflict. Then it was clear there was this bloke who was in the house all the time, he is called Dad, but I’m not sure what he is, and there is Mum, who has been there all this time.” Interviewee 2

Furthermore, research carried out with Dutch military families in 2011¹⁵⁷ found that a quarter of serving parents were concerned about their children’s response to their return, and 10% of mothers reported **difficulties with children accepting the authority** of their returning parent.

Emotional re-adjustment and re-establishing relationships

Service children may find it **difficult to bond with their returning parent** following separation, particularly if they were very young when their serving parent was deployed. Indeed, research with UK Naval families in 2018¹⁵⁸ identified distress in Service Personnel and their children, as a result of **young children not recognising their parent following separation**. Furthermore, Dutch research¹⁵⁹ referred to in the section above, found that 6% of Service Personnel reported that their child didn’t recognise them on their return, and 15% felt their relationship with their children had changed as a result of deployment. This was reflected in one SME’s discussion of their experience of returning to their family following deployment:

“I’m walking back across in my flying suit coming back and my kids run to meet me and my boy was a year, 15 months older than [my daughter], who I had a bond with, ran up to me, gave me a hug, wouldn’t leave me. I have hold of my boy in one arm, my daughter in another and it’s quite an interesting one... because what it shows is the boy really close to me, but my daughter making a V shape away from me, because she doesn’t know who I am, and she wants to be away from me.” Interviewee 2

156 Orthner D and Rose R. Adjustment among Army children to deployment separations. Washington, DC: Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences 2005.

157 Andres MD and Moelker R. [There and back again: How parental experiences affect children’s adjustments in the course of military deployments](#). Armed Forces & Society 2011; 37: 418-447.

158 Naval Families Federation. [Naval Service Families Mental Health Survey](#). 2018.

159 Andres MD and Moelker R. [There and back again: How parental experiences affect children’s adjustments in the course of military deployments](#). Armed Forces & Society 2011; 37: 418-447.

Research from the US suggests that reunion can be just as stressful as deployment and can result in feelings of ambivalence and estrangement between Service children and their serving parent¹⁶⁰. Evidence regarding children’s emotional re-adjustment is mixed, with some studies suggesting children experience significant difficulties on return¹⁶¹, and others showing quick re-adjustment¹⁶². However, Dutch research¹⁶³ suggests that children who experienced more adjustment difficulties during separation were more likely to experience difficulties after reunion. Indeed, 40% of mothers reported that their child experienced separation anxiety following their father’s return and were afraid that they would leave again. Interestingly, a recent study in the US¹⁶⁴ found that adolescent Service children’s perceptions of family cohesion and inter-parental conflict during re-integration were significantly associated with their psychosocial health (i.e. anxiety, depression, and general wellbeing).

Key Findings

- Reintegration following deployment represents a challenging time for military families. Renegotiating roles and responsibilities within the family and difficulties re-establishing relationships with children are experienced, particularly with young children.

Our Recommendation

1. Very little research exists on the experiences of family reintegration in the UK, and the impact of this on Service Children. Therefore, we recommend research is conducted to identify the main challenges faced during reintegration, in order to determine how best to support military families.

160 Johnson SJ, Sherman MD, Hoffman JS, et al. The psychological needs of US military service members and their families: A preliminary report. American Psychological Association Presidential Task Force on Military Deployment Services for Youth, Families and Service Members 2007.

161 Chandra A et al. [Understanding the impact of deployment on children and families: Findings from a pilot study of Operation Purple Camp participants](#). RAND. 2008.

162 Orthner DK and Rose R. [SAF V survey report: Adjustment of Army children to deployment separations](#). US Army Family and MWR Programs, 2005.

163 Andres MD and Moelker R. [There and back again: How parental experiences affect children’s adjustments in the course of military deployments](#). Armed Forces & Society 2011; 37: 418–447.

164 O’Neal CW and Mancini JA. [Military Families’ Stressful Reintegration, Family Climate, and Their Adolescents’ Psychosocial Health](#). Journal of Marriage and Family 2020.

5. The impact of mobility

Frequent moves are a part of military life, with families historically following Service members as they are posted to new locations. **Frequent relocation can have a significant impact on both Service families and Service children**, who may be required to move schools and leave friends and family behind. Indeed, research with Canadian Service children¹⁶⁵ highlights an association between mobility rate (i.e. number of moves divided by child's age) and both increased externalised problems (i.e. hyperactivity and conduct problems) and decreased prosocial behaviours. However, **the recency of the last relocation was the most important factor** in adolescent adjustment, with the poorest adjustment behaviours seen in the first year. Mobility is also related to **lacking a sense of belonging** in Canadian Service children¹⁶⁶. This was discussed by SMEs in relation to a lack of geographical 'roots' as a result of mobility:

“The youngsters tell us they absolutely hate being asked ‘where do you come from?’ because they don’t know how to answer that. Some will answer it ‘I was born in...’ or ‘My last school was...’ but they struggle to say ‘Actually, who am I? Where am I from?’ Interviewee 1

“I think it comes down to an inability to lay down roots. I think when I talk to Service peoples they always say, “well this isn’t my forever home”, and you ask what is and they say, “Well I don’t know yet”. It’s that, it builds in a sort of nomadic approach to where they want to be, which can have increased anxiety for Service families and for children.” Interviewee 2

The FAMCAS survey in 2020¹⁶⁷ showed that a quarter of Service families have moved for Service reasons in the past year. However, **this was much lower in RN/RM families (13%)** compared to RAF (23%) and Army (31%) families. Indeed, 58% of RN/RM families had not moved at all in the past 5 years. SMEs commented on how this issue appears to have the **least impact on children from RN/RM families**:

“So, they have mobility, move house a lot of the time changing schools, which can be less of an issue for the majority of Royal Navy/Royal Marine families because we have relatively fewer in Service family Accommodation.

.....
165 Perreault K, McDuff P and Dion J. [Impact of Relocations on Mental Health and School Functioning of Adolescents from Canadian Military Families](#). Military Behavioral Health 2020.

166 Bullock A. [Military Stressors and the Well-Being of Adolescents in Canadian Armed Forces Families: The Roles of Relationships with Parents and Peers](#). Carleton University, 2017.

167 Ministry of Defence. [UK Tri-Service Families Continuous Attitude Survey Results 2020](#). 2020.

***But that does definitely exist for some families who choose to be mobile”
Interviewee 5***

***“So I think you’ve got families that have been more static and almost settled
in Naval communities often and so I think there’s some benefits there”
Interviewee 11***

Mobility has decreased since this question was first asked in the 2011 FAMCAS¹⁶⁸, at which time 34% had moved within the previous year (18% in RN/RM families). FAMCAS 2020¹⁶⁹ also found that spouses who had moved in the past year reported slightly lower well-being, were less likely to be employed, were less likely to own a house than those who had not moved, and were more likely to experience difficulties accessing dental and hospital services, compared to those who had not moved in the past year. Furthermore, **the majority of families with school age children who had moved in the past year, had changed schools** for Service reasons (72%).

The **Service Children’s Progression Alliance (SCiP)** was set up at the University of Winchester in 2016 with the aim of improving outcomes for Service children and championing their progression through education to adult life¹⁷⁰. A stakeholder consultation carried out by SCiP¹⁷¹ identified mobility as the most common challenge for military children, with **frequent relocation suggested to impact on children’s engagement with education.**

Practical difficulties associated with moving schools

There is a **lack of data** available on the numbers of Service children in UK schools. A number of SMEs reflected on this issue, which was apparent across the devolved nations, and the challenges that arose as a result:

“In Scotland, I did a pilot data collection in October 2019 just passed, and I would certainly say that the numbers are under-reported. We don’t have a system in place, nor do we have a flag on our early years early learning and childcare centres and those that are part of a local authority in a school or even the private ones... And so, if we’re not capturing that number, then we are under-reporting.” Interviewee 4

168 Ministry of Defence. [Tri-Service Families Continuous Attitude Survey \(FAMCAS\)](#). 2011.

169 Ministry of Defence. [UK Tri-Service Families Continuous Attitude Survey Results 2020](#). 2020.

170 The SCiP Alliance <https://www.scipalliance.org/about/information-page>. 2020.

171 The SCiP Alliance. [Identifying shared priorities for action to ensure the educational success of Service Children, and to better enable their progression through further and higher education into thriving adults and careers](#). 2018.

“I think what we've definitely found is, when we are trying to go and engage with policymakers, engage with politicians, they want to know that data, those facts. So, they're very interested in what the young people directly have to say, but they're also then saying have you got to any data on attainment... any data on mental health and we don't. And we don't even have accurate regular data in terms of the numbers. We can't even definitely say well you now, there's this many Service children in our schools and these are the areas that they are in. So, for us, we do find the lack of data is a huge challenge.” Interviewee 7

Data from Service Children in State Schools (SCISS) reported in the ‘Living in Our Shoes’ report¹⁷² suggested that in January 2018, the number of Service children in schools in England was just over 76,000. Furthermore, a report by the National Audit Office (NAO) for the House of Commons Defence Committee in 2013¹⁷³ indicated 28% of Service children had **moved school 7 or more times**.

Research in the UK and discussions with SMEs suggests that **a number of practical challenges** are experienced by military families as a result of frequent school moves. The NAO study¹⁷⁴ found that **63% of Service families reported major difficulties** in organising schooling for their children. Common reasons for this included obtaining school places, and getting accommodation confirmed in time to apply to schools. A House of Commons report in 2013¹⁷⁵ highlighted difficulties associated with the **often short notice of moves, which could occur in the middle of school terms**, and often meant little choice of school places.

“I think the school's admission's code right now is a bit clunky... we are looking at trying to revisit that to enable children to get school places where they need to be or where you've got a family. I spoke to a family in Plymouth I think they have four children and the serving partner was away and Mum was trying to deliver kids to 4 different schools all on different parts of the city, all at the same time in the morning and it can't be done.” Interviewee 5



172 Walker J, Selous A and Misca G. [Living in our shoes: understanding the needs of UK armed forces families](#). 2020.

173 Brady D, Low N, Neogi R, Vinson N and Summerfield L. [The education of Service children: findings of a National Audit Office consultation](#). 2013.

174 Brady D, Low N, Neogi R, Vinson N and Summerfield L. [The education of Service children: findings of a National Audit Office consultation](#). 2013.

175 House of Commons Defence Committee. [The Armed Force Covenant in Action? Part 3: Educating the Children of Service Personnel](#). 2013.

This report also highlighted the **conflict between the Armed Forces Covenant**¹⁷⁶, which states that children may need special arrangements to access school places, **and the School Admissions Code**, which has strict deadlines for admissions. These problems in obtaining school places have resulted in some Service families having similar-aged children spread across different schools^{177, 178}.

Admissions policies differ across regions, increasing the difficulties experienced by parents in **navigating these different policies when relocating**. Ofsted (2011) report that a minority of regions do not require proof of residency from Service families to enable applications for school places to be made in advance. However, other regions have no specific arrangement for Service families. Service families returning from overseas postings experience additional challenges, as some Local Authorities (LAs) may not accept a British Forces Posted Overseas address or confirmation of a new posting as sufficient to apply for school places. One SME highlighted a problematic case in which a posting location was changed at short notice, impacting on the Service children’s school places:

“Myself and another head teacher went out to the Brunei school... I got told by the next parent... who had one child coming to us back to us, which is lovely, and one child going to a secondary school system. Got places at a secondary school in Kent, were really excited. Kent has 11 plus system, that’s a grammar school, and then a month before they came over... he was moved to Brecon. And then he phoned me in a panic saying, “How do I get a child into a secondary school in Wales, I don’t understand any of the forms can you help me?” So I phoned – I have to say I didn’t understand either and then in the end I got through to some really helpful lady in some admissions department and that was the first time it really really occurred to me how tricky it is.” Interviewee 12

Children may also experience differences in curricula when moving between regions/ devolved nations, leading to disruptions in learning and examinations, repeated topics and missing out on desired topics^{179,180}. This was highlighted in a report by the RAF Benevolent Fund in 2021¹⁸¹, which emphasised the disruption to RAF children’s education

176 Ministry of Defence. [The Armed Forces Covenant: Today and Tomorrow](#). 2011.

177 Children’s Commissioner. [Kin and Country](#). 2018.

178 Ofsted. [Children in Service Families](#). 2011.

179 Children’s Commissioner. [Kin and Country](#). 2018.

180 House of Commons Defence Committee. [The Armed Force Covenant in Action? Part 3: Educating the Children of Service Personnel](#). 2013.

181 Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund. [Growing up in the RAF: The wellbeing of children and young people who have serving parents](#). 2021

caused by frequent moves, including missing or repeating lessons. Furthermore, the 'Living in Our Shoes' report highlighted the example of Service children being unable to study their preferred language due to it not being taught in their new school. This was a common theme in discussions with SMEs:

“If there are movements around, cross border issues, there are curricula differences and discontinuity of curricula. Either having to cover the same topics over again or gaps... one young lady still has great difficulty telling the time. She moved around such a lot that she was never actually at school when time was being taught as a subject and she still to this day has difficulty telling the time.” Interviewee

“They are coming into a new school setting on a regular basis and the transition piece can be challenging for some families and for some children because curriculums aren't the same wherever they go. They might be, as people always joke, doing the same subjects over and over again in schools, because they are seeing the same piece of the curriculum... and they may be missing out on parts of the curriculum or key areas because they've moved. That's one of the biggest sorts of issues that we face.” Interviewee II

Differences in schooling systems are further exacerbated when families are required to move between the devolved nations of the UK. This was highlighted both in the UK literature and by SMEs. The governments across the different administrations have implemented different educational policies and support for Service children. Whilst England and Wales follow the National Curriculum, Scotland follows the Curriculum for Excellence and Northern Ireland follows the Northern Ireland Curriculum¹⁸². This was seen by one SME as particularly disruptive for older Service children, who may be studying for GCSEs or A-Levels (and equivalent):

“Curricula wise, there can be huge issues for the older ones, for the secondary school students, especially if it's exam stages. And I know the military try not to - and they are much better than they were - move or give the opportunity to the family to stay put if the child is facing an exam.” Interviewee I

.....

¹⁸² [The School Run. An overview of the Scottish education system, 2020.](#)

SMEs particularly emphasised the **differences when moving between England and Scotland:**

“We do come across youngsters who either, and it works both ways cross border, have started their exam system in England, come to Scotland, and find that the courses that they wanted to do aren’t available and vice versa. Or the course is full at their local school or their local school doesn’t offer it and there is discontinuity there. So, the issues with curricula perhaps are more impactful on the older ones than they are on the younger ones.”

Interviewee I

Indeed, schooling in Scotland has different term times, takes a different approach to assigning school years (i.e. those born between March of one year and February of the next are in the same year group) and has a different qualification framework¹⁸³. The Army Families Federation (AFF) ‘Life in Scotland Survey’ in 2017¹⁸⁴ reported that **a third of Army families were very concerned by the curriculum differences in Scotland**, and just over a quarter were very concerned that their children’s date of birth would put them a year behind at school on return to England.

“In Scotland, because they have a slightly different year group set up, people often feel that their children might be behind, which isn’t strictly the case, and the Scottish education system is a very good one... its set up slightly differently. So again, we try to ensure that people have good information, advice and guidance about what they will be receiving in Scotland. So understandably, families are worried about moving into a different education system.” Interviewee II

The ‘Living in Our Shoes’ report¹⁸⁵ highlighted the support provided to Service children in Scottish schools and the focus of the Curriculum for Excellence, which aims to meet the needs of individual children. When asked about particular policies that supported the needs of Service children, SMEs highlighted this approach to assessing and meeting children’s individual needs:

“In Scotland, we’re looking at a universal approach to Additional Support for

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183 The School Run. An overview of the Scottish education system. 2020.

184 The Army Families Federation. [AFF Army life in Scotland Survey](#). 2017.

185 Walker J, Selous A and Misca G. [Living in our shoes: understanding the needs of UK armed forces families](#). 2020.

Learning... and that's all around getting it right for every child. It's around the child being the focus so that any child has access to additional support for their learning if and when they need that." Interviewee 4

"What I would say looking at it from the Scottish perspective, I would say for Service children our main framework is the Additional Support for Learning framework, and I would say on paper that framework is brilliant. Because it is made to be very flexible, it's made to support every child with their individual needs" Interviewee 7

The Welsh government have recognised the challenges experiences by Service children and have set up a fund, the Supporting Service children in Education (SSCE) Cymru project, to help schools support Service children¹⁸⁶. However, survey research in 2019¹⁸⁷ suggested that **many schools in Wales were unaware of the needs of Service children**. This work and discussion with SMEs also highlighted the difficulties children face in adapting to different curricula in Wales, particularly learning Welsh, which is mandatory throughout the Welsh school system:

"In certain parts of Wales, people can be pretty forceful about pushing the Welsh language. And I understand completely where they would want to do that... But not fun if you come in and you've got a child coming into reception class and they are maybe being told that they're going to have to be in a class where people are only going to speak Welsh." Interviewee 11

This is being addressed with a Day School Allowance¹⁸⁸ in North Wales to enable Service families to access English tuition in areas where teaching in state schools is bilingual or Welsh-only.

In Northern Ireland, the differences in syllabus at secondary school caused concern for Service families consulted in the 'Living in Our Shoes' report¹⁸⁹, as it was reported that these do not transfer well to other areas of the UK. However, **schools in Northern Ireland have the ability to make early admissions on a discretionary basis**, due to further differences in the determination of school year in this country¹⁹⁰. A Forces in Mind Trust

186 Walker J, Selous A and Misca G. [Living in our shoes: understanding the needs of UK armed forces families](#). 2020.

187SSCE Cymru. [SSCE Cymru school survey \(2019\)- findings](#).2019

188 Ministry of Defence. [Tri-service regulations for expenses and allowances \(JSP 752\)](#). 2017.

189 Walker J, Selous A and Misca G. [Living in our shoes: understanding the needs of UK armed forces families](#). 2020.

190 Ministry of Defence. [A Guide for Service Families: UK Education Systems](#). 2013.

report in 2015¹⁹¹ found that Service children in Northern Ireland experienced additional challenges due to the security issues surrounding military personnel in this country. As a result, many Service families in Northern Ireland may not identify themselves as associated with the military.

Having obtained a school place in a new region or country, **Service children face additional challenges in having their education records transferred** from their previous school. Ofsted reported in 2011¹⁹² that the system for transferring a Service child’s information to a new school was uncoordinated, and was reliant on the parents taking paper records by hand. However, **in 2018 a Service children’s section was added to the Common Transfer File**, the system by which schools in England transfer educational records¹⁹³. This includes information that will help schools to meet the needs of particular Service children. However, this system is not used across the devolved nations, and SME discussions suggests that the transfer of data across nations remains a challenge:

“So it is that moving across borders, it is the transfer of records which is problematic because electronic copies don't go across boundaries”
Interviewee 4

“If that is the case then we are talking about the issues to do with the transition between schools and the poor transfer of data between those schools for example” ***Interviewee 3***

A number of researchers and SMEs highlighted the challenges associated with moving school for **Service children who have Special Educational Needs (SEN)**. These are explored further in Section 10 ([Children with additional needs and disabilities](#)).

The social and emotional impact of moving schools

The disruption caused by moving schools appears to be associated **with increased social and emotional difficulties** in UK Service children. Indeed, a consultation by Ofsted in 2011¹⁹⁴ found that schools report **increased welfare needs in Service children**. Children in this study and research by the NAO in 2013¹⁹⁵, Bowes in 2018¹⁹⁶, the Children’s

191 Brian Parry Associates. [Better Understanding the Support Needs of Service Leaver Families](#). 2015.

192 Ofsted. [Children in Service Families](#). 2011.

193 Department for Education. Common transfer file: CTF 20 specification, version 1.0. 2020.

194 Ofsted. [Children in Service Families](#). 2011.

195 Brady D, Low N, Neogi R, Vinson N and Summerfield L. [The education of Service children: findings of a National Audit Office consultation](#). 2013.

196 Bowes RE. [Researching the experiences of children and young people from Armed Forces families](#). 2018.



Commissioner in 2018¹⁹⁷, and the RAF Benevolent fund in 2021¹⁹⁸ reported that Service children **found leaving friends behind very difficult and upsetting**, and making new friends in a new environment daunting and particularly difficult when moving mid-term. This led to some children to **avoid making friends at all**, as they assumed they would be moving again soon.

“Children have sort of said “I’ve just got to the point moving schools that I just don’t see any point in making friends anymore, because I know I’m going to be moving again”. Interviewee 6

This is supported by research with British Army children, who report fewer friends and increased loneliness than civilian children¹⁹⁹.

“The downside of that is that if they are moving all the time, they don’t make the lifelong friends. I come from, my Dad was in the Army, so I can stand for this but my wife pretty much grew up in Cornwall and she’s got a close friend who she met when she was 5 years old and is still a close friend today 50 years later... I think Service kids don’t have that. What they have is they have those longer-term friends from almost the last school that they went too. Because that’s the last one that they met and the other one’s sort of faded away.” Interviewee 2

Furthermore, **missing friends and family from previous posting was identified as a significant challenge** for Service children by 20% of respondents in Welsh schools²⁰⁰.

Despite these difficulties, there is also indication from SMEs and the US literature that frequent relocation may be associated with **increased resilience** in Service children²⁰¹. Qualitative research found that staff in schools perceived Service children as more **adaptable and mature, with stronger social skills** than their civilian peers²⁰².



197 Children’s Commissioner. [Kin and Country](#). 2018.

198 Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund. [Growing up in the RAF: The wellbeing of children and young people who have serving parents](#). 2021

199 Noret N et al. [The Educational Attainment of Army Children](#). 2013

200 SSCE Cymru. [SSCE Cymru school survey \(2019\)- findings](#). 2019

201 Weber EG and Weber DK. [Geographic relocation frequency, resilience, and military adolescent behavior](#). *Military medicine* 2005; 170: 638–642.

202 Bradshaw CP, Sudhinaraset M, Mmari K and Blum RW. [School Transitions Among Military Adolescents: A Qualitative Study of Stress and Coping](#). *School Psychology Review* 2010; 39: 84–105. DOI: 10.1080/02796015.2010.12087792.

“I know the fringe benefits of that is you’re good at making friends, your social skills are likely to be increased.” Interviewee 8

Educational attainment

Evidence that the disruption caused by frequent relocation and moving schools has an impact on children’s performance and attainment is mixed. A report by the Department for Education in 2010⁹⁶ found that **Service children out-performed their civilian peers** at Key Stages 1 and 2 and at GCSE level. This is further supported by research carried out by Ofsted in 2011²⁰³ and the Children’s Commissioner in 2018²⁰⁴. However, **mobile Service children do not appear to perform as well as their non-mobile peers**^{205,206}, emphasising the disruption caused by mobility. Indeed, a NAO study in 2013²⁰⁷ found that 42% of Service families felt that moving home had a negative impact on their children’s school performance. However, an AFF report in 2013²⁰⁸ found that **Army children in year 10 and 11 performed significantly worse in English**, but similarly in Maths and Science, in comparison to their non-Army peers. It is possible that this is due to the increased mobility of Army families in comparison to the other services. This association between mobility and educational attainment was highlighted by one SME, alongside differences associated with Service branch and rank:

“Where there is increased mobility it increases the gap in the attainment, and it drops down, and it is also Tri-Service differences and there is also rank differences that you might expect. So, for attainment the key thing is that the level of mobility has an impact on it” Interviewee 1

The Living in Our Shoes report in 2020²⁰⁹, emphasises the mixed findings in the UK, with data suggesting **varied educational attainment of Service children across different Local Authorities (LAs)**. This report cautions that each LA has its own way of tracking attainment and has its own unique social and cultural factors, making both the amalgamation and comparison of data from different regions difficult.

Academic research from **outside of the UK** is similarly mixed in its findings. Research



203 Ofsted. [Children in Service Families](#). 2011.
 204 Children’s Commissioner. [Kin and Country](#). 2018.
 205 Children’s Commissioner. [Kin and Country](#). 2018.
 206 Department for Education. [The Educational Performance of Children of Service Personnel](#). 2010.
 207 Brady D, Low N, Neogi R, Vinson N and Summerfield L. [The education of Service children: findings of a National Audit Office consultation](#). 2013.
 208 Noret N et al. [The Educational Attainment of Army Children](#). 2013
 209 Walker J, Selous A and Misca G. [Living in our shoes: understanding the needs of UK armed forces families](#). 2020.

with Canadian Service families²¹⁰ found that **mobility rate was not related to children’s academic performance** or suspensions/exclusions from school. Research from the **US shows similar or increased performance and fewer behavioural problems** in Service children^{211, 212, 213}. However, other US papers suggest a **negative impact of mobility on academic performance and high school completion**^{214, 215}.

Knowledge and awareness of schools

Variability in the knowledge and awareness of the needs of Service children was highlighted in the literature and by SMEs. A report by Ofsted in 2011²¹⁶ found that there was a general lack of awareness in schools of Service families and their needs. However, **schools with higher proportions of Service children were more able to successfully meet their needs**. A report by the Children’s Commissioner in 2018²¹⁷ reported similar findings, and also found that **secondary schools had less support available** for Service children compared to primary schools. Bowes²¹⁸ found evidence of successful support for Service children in schools, such as after school Armed Forces clubs and HMS Heroes.²¹⁹ However, overall, support was found to be inconsistent within and between different schools.

This was echoed by SMEs who felt that schools in areas with a high density of military families had significantly more experience of working with Service children, and as such had more support in place to mitigate the challenges they experience.

“Those schools that are close to any kind of base... are often kind of fully enmeshed in it and they might have, for example, a Service champion on the governing body. They might have serving members or family members of

210 Perreault K, McDuff P and Dion J. [Impact of Relocations on Mental Health and School Functioning of Adolescents from Canadian Military Families](#). Military Behavioral Health 2020.

211 Weber EG and Weber DK. [Geographic relocation frequency, resilience, and military adolescent behavior](#). Military medicine 2005; 170: 638-642.

212 Rippe JK. [The impact of low, moderate, and high military family mobility school district transfer rates on graduating senior high school dependents’ achievement and school engagement](#). 2012

213 Strobino J and Salvaterra M. [School transitions among adolescent children of military personnel: A strengths perspective](#). Children & Schools 2000; 22: 95-107

214 Gruman DH, Harachi TW, Abbott RD, et al. [Longitudinal effects of student mobility on three dimensions of elementary school engagement](#). Child development 2008; 79: 1833-1852.

215 Haveman R, Wolfe B and Spaulding J. [Childhood events and circumstances influencing high school completion](#). Demography 1991; 28: 133-157.

216 Ofsted. [Children in Service Families](#). 2011.

217 Children’s Commissioner. [Kin and Country](#). 2018.

218 Bowes RE. [Researching the experiences of children and young people from Armed Forces families](#). 2018.

219 HMS Heroes was described as a school group for Armed Forces children that allows children to make connections with our Service children nationwide.

Service Personnel on the governing body as well.” Interviewee 11

“If they are in a school with lots of Service children then there is probably a synergy of experience there. If they are in a school with less Service children occasionally, they can feel a little isolated and almost special for maybe not the best reasons.” Interviewee 2

“In England the challenge [is] that just about 50% of schools that have Service children only have one or two and that large number of schools, perhaps 5000 schools... only have very little expertise or rational or mechanism in how to engage effectively or understand those Service children.” Interviewee 3

SCiP recently launched a [new Thriving Lives Toolkit](#) to help schools effectively support Service children. The Thriving Lives Toolkit provides schools with an introductory animation, cases studies and a resource focused around their 7 principles of effective support²²⁰, which are:

1. Our approach is clear
2. Wellbeing is supported
3. Achievement is maximised
4. Transition is effective
5. Children are heard
6. Parents are engaged
7. Staff are well-informed

When Service Personnel are serving overseas (for example, in Germany or Cyprus), their children **may attend MOD schools and settings (previously Service Children Education [SCE] schools)** as part of the Directorate Children and Young People (DCYP). This ensures that Service children can access schools that **mirror the English education system**, and staff at these schools will have a good understanding of Service children’s needs.

Data from the Department of Education (2010)²²¹ found that 8500 Service children were educated overseas in 2009, and that children in KS1 and KS2 were **performing slightly**



220 The SCiP Alliance, [Thriving Lives Toolkit](#). 2020.

221 Department for Education. [The Educational Performance of Children of Service Personnel](#). 2010.

better or the same, respectively, as those educated in England. However, Ofsted (2011)²²² found deficiencies in post-16 education in SCEs, with limited curricula disadvantaging Service children in Germany and Cyprus. We were **unable to find any more recent data on Service children’s education overseas**, however, a NAO consultation in 2013 raised concerns about the varied quality of education in these schools²²³.

The **majority of Service children in England attend civilian schools with less than 10 Service children**²²⁴. Survey research in Wales²²⁵ found that the majority of schools had 3 or fewer Service children (39.5%) or were unsure how many Service children were in attendance (31.1%). SMEs also commented on the **lack of accurate records of Service children by schools**. In England, this was predominantly an issue with the system that schools in England use to return a census of their students to the Department of Education.

SMEs explained that **this system recorded Service children in terms of whether they received the Service Pupil Premium (SPP)**, a £300 premium paid to schools to support Service children. However, the Pupil Premium, a much higher premium provided to schools for disadvantaged children, was often opted for instead, in cases where the Service child fulfilled the criteria for this. As such, the census provided by schools may not accurately represent Service children.

“There is an issue around... whether or not Service children can be identified as Service children for receiving SPP, as well as being identified for Pupil Premium. And there is an issue in the way that the policy works in the data for DFE [Department for Education], and how it’s recorded, that prevents them from being identified as both... That affects the veracity of the data that we get nationally, potentially. It certainly affects the data that local authorities get, maybe not nationally about the numbers of Service children that they have.” Interviewee 3

“You can’t record a child as a Service child and a free school meal child [Pupil Premium], as that the system will not let you double count. So, what you have to do and for the school – I’ve done it myself – You think, well, actually, the free school meals child brings in 1200 pounds, Service child [SPP] brings you 300. So, you take them off the service pupil premium... we all went back and all looked all of us had a 10% drift in our schools.” Interviewee 12



222 Ofsted. [Children in Service Families](#). 2011.

223 Brady D, Low N, Neogi R, Vinson N and Summerfield L. [The education of Service children: findings of a National Audit Office consultation](#). 2013.

224 Walker J, Selous A and Misca G. [Living in our shoes: understanding the needs of UK armed forces families](#). 2020.

225 SSCE Cymru. [SSCE Cymru school survey \(2019\)– findings](#). 2019

One SME indicated that a solution to this issue is currently in development by SCISS:

“We’re trying to get the DFE census team to agree to double count now. In the summer/spring census in January, we were assured that issue would be going, but still an error message came up... But that’s something that the pupil premium lead in SCISS is looking into and [name] at DCYP was saying ‘I can’t understand why they can’t just make it just basic system software’. But I think if you could get double counting thing sorted, I think across the country it’d be interesting if more [Service] children suddenly appeared.”
Interviewee 12

The SPP is intended to be used by schools to **mitigate the impact of Service life** (i.e. mobility and deployment) on Service children. However, the ‘Living in Our Shoes’ report²²⁶ found significant variation in how this was being spent, with a number of **schools unsure how best to use the funding to support Service children**. This was again dependent on the numbers of Service children and experience of the school in supporting Service children. Furthermore, the majority of schools are reported to be using the SPP for **pastoral rather than academic support**²²⁷. SMEs highlighted frustration amongst parents as to how this money was spent by schools:

“The schools say the right things with the pupil premium and how they utilise them but speaking to Service families they get very frustrated. That it all seems to go into this one pot and particularly at my daughter’s school, and I did challenge this for another family, they were doing an Armed Forces club, but they were coupled in with the children that couldn’t be in the classroom. So, the disruptive children. But actually, those behaviours and putting in Service children within that may also lead to negative behaviours within the home.” **Interviewee 7**

Research in the UK suggests that **many Service families are unaware of the SPP** and how it is spent by schools^{228, 229}. This may reduce the number of children benefiting from SPP, as it is dependent on parents informing the school of their child’s military



226 Walker J, Selous A and Misca G. [Living in our shoes: understanding the needs of UK armed forces families](#). 2020.

227 McCullouch J and Hall M. [Further and Higher Progression for Service Children](#). 2016.

228 Walker J, Selous A and Misca G. [Living in our shoes: understanding the needs of UK armed forces families](#). 2020.

229 The House of Commons Defence Committee. [The Armed Force Covenant in Action? Part 3: Educating the Children of Service Personnel](#), 2013

association. Furthermore, the AFF's 2019 Families' Concerns²³⁰ Survey report highlighted the inconsistencies of SPP as a challenge for families in their "Listening to our Service children" survey.

In addition, a number of SMEs highlighted the fact that the SPP is another policy that does not translate across the devolved nations:

"Funding is one thing and it is, I suppose for the UK, a cross border issue, because for families in England, the SPP is X number of pounds, 300 pounds, it goes to the school and it should be, [but] it is not always, spent on my child. They come to Scotland and they say 'where [is] the SPP?' and we say 'we don't have it in Scotland, we don't have it in Wales', there is a confusion with funding. The Scottish government will say that they are funded in a different way through the additional support needs budgets but that doesn't actually give clarity to the families." Interviewee 1

"Often we get a parent saying, 'we don't have service pupil premium in Scotland' and then when we say 'well it's a totally different framework', and actually, if the Additional Support Needs framework is working as it should they're shouldn't really be any need for there being this sort of targeted funding or certain ring-fenced funding. But I think the difficulty is, and I think it's the same with a lot of policy areas, it doesn't always work in practice the way it's meant to be on paper." Interviewee 6

Boarding schools

Whilst the majority of Service children attend state schools, some **parents may opt to send their children to boarding school to promote stability** and continuity of their education. Maintaining continuity and deciding whether to send children to boarding school is reported a major concern by UK Service Personnel^{231,232}. The MOD offer a **Continuity of Education Allowance (CEA)** to help mobile Service families send their children aged 8 years or above to boarding school for this reason. This fund currently provides 90% of the costs up to £5969 per term for junior school, and £7828 per term for senior school²³³. Recent concerns regarding the need to prove mobility since 2018 (i.e.

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230 Army Families Federation. [Families Concerns Jan Jun-2019](#).

231 Brady D, Low N, Neogi R, Vinson N and Summerfield L. [The education of Service children: findings of a National Audit Office consultation](#). 2013.

232 The House of Commons Defence Committee. [The Armed Force Covenant in Action? Part 3: Educating the Children of Service Personnel](#). 2013

233 Army Families Federation. [Continuity of Education Allowance \(CEA\)](#). 2020.

that a Service family is likely to move over 50 miles from their current location in the next 4 years) have been raised in regards in eligibility for CEA²³⁴. ‘Living in our shoes’ reports that 4200 children were in receipt of CEA in 2018²³⁵. This is a significant reduction from the 8127 reported by Ofsted in 2011²³⁶.

UK research suggests that Service children have a positive experience of boarding schools. Young people attending a boarding school with a high proportion of Service children suggested that there were a number of advantages to boarding school, including more stability to plan their education, developing lasting friendships and having supportive teachers who understood their needs as Service children.²³⁷ However, these young people were less positive about children under the age of 11 years attending boarding school, and felt that younger children may be better off with their parents. This concern was also raised by one SME:

“Because what’s happened historically is certainly for children of Officers, they’ve been put into boarding schools at very real early age. Around seven, I think, is the earliest age that we do – that’s when the MOD will fund it. And I think, again, going back to the attachment... because when they have their holidays, summer holidays and Christmas holidays, is whether or not the parents [are] actually going to be there, compared with the civilian population.” Interviewee 8

Research carried out by the University of Winchester in 2016²³⁸ reported that Service children found boarding schools **more supportive following military-related events** (i.e. deployment), and that they generally had a better **understanding of military culture**. In this sample, half of undergraduate Service children had attended a boarding school.

Progression to further/higher education

The disruption to education caused by **mobility may impact on Service children’s likelihood of pursuing further or higher education**. This issue was highlighted by the ‘Living in Our Shoes’ report²³⁹, which indicated that **a lower proportion of Service children in England are progressing to university** compared to civilian children. It is unclear whether this is due to disadvantage in accessing higher education, or differences in decision-making around vocation in Service children. None of the Service children or

234 Walker J, Selous A and Misca G. [Living in our shoes: understanding the needs of UK armed forces families](#). 2020.

235 Walker J, Selous A and Misca G. [Living in our shoes: understanding the needs of UK armed forces families](#). 2020.

236 Ofsted. [Children in Service Families](#). 2011.

237 Walker J, Selous A and Misca G. [Living in our shoes: understanding the needs of UK armed forces families](#). 2020.

238 McCullouch J and Hall M. [Further and Higher Progression for Service Children](#). 2016.

239 Walker J, Selous A and Misca G. [Living in our shoes: understanding the needs of UK armed forces families](#). 2020.

the parents consulted in the report expressed concerns about progression to higher education, and some suggested this is something they might consider later in life²⁴⁰.

Furthermore, **Service children in England are more likely to go into employment** at the age of 18 years, compared to civilian children²⁴¹. It is possible that there **may be a difference in intention to progress to higher education vs going into employment** between military and civilian children, however this requires further investigation. One SME commented on the lack of understanding of this issue:

“We don’t really have good information or data on young people about what happens to them around sort of 16–18 when they are of that FE age. We don’t really know what goes on there and what their sort of thought processes with regards to going into higher education or employment or whatever thing they want to be, we don’t really understand that.” Interviewee 5

UK research has found that a **parent’s rank impacts on Service children’s intention to go to university**²⁴²: Children of senior non-commissioned officers (NCOs) report a greater intention to go to university compared with children of junior NCOs. This research also indicated that a **parent’s attendance at university had no impact on children’s intention to go to university**, and neither did the number of schools attended.

We know little about the numbers of Service children attending university in the UK, and research²⁴³ suggests a lack of **data on post-16 academic achievement in Service children**. The **identification of Service children in universities in the UK** has been previously highlighted as an issue^{244, 245}, as universities have not historically collected this data. As such, **data on the numbers of Service children in higher education is likely to be inaccurate**. However, in 2018, UCAS added a set of questions to its postgraduate applications that asks students to identify themselves as having a parent or carer in the UK Armed Forces²⁴⁶. It is UCAS’s intention to add these questions into the undergraduate application forms in the future, which will allow Service children to be identified by higher education institutions.

Universities and colleges may have little awareness of the needs of Service children. Indeed, a consultation exercise commissioned by SCiP and published in 2018²⁴⁷ found



240 Walker J, Selous A and Miscia G. [Living in our shoes: understanding the needs of UK armed forces families](#). 2020.

241 Armed Forces Covenant. [Armed Forces Covenant annual report 2019](#). 2019.

242 McCullough J and Hall M. [Further and Higher Progression for Service Children](#). 2016.

243 McCullough J and Hall M. [Further and Higher Progression for Service Children](#). 2016.

244 Walker J, Selous A and Miscia G. [Living in our shoes: understanding the needs of UK armed forces families](#). 2020.

245 McCullough J and Hall M. [Further and Higher Progression for Service Children](#). 2016.

246 UCAS [Service Children](#).

247 The SCiP Alliance. [Identifying shared priorities for action to ensure the educational success of Service Children and](#)

that practitioners from colleges and universities were **unsure about the challenges experienced by Service children**, or what support they needed. Stakeholders who were aware of Service children’s unique circumstances highlighted the way in which **children’s future aspirations were impacted by their specific experiences as a Service child**, and that disruption due to frequent relocation may lead to an **incomplete understanding of their career options** and the opportunities that further/higher education could offer them. This highlights the importance of universities and colleges in providing information and support targeted towards Service children.

Key Findings

- Service children moving schools can face a range of practical difficulties; difficulties obtaining places due to the school admissions code (particularly mid-year/term), difficulties with record transfer (particularly between countries), different curricula between the devolved nations, and repetition of curricula when moving between regions.
- The international literature suggests that a Service child’s increased mobility rate is associated with increased externalising problems and decreased prosocial behaviours, especially in the first year post-move.
- Service children can find leaving friends very upsetting and difficult, but there is some evidence that frequent moves can improve social skills and resilience.
- There is mixed evidence from the UK and international literature on the impact of being a Service child on educational attainment. However, there is indication that mobile Service children do not perform as well as non-mobile Service children.
- Evidence suggests that awareness and understanding of Service children’s needs varies across schools. However, schools with higher proportions of Service children appear to be more able to successfully meet their needs.
- The Service Pupil Premium is used inconsistently across schools and is not currently an accurate way of reporting data on Service children.
- The limited evidence base suggests that a lower proportion of Service children in England progress to University, and a higher proportion enter employment at age 18 compared to civilian children.

Our Recommendations

1. SMEs interviewed for this report felt that mobility led to Service children lacking ‘geographical roots’, which is supported by the international literature. As such, we

[to better enable their progression through further and higher education into thriving adults and careers](#). 2018.

recommend that future research should explore the impact of mobility on Service children's identity and sense of belonging.

2. The data in the UK around the educational attainment of Service children is mixed, with indication that mobility may be a key factor. We recommend that research is needed to investigate this further, to better our understanding of the impact that mobility and other aspects of military life have on educational attainment.
3. The findings of this report suggest that schools are often unsure of how best to use the SPP to support Service Children. We recommend that best practice for utilising the SPP is collected and developed into guidance for schools.
4. Researchers should continue their efforts to understand Service children's progression into further and higher education, traineeships, employment or other destinations and the reasons for these choices.

6. Dealing with stigma and bullying

There is **mixed evidence** as to whether Service children in the UK experience bullying as a result of Service life. Parents and school staff interviewed for the previous *Overlooked Casualties of Conflict* report in 2009 noted that during the Iraq War era, Service children were often "**prime targets**" for bullies whilst their parents were deployed¹⁰⁵. More recent research carried out by McCullough, Judith, and Hall (2016) also identified **bullying as a challenge for some secondary and undergraduate Service children, routed in assumptions made by civilian children about Service Life**. The 'Living in our Shoes'²⁴⁸ report highlights a survey reported in the *Army & You* magazine, in which Service parent's list bullying as a challenge²⁴⁹.

This in contrast, however, to O'Donnell and Rudd (2007)²⁵⁰ who undertook a survey of parent's views of how well SCE in the UK and Overseas met the 5 'Every Child Matters Outcomes' (Being Healthy, Staying Safe, Enjoying & Achieving, Making a positive contribution and Achieving economic well-being) and other measures of satisfaction or concern with the settings. They found that **the majority of parents agreed or strongly agreed that schools deal with bullying appropriately**. It should be noted that those parents that did not agree or strongly agree mainly responded that they were not sure. Additional questions were asked of parents with children in a secondary boarding setting, and whilst no question was asked specifically on bullying, **89% parents agreed or**



248 Walker J, Selous A and Misca G. [Living in our shoes: understanding the needs of UK armed forces families](#). 2020.

249 Due to the sparse literature this survey was included in order to get the fullest picture possible. However, it must be noted that due to its intended audience no information on methods used or the extent to which bullying is a challenge is included.

250 O'Donnell L and Rudd P. [Service Children's Education: Survey of Parental Views](#). 2007.

strongly agreed that schools “provides a safe environment for their child”, suggesting that potentially they did not perceive bullying to be a significant problem. It must be noted that this study relied on parent’s perceptions of their children’s experience and therefore is limited by the extent to which children chose to disclose any challenges they faced. Furthermore, the generalisability of these results to all Service children is limited, as this survey only included SCE schools.

As noted in the section [Knowledge and awareness of schools](#), schools with higher proportions of Service children may be better able to meet their needs. This could potentially extend to their ability to deal appropriately with bullying related to military life, and therefore help us to explain the mixed picture of evidence above. However, further research is needed to confirm this. This concurs with evidence gathered as part of the ‘Living in our Shoes’²⁵¹ report, which suggests that being in a school that has a good understanding of Service life could impact on whether Service children are targets of bullying. This report details the experience of one child, who had previously been warned by their Service parent to avoid talking about their connection to the military at school, in order to avoid bullying. However, this Service child did not face this problem at when attending The Duke of York’s Royal Military School, due to its understanding of and pride in Service life.

As with the literature, SMEs held different opinions of whether bullying was an increased problem for Service children. Some relayed that **Service children can experience bullying linked to their military background:**

“I remember one in particular that is quite striking, he was bullied and I didn’t know it was going on at the time until obviously he told me about it because I didn’t see it. But the kids were saying ‘Your Dad is a killer, you Dad is a murderer because he goes and shoots people’ ... So, I don’t think that it is any more prevalent but when it does happen it’s more a specific kind of bullying in my experience... it’s a more targeted bullying because of the military connection.” Interviewee 1

“Someone once said to me that in their local school there wasn’t many Service pupils, but the school got the Service Pupil Premium. The other pupil premiums were for those people that needed special needs and he was telling me that his kid was being bullied because they thought he was a special needs kid because of the SPP.” Interviewee 2

Some SMEs commented that the nature of bullying seems to vary according to the



251 Walker J, Selous A and Misca G. [Living in our shoes: understanding the needs of UK armed forces families](#). 2020.

number of Service children at the school, aligning with suggestions in the literature that being in a military supportive environment might make for a safer environment:

“I’d like to think that’s not an issue. I’m not aware of things, but it could be that we’ve got quite a big military community within the school... When we had Ofsted, actually the Ofsted inspector asked the children about that and they basically they said there wasn’t any issues... At a secondary age when you talk to them, I think where there can be problems if they’re the one child in a school and they’re the only military family” Interviewee 12

“I think there always will be... some comments that are made. Bullying has always been seen as an issue raised by Armed Forces families when they move into a location.” Interviewee 4

Some SMEs felt that bullying was not a problem for Service children beyond the norm, and suggested that bullying was not related to military Service, but rather to the quality of school:

“I don’t see a huge amount of problems in terms of bullying in state schools beyond what might be sort of typical. For me, the challenge around schooling and bullying and things like that is actually if you are in an area where the quality of school is not great that is probably you know your choices relatively limited... because of catchment area and the location of the base or you know the location of the Service family accommodation” Interviewee 11”

One SME suggested that Service children may turn to being the bully to establish security in a new school if they’ve had previous negative experiences:

“There is a gender issue here that young boys, primary, would come in and want to mark out their territory very quickly and if it meant giving children a smack round the chops, so be it... sometimes it’s because they have poor experiences at a previous school, and they didn’t want it to happen again, so they come in puffed up man motion. ‘I’m the big guy and my Dad’s a soldier’.” Interviewee 1

Our review returned no research that focused specifically on the impact of military stigma on Service children and families. However, wider research on public opinion of the UK Armed forces can help build a picture of the potential stigma children could face. Gribble et al (2014) analysed the 2011 British Attitudinal Survey in order to examine public perceptions of the Iraq and Afghanistan missions. They found **overall negative opinions of both**, however, with a slightly more favourable perception of the Afghanistan mission: **5 out of 10 people disagreed with UK engagement in Afghanistan compared to 6 out of 10 for Iraq.**²⁵² However, these results must be viewed with caution, as they represent an outdated picture of public perception based on historic conflicts and may not necessarily translate into social stigma or hostility towards Armed Forces’ personnel and their children in the current context.

More recent evidence indicates that public perception of Armed Forces personnel is positive, and is separated from their support for specific missions^{253,254} A more recent 2018 YouGov report²⁵⁵ assessed the perception of Armed Forces Veterans via qualitative interviews, with overall positive results. **The majority of respondents had a favourable view of the UK Armed Forces Veterans.** For example, when interviewees were asked to provide words to describe Veterans, their quick associations were all positive (bar one: an association with PTSD), with the most commonly reported being **‘brave’ and ‘disciplined/discipline’.**

This positive UK perception of the Armed Forces is supported by data from the 2017 MOD reputation survey²⁵⁶ where **88% of those asked had a very/mainly favourable view of the Armed Forces.** Armour et al (2018)²⁵⁷ analysed data from the Northern Ireland ‘Life and Times Survey’ and found that the **majority (42%) of those interviewed had a positive perception** of the Armed Forces and **70% would feel comfortable with a member of the Armed Forces moving in next door or marrying a close relative.**

Our SME interviews noted whilst that stigma is still a challenge for Service families, it may be lessening and that for some Service children the “military brat” status is a positive element of their identity:

“Stigma is still there unfortunately, there is still a stigma of in the Army’s case of the ‘Pad Brat’ and I’m sure the language in the Naval community is slightly different, but it is still the same stigma. When I worked down in



252 Gribble R et al. British Public Opinion after a Decade of War: Attitudes to Iraq and Afghanistan. Politics 2014; 35: 128-150.

253 Latter J, Powell T and Ward N. [Public Perceptions of Veterans and the Armed Forces](#). 2018.

254 Armour C, Waterhouse-Bradley B et al. [Public Attitudes to the UK Armed Forces in Northern Ireland](#). 2018.

255 Latter J, Powell T and Ward N. [Public Perceptions of Veterans and the Armed Forces](#). 2018.

256 Ministry of Defence. [MOD and Armed Forces Reputational Polling, Summer 2017 Survey Topline Findings \(27-07-17\)](#) 2017

257 Armour C, Waterhouse-Bradley B et al. [Public Attitudes to the UK Armed Forces in Northern Ireland](#). 2018.

Helensburgh area with youngsters from Naval Families they were very clear that civilian communities sometimes blamed them, blamed the Naval community for the ills in the community, when in fact they felt it was really unfair and stigma.” Interviewee 1

“I think that, you know, some people wear that as a badge of honour.” Interviewee 11

Key Findings

- The literature and SME interviews present a mixed picture of whether Service children experience military-specific bullying. We found evidence that schools with greater knowledge and awareness of Service children may be better placed to prevent or deal with military specific bullying.
- There was no research that focused specifically on the impact of military stigma on Service children and families.

Our Recommendation

1. In light of the lack of evidence related to the impact of public perception of the Armed Forces or Service children, we recommend that research should be undertaken to explore whether Service children experience military-specific bullying and to examine whether Service children are impacted by stigma associated with military life.

7. The impact of parental illness or injury

In the financial year 2019–20, 114 non-fatal injuries were recorded as part of the *Biannual UK Armed Forces and UK entitled civilians operational casualty and fatality statistics*²⁵⁸. The majority were non-battle injuries (56), followed by natural causes (55) and a small number of battle injuries (3). This is a decrease from a total of 152 total non-fatal injuries in 2018–19. Between 2011–2020 there were a total of 1020 non-fatal injuries: 533 natural causes, 484 non-battle injuries and 3 battles injuries (all in the year 2019–20).

258 Ministry of Defence. [Biannual UK Armed Forces and UK Entitled civilians operational casualty and fatality statistics](#) | June 2011 to 31 March 2020. 2020.

However, physical injuries alone do not give us the entire picture of the health of Serving Personnel and Veterans. In 2019–20 **1 in 8 Armed Forces personnel sought mental health care (12.7%)**, following the trend of recent years which has seen rates of care **stabilise at around 12–13%**²⁵⁹. Whilst this represents an increase from 8.6% in 2012–13, this may reflect more Service personnel accessing support, as opposed to an increase in mental health problems. Furthermore, **this is similar to rates of mental health care seen in the civilian population.**

Level of **mental healthcare utilisation does vary slightly by branch**²⁶⁰, with 1 in 7 RAF personnel, 1 in 8 Army and Navy personnel, and 1 in 12 Royal Marine personnel seeking support. Women, those aged between 20–44, and non-commissioned Service personnel are more likely to utilise specialist mental healthcare. When considering the mental health of the Armed Forces population, PTSD is often at the forefront of discussions. Whilst 2 in every 1,000 Service Personnel (8%) receive specialist PTSD treatment, **the most common reasons for specialised care are depressive episodes (36%) and adjustment disorders (34%).**

Parental mental health

The majority of literature identified in this area focused on the impact of parental mental health on Service children, particularly with regards to PTSD. Evidence focused on the impact of parental PTSD on Service children in the UK is mixed. Studies have shown that Service personnel who have symptoms of PTSD are **more likely to perceive that their Service is having a negative impact on their children’s well-being.**^{261,262} This association is also reported for symptoms of common mental health disorders.

In a UK study looking at the impact of paternal combat deployment and PTSD on the well-being and behaviour of their children, **PTSD was found to have an impact on hyperactivity in boys under 11 only**²⁶³. This study also found an association between emotional numbing (a symptom of PTSD) and behavioural problems in boys under 11 years, and conduct problems in boys of any age. **No association was found between girls’ well-being or behaviour and father’s PTSD symptoms in this study.** It should be highlighted that this study did not look at the impact of maternal PTSD on children’s behaviour, and as such we cannot rule out an impact of parental PTSD on girls altogether.



259 Ministry of Defence. [UK Armed Forces Mental Health: Annual Summary & Trends Over Time 2007/08–2019/20](#). 2020.

260 Ministry of Defence. [UK Armed Forces Mental Health: Annual Summary & Trends Over Time 2007/08–2019/20](#). 2020.

261 Thandi G, Greenberg N, Fear N and Jones N. [Perceived effect of deployment on families of UK military personnel](#). Occupational Medicine 2017; 67: 562–568.

262 Rowe S, Keeling M, Wessely S and Fear N. [Perceptions of the impact a military career has on children](#). Occupational medicine 2014; 64: 490–496.

263 Fear NT et al. [Impact of paternal deployment to the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan and paternal post-traumatic stress disorder on the children of military fathers](#). The British Journal of Psychiatry 2018; 212: 347–355.

Looking beyond the UK to culturally aligned countries, research with Australian military families²⁶⁴ found **no evidence of intergenerational transmission of PTSD symptoms or poor self-esteem** between Service Personnel with PTSD and their children. **Parental PTSD, however, was found to lessen some aspects of family functioning (i.e. appropriate emotional responses and problem solving)**. Further research is needed to cement our understanding of the impact of parental PTSD on Service children in the UK.

Evidence from the US literature also discusses the impact of parental mental health conditions on Service children. Whilst cultural differences limit the generalisability of these findings, some key papers are summarised in the Table 3 below.

Table 3. A non-exhaustive selection of US literature discussing the impact of parental mental health on Service children.

Reference	Study Focus	Key Findings
Herzog, Joseph R., R. Blaine Everson, and James D. Whitworth. ²⁶⁵ "Do Secondary Trauma Symptoms in Spouses of Combat-Exposed National Guard Soldiers Mediate Impacts of Soldiers' Trauma Exposure on Their Children?"	Explores the secondary trauma experienced by family members of Servicemen with PTSD.	Children are at risk of secondary trauma (exhibiting internalising but not externalising behaviours). This risk increases if the non-serving spouse also displays secondary trauma.
Gewirtz, Abigail H, Melissa A Polusny, David S DeGarmo, Anna Khaylis, and Christopher R Erbes. ²⁶⁶ "Posttraumatic Stress Symptoms among National Guard Soldiers Deployed to Iraq: Associations with Parenting Behaviours and Couple Adjustment."	Examines the relationship between PTSD, parenting and couple adjustment in National Guard Soldiers who have deployed to Iraq.	Increased PTSD symptoms were associated with less effective parenting. However, deployment injury in general had no association with parenting behaviour. Social support was highlighted as a benefit to families, as it lessened PTSD symptoms.

264 Davidson AC and Mellor DJ. [The adjustment of children of Australian Vietnam veterans: is there evidence for the transgenerational transmission of the effects of war-related trauma?](#) Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry 2001; 35: 345–351.

265 Herzog JR, Everson RB and Whitworth JD. [Do Secondary Trauma Symptoms in Spouses of Combat-Exposed National Guard Soldiers Mediate Impacts of Soldiers' Trauma Exposure on Their Children?](#) Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal 2011; 28: 459–473117.

266 Gewirtz AH, Polusny MA, DeGarmo DS, et al. [Posttraumatic stress symptoms among National Guard soldiers deployed to Iraq: associations with parenting behaviors and couple adjustment.](#) Journal of consulting and clinical psychology 2010; 78: 599.

<p>Snyder, James, Abigail Gewirtz, Lynn Schrepferman, Suzanne R Gird, Jamie Quattlebaum, Michael R Pauldine, Katie Elish, Osnat Zamir, and Charles Hayes.²⁶⁷ "Parent–Child Relationship Quality and Family Transmission of Parent Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Symptoms and Child Externalizing and Internalizing Symptoms Following Fathers' Exposure to Combat Trauma."</p>	<p>Investigated the transmission of PTSD symptoms between non-serving mother, serving father and child who have undergone a parenting intervention program.</p>	<p>Evidence was found of transmission of PTSD symptoms between serving father and mother and of an association of both father and mother PTSD symptoms with child internalising and externalising behaviours.</p>
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Whilst there is limited UK research looking at the impact of parental mental health on Service children, this was highlighted by some SMEs. There was suggestion that parental mental health was associated with children taking on additional caring responsibilities and becoming withdrawn at school:

“I have seen the impact of post-traumatic stress with parents... it filters through [to] children and certainly within the Gurkhas, the way there's been some quite horrific things that have gone on that parents [have] been exposed to.” Interviewee 12

“What we have found is where there's been incidents like that the children have been very quiet. Very, very subdued and when we've tried to put support in they won't talk about what goes on at home... months before they started talking about what Daddy was like at home and how frightened they were.” Interviewee 12

There is some evidence that parental PTSD may put children at risk of neglect or abuse in the UK Armed Forces. Based on a large cohort, one UK study²⁶⁸ found that **Service personnel with PTSD were more likely to report family violence**. This association was also found for those with **common mental health disorders and those who displayed aggression symptoms** in the last month. Family violence here included both violence

267 Snyder J, Gewirtz A, Schrepferman L, et al. [Parent–child relationship quality and family transmission of parent posttraumatic stress disorder symptoms and child externalizing and internalizing symptoms following fathers' exposure to combat trauma](#). *Development and Psychopathology* 2016; 28: 947–969.

268 Kwan J, Jones M, Somaini G, et al. [Post-deployment family violence among UK military personnel](#). *Psychological medicine* 2018; 48: 2202–2212.

towards children and other family members, such as spouses, and therefore it is unclear whether children are victim of the self-reported violence in this study.

However, Portuguese research²⁶⁹ suggested that **war veterans with PTSD were more likely to emotionally and physically neglect their children, but no association was seen with abuse.** The reliance on self-report on the perpetration of child maltreatment is a significant limitation of both studies, as the undesirable nature of family violence may lead to underreporting. Evidence from our SME interviews around child maltreatment is discussed in the [Domestic Violence and Child Maltreatment](#) section later in this report.

Physical injury

Whilst no UK papers in our scoping review were returned that focused on the impact of parental physical injury on Service children, research has been undertaken to examine the challenges families face in coping with life-altering injuries²⁷⁰. Although this research does not specifically interview the children of injured Service Personnel, it identifies that a **lack of awareness in healthcare professionals of the challenges faced by families living with injured Service Personnel** and Veterans.

US research has explored how the severity and type of injury may impact children’s well-being. Research²⁷¹ with spouses of combat injured Service Personnel (most commonly multi-trauma injury, traumatic brain injury and amputation) found that **families experience high disruption** (i.e. disruption to schedules, disciplining and time spent together) **and child distress post-injury**. Furthermore, children who experienced higher distress during pre-injury deployment and higher family disruption post-injury, were more likely to be distressed post-injury. However, **the severity of injury did not impact on the level of child distress** in this study. Therefore, support to help reduce family disruption post-injury may help reduce child distress, regardless of the severity of the injury. The sample in this study was limited to the families of injured male Service Personnel and therefore further research is needed to explore the impact of parental injury on the families of injured Servicewomen.

Data from the Military Health System Data repository in the US²⁷² suggests that parental injury is followed by an **increase in Service children’s use of healthcare services for mental health, injury and maltreatment, and use of psychiatric medicine**. The authors highlight that healthcare usage changes were generally similar across injury type. However, the use of psychiatric medication and healthcare usage for child maltreatment was somewhat higher for those parents with a joint PTSD and Traumatic



269 Dias A, Sales L, Cardoso RM, et al. [Childhood maltreatment in adult offspring of Portuguese war veterans with and without PTSD](#), European journal of psychotraumatology 2014; 5: 20198.

270 Engward H, Fleuty K and Fossey M. [Caring and Coping: the family perspective on living with limb loss](#). 2018.

271 Cozza S, Chun RS and Miller C. [The children and families of combat-injured Service members](#). 2011

272 Hisle-Gorman E, Susi A and Gorman GH. [The Impact Of Military Parents’ Injuries On The Health And Well-Being Of Their Children](#). Health Affairs 2019; 38: 1358-1365.

Brain Injury diagnosis. This study also showed that the impact of parental injury on children’s healthcare usage **differed depending on whether the injury was combat or non-combat related. Combat-related injuries were not associated with changes in levels of healthcare usage** for mental health, maltreatment or injury. The authors posit that this may be due to increased tailored support available for families experiencing combat injuries.

The impact of physical injury was discussed only briefly in SME interviews and mainly in relation to infantry Service personnel. One theme of that emerged across the different regiments was the gendered impact of parental injury, with the SME’s experiences suggesting that parental injury can be more impactful on boys with serving fathers:

“I’ve got a family member that’s in the Paratrooper Regiment. And he broke a leg doing a parachute jump and his son who was four or five years old was absolutely distraught that Daddy wouldn’t be able to jump out of helicopters anymore.” Interviewee 12

“And limb loss was one that really surprised me and children whose parents – there was, going back probably about eight or nine years – four or five parents in the same tour that lost legs. And when they all came back... they were back on the school site on crutches or with prosthetic legs, things like that. The little, their sons, particularly more than the girls really struggled that their Dads [were not] strong anymore. And it is perception of that you have to have two legs to be strong. That they couldn’t be a fighter” Interviewee 12

One SME’s anecdote highlighted clearly the impact that parental illness can have on Service children, with children taking on caring responsibilities. The challenges experienced by military-connected Young Carers are discussed earlier in this report (see [Young Carers](#) section).

“I’ve got a lady at the minute, she’s a single parent and her son’s 19... people said to me, and I had these battles on Friday, ‘But that 19 year old [is] classed as an adult’. And I said, ‘Well not under the young carers scheme they’re not’. So, they wanted to discharge her home for palliative care into the care of a 19-year-old child and I’m thinking, “What is going on in this country for it to be in such a state that we’re in” Interviewee 7

At the time of undertaking this research the UK Armed Forces are not involved in any

overt conflicts. However, future conflicts will inevitably occur, with associated high levels of injury and mortality. It is important for us to reflect now on the challenges faced by children in military families as they face these traumas and design evidence-based service models and interventions that may mitigate the effects observed in some of the international research.

Key Findings

- The UK literature on mental health presents a mixed picture, with some evidence of a link between PTSD and hyperactivity (in boys only), and increased neglect and abuse in Service children. However, this research is limited by its focus on PTSD and paternal mental health only.
- No UK literature was found on the impact of parental physical injury on Service children. US literature suggests that parental physical injury can cause significant family disruption and child distress and may negatively impact children's own physical and mental health.

Our Recommendations

1. Considering the mixed findings in relation to the impact of parental mental health on Service children in the UK, we recommend further research is needed in this area. In particular, research looking at non-PTSD parental mental health disorders, and the children of servicewomen is required.
2. Research is needed to explore the impact of physical injury of Service children. Whilst we are not currently at war, it is necessary to prepare for future conflicts by reflecting now on the challenges faced by children in military families in the context of physical injury. In line with work already undertaken by Blesma on adult carers¹²¹, evidence-based service models and interventions that may mitigate the effects observed in some of the international research may provide further avenues for research.

8. The impact of parental bereavement

In 2019, **66 UK Service personnel died whilst in service**; 9 RN/RM, 40 Army and 17 RAF²⁷³. Whilst Service deaths in the Army and RAF have increased from 2018 (48% and 17% respectively) and the RN/RM saw a 21% decrease, **all three branches have seen Service-related deaths decrease in the last 10 years**²⁷⁴. Furthermore, MOD data shows that UK Armed Forces personnel are less likely to die than the general population, dubbed the **“healthy worker effect”**.

Our scoping review identified no papers related to impact of parental death on Service children in the UK Armed Forces. A review of the US literature in 2013²⁷⁵ looked at the impact of combat injuries and deaths on Service families and children. For this study, combat deaths were defined as death and suicide in the combat zone, or suicide upon return from deployment. Whilst not all the research in this review is specific to Service children, they highlight an association between pre-bereavement parental mental health and parenting style post-bereavement to a child’s healthy response to death. **Pre-existing mental health problems in the surviving parent were associated with poorer adjustment to bereavement in children. Family cohesion and consistency in routine post-bereavement were associated with positive adjustment.** Some potentially protective factors for bereaved Service children compared to civilian children were identified by the authors; Service children may be better able to adjust to a parent’s death due to the **“professional culture and a sense of mission”** attached to Service, and **may benefit from military-specific support services.**

Child Bereavement UK²⁷⁶ describes the way in which children, in general, commonly grieve. Many reflect our understanding of grief in adults: **anger, denial, feeling anxious and insecure, and asking questions around death.** However, some may be more surprising. For example, children are described as: **becoming more impulsive/taking risks, seeking to care for surviving parent or siblings**, reporting **“magical thinking”** (for example, ‘if I am well-behaved my parent will come home’), being **very aware of tension and distress in others**, or seemingly **not reacting to death** (i.e. carrying on as normal) but then **experiencing sudden outbursts of grief later.**

Early parental bereavement can have long-term impacts on the well-being of children in general. Analysis of the 1970’s British cohort study²⁷⁷ showed that parental loss before the age of 16 in civilian children was associated with **greater odds of being**



273 Ministry of Defence. [Deaths in the UK regular armed forces: Annual summary and trends over time 1 January 2010 to 31 December 2019.](#) 2020.

274 Ministry of Defence. [Deaths in the UK regular armed forces: Annual summary and trends over time 1 January 2010 to 31 December 2019.](#) 2020.

275 Holmes AK, Rauch PK and Cozza SJ. [When a parent is injured or killed in combat.](#) Future Child 2013; 23: 143-162. 2013/10/01.

276 Child Bereavement UK. Supporting bereaved children and young people (accessed 21.10.20).

277 Parson S. [Long-term impact of childhood bereavement.](#) 2011

unemployed at 30, smoking cigarettes, having significant depressive symptoms, or having no qualifications. Narrative analysis of 33 individuals²⁷⁸ who lost parents at a young age identified several factors that could lead to adverse outcomes in later life. **Lack of continuity post-death**, such as moving home or separation from friends and family, made adjustment more difficult for children and was associated with **long term emotional difficulties, insecurity and loneliness in adult life.** This may be of significance for military families, who may have to leave SFA and make a choice as to where to live. Furthermore, **feelings of safety and security and effective parenting were crucial to healthy adjustment**, and lack thereof can lead to later issues with self-esteem and self-worth. Finally, communication around the death of a parent was also highlighted as key to adjustment, **with unsuccessful communication associated with an inability to express emotion in adulthood.**

The lack of military-specific UK research must be remedied to fill this important gap in our understanding around Service children. Only two SMEs spoke about the impact of bereavement on Service children's lives, focused primarily on the difficulty of bereavement in the Afghanistan and Iraq era, when media attention was high, but also emphasising that bereavement was still an issue:

“Even in a Service death, the media [is] quite intrusive. So we have media shielders and they will liaise with the media and they give us that 24/48 hour sort of grace to be able to inform them, get a picture about the death of the serving person. And sometimes the children want to be part of that, they want to choose the picture that goes into the paper, and dependent on their age and they're really passionate about being part of that. Then other times, 24/48 hours to put that on a child, they haven't got time to even get their head around what's happening, let alone choose a picture... but the media can be outside the home [which] really puts a lot of pressure on a family, if we don't release something.” Interviewee 7

“Sadly bereavement, coping with bereavement is still a challenge.” Interviewee 1

Emphasis was placed on the importance of ensuring that children receive proper support throughout the process. However, it was apparent that some effective support exists for Service children:



278 Ellis J, Dowrick C and Lloyd-Williams M. [The long-term impact of early parental death: lessons from a narrative study.](#) Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine 2013; 106: 57–67. 2013/02/07.

“I have to put my hands up and say the schools have been fantastic with some of the younger children that I have supported through bereavement of a parent.. The family activity breaks that are done Tri-Service for children... and they still now take children that have experienced bereavement through Service, not just through operations now” Interviewee 7

This SME also highlighted the importance of the Service funeral to families of the bereaved. For some this functions as a way of highlighting the importance of their parent’s service:

“We still try and do the Service funeral, that is, if the family want the Service funeral. But with the children for them to see that gives them that sense of there was a reason for my parent dying.” Interviewee 7

Parental suicide

Since the year 2000, **306 Service personnel have committed suicide (288 males and 18 females)**^{279,280} with 10 of these deaths taking place in 2019. Analysis from the MOD²⁸¹ on suicide rates of male Service personnel between the ages of 16–59 shows that whilst this fluctuates year on year, an increase is clear since the previous ‘Overlooked Casualties of Conflict’ report was published in 2009. It must be noted, however, that whilst every death represents a significant loss, **the rate of suicides in male Service personnel is below that of the civilian male population.**

No research was identified in the UK or culturally aligned countries that investigated the impact of suicide on military families. However, considering US literature on military suicide and UK literature on parental suicide in the civilian population provides an indication of the potential impact on Service children.

Research with the families of US Marines²⁸² suggests that **death by suicide is associated with less family cohesiveness, increased family conflict and reduced spousal mental health** scores prior to bereavement, in comparison to accidental death and death in

279 Ministry of Defence. [Suicides in the UK Regular Armed Forces: Annual Summary and Trends Over Time 1 January 1984 to 31 December 2019](#). 2020.

280 Buckman JEJ, Forbes HJ, Clayton T, et al. [Early Service leavers: a study of the factors associated with premature separation from the UK Armed Forces and the mental health of those that leave early](#). European journal of public health 2013; 23: 410–415.

281 Ministry of Defence. [Suicides in the UK Regular Armed Forces: Annual Summary and Trends Over Time 1 January 1984 to 31 December 2019](#). 2020.

282 Aronson KR, Kyler SJ, Morgan NR, et al. Spouse and family functioning before and after a Marine’s suicide: Comparisons to deaths by accident and in combat. Military Psychology 2017; 29: 294–306.

combat. Thus, when considering the impact of parental suicide on Service children we must take into account the potential impact of pre-bereavement family functioning on the bereaved child. Additionally, suicide-bereaved military spouses reported **higher perceived stigma and increase shame around their partner's death.**

The stigma associated with military suicide was highlighted in other US research²⁸³, which highlighted the fact that military families may face stigma associated with a perception of **military suicides as a dishonourable death.** Furthermore, this study found that military families experience not only the loss of their loved one but also the **loss of their military way of life**, and the **impact of media attention around military death** can result in privacy issues for the family. The authors describe how peer support programs such as 'Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors'²⁸⁴, in which other surviving families lead support, can help by fostering a new peer environment where families feel understood, can normalise the extreme feelings around traumatic suicide grief and can model successful habits of their peers. They note the work of Leenars and Wenckstern²⁸⁵ (1998) that stresses the need for immediate support to families after a military suicide, to aid families in "how and what to tell children, spiritual questions, family dynamics, and the "why" questions". Importantly, this study discusses the potential 'Hero to Zero' effect of military suicide, which can perpetuate views of military suicide as dishonourable and lead to a lack of recognition of the value of the Serving person's efforts during Service. Both US papers highlight **the additional stigma around suicide** and the **impact that this can have on a family's ability to cope and access to support.**

In the civilian population, one UK study²⁸⁶ undertook conversational interviews with children and young adults (up to the age of 21) to understand the impact of parental suicide. In this study, **parental suicide was characterised by closed communication within the family** (for example, children being provided with no or very little detail around their parent's death). This **closed communication can negatively affect children's ability to adjust** to bereavement, leading to a loss of memories of the deceased parent and later anger and blame directed at the surviving parent for this choice. Indeed, the literature highlights the **importance of healthy communication in children's grieving process.**

The study further found that **families often hide their grief from one another**, not wishing to upset each other. Again, the literature around bereavement suggests that this could



283 Harrington-LaMorie J, Jordan J, Ruocco K, et al. [Surviving families of military suicide loss: Exploring postvention peer support.](#) Death Studies 2018; 42: 1-12.

284 The TAPS program is specific to military suicide survivors and began in 2005. TAPS provides a multitude of support; families are sent a general information pack followed by a personalised pack including counselling referrals and child therapist information specific to their location. TAPS run a 24/7 contact service, offers one to one mentoring, online support, seminar and workshops, grief counselling camps for children and general training and education.

285 Leenars AA and Wenckstern S. [Principles of postvention: Applications to suicide and trauma in schools.](#) Death Studies 1998; 22: 357.

286 Simone C. [Parental suicide.](#) Bereavement Care 2008; 27: 43-46.

negatively impact children’s adjustment^{287,288}. This finding underscores the **importance of including children in traditional bereavement rituals and the funeral**. Indeed, a lack of inclusion in these events lead to later anger towards the surviving parent. Finally, **parental suicide was associated with children’s fears around their own mortality in later life**. Further to this, a longitudinal cohort study in the UK civilian population²⁸⁹ found that **parental suicide attempts were associated with an increased in the risk of self-harm with suicidal intent in children**.

The impact of parental suicide on Service children in the UK represents a **significant research gap**, and parental suicide was not raised a topic in SME interviews. However, **international research suggests a significant impact on Service children and families**. It is important to consider that the younger people affected by the suicide of a Serving person may also include younger siblings of the serving person, and other relations, for example nieces and nephews and even those with close family-like friendships, who may all be impacted by grief.

Key Findings

- No UK literature was found exploring the impact of parental death or parental suicide on Service children. US literature suggests that in the military context, the surviving parent’s poor mental health prior to bereavement is associated with poor adjustment in children post-bereavement. However, family cohesion and consistency were associated positively with children’s adjustment. Military culture and support were also highlighted as having the potential to help children better cope.
- US literature also highlights an association between parental suicide in the military context, with stigma and shame. There was indication that this may impact on family coping and access to social support.

Our Recommendations

1. There is a significant lack of research in the UK looking at the impact of paternal death and suicide on Service children. Considering indications of a significant impact on family functioning and adjustment from the international literature, research is required to provide a better understanding of how best to support bereaved Service children and families.

287 Worden JW. [Children and Grief When a Parent Dies](#). 2001

288 Holland J. [Understanding children’s experiences of parental bereavement](#). 2001.

289 Geulayov G, Metcalfe C and Gunnell D. OP64 [Parental Suicide Attempt and Offspring Self-Harm and Suicidal Thoughts: Results from the Alspac Birth Cohort](#). [Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health](#) 2012; 66: A25–A25.

9. Family relationships and breakdown

As seen in the sections above, the **military lifestyle poses significant challenges to family life**. SMEs highlighted the difficult balance and conflicting needs of military and family life:

“We have to be able to give help [to] families, because we are asking the family to serve as well as the individual. I think most senior officer do understand that, but I think that there is still a lack of understanding that people are a capability in their own right.” Interviewee 2

The literature and SME interviews identified the **impact of family breakdown/divorce** and highlighted the (less common) occurrence of abuse and violence in the domestic setting.

Separation and divorce

UK research suggests that the **stress placed on families by deployments can result in marital difficulties**, particularly for those who deploy for more than 13 months in a 3 year period²⁹⁰. Additionally, **financial difficulties, lack of support and childhood adversity** have all been associated with **relationship difficulties** in UK Service personnel²⁹¹. Indeed, the impact on the couple relationship was rated as the fourth highest adverse impact of Service life in the 2020 FAMCAS²⁹² (endorsed by 35%). This was particularly high in RN/RM spouses (43%, compared to 33% in the Army, and 34% in the RAF).

SMEs highlighted the impact of the military lifestyle on relationships, and the need to provide support:

“I think where families are dispersed, because of parental conflicts, that can create its own issues, and I’m not sure that that’s necessarily unique to the military context, [but that] makes it more difficult.” Interviewee 11

“If you are going to put couple relationships through all of the rapid changes and additional pressure, then you provide some support around that as well. So, my perception is, and certainly see it in a lot of the enquiries that we have

290 Rona RJ, Jones M, Keeling M, et al. Mental health consequences of overstretch in the UK Armed Forces, 2007–09: a population-based cohort study. *The Lancet Psychiatry* 2014; 1: 531–538.

291 Keeling M, Wessely S, Dandeker C, et al. [Relationship difficulties among UK military personnel: impact of sociodemographic, military, and deployment-related factors](#). *Marriage & Family Review* 2015; 51: 275–303.

292 Ministry of Defence. [UK Tri-Service Families Continuous Attitude Survey Results 2020](#). 2020.

had, and since we have managed to get RNRMC [the Royal Navy and Royal Marines Charity] to fund Relate counselling and that stuff for our families”
Interviewee 5

Despite this, evidence suggests that **UK Service personnel are less likely to be divorced than the general population** (military: 3.7% vs. general: 10%), except for those ages 18–29 years (military: 1.3% vs. general: 0.8%)²⁹³. This is supported by research from the US in which Service personnel are more likely to be married, and less likely to be divorced than civilians^{294,295}. However, for those Service children who do experience the separation or divorce of their parents, this is likely to have an adverse impact on their well-being. There is a lack of research looking at this issue in UK Service families. However, research from the general population indicates **parental separation is associated with poorer well-being in children**, and risky health-related behaviours (e.g. smoking, alcohol use) which persist into adulthood²⁹⁶.

The ‘Living in Our Shoes’ report²⁹⁷ highlights the **unique difficulties that may occur following divorce/separation if the family lived in SFA**. In this case, the family will be asked to leave the family home (the SFA) within 90 days, something that is not likely to happen in civilian families. This **upheaval may exacerbate the challenges associated with mobility** that Service children may have already experienced. Additionally, divorced Service personnel **may be asked to move into SLA following separation, which may not be appropriate for children to visit**. Indeed, the AFF Divorce survey in 2015 found²⁹⁸ that 49% of former Armed Forces spouses reported that they had problems obtaining housing following separation and **45% of divorced Service personnel reported that they did not have appropriate accommodation for their children to visit**. Respondents in this survey felt that the Army should not simply disengage with spouses as soon as the couples separate, but should continue to provide support to the spouse and Service children.

Domestic violence and child maltreatment

Parental and family conflict may in extreme cases result in domestic violence. There is limited research looking at domestic violence in the UK Armed Forces. Survey research



293 Keeling M, Wessely S and Fear NT. [Marital status distribution of the UK military: Does it differ from the general population?](#) Military Behavioral Health 2017; 5: 26–34.

294 Karney BR, Loughran DS and Pollard MS. [Comparing marital status and divorce status in civilian and military populations.](#) Journal of Family Issues 2012; 33: 1572–1594.

295 Adler–Baeder F, Pittman JF and Taylor L. [The prevalence of marital transitions in military families.](#) Journal of Divorce & Remarriage 2006; 44: 91–106.

296 Kestilä L. [Pathways to health: Determinants of health, health behaviour and health inequalities in early adulthood.](#) 2008.

297 Walker J, Selous A and Misca G. [Living in our shoes: understanding the needs of UK armed forces families.](#) 2020.

298 Army Families Federation. [AFF 2015 Divorce Survey.](#) 2015

with UK military partners, published in 2011²⁹⁹, found that 5.4% of respondents reported that their partner was physically violent towards them, and 28.9% reported that their partner was verbally abusive to them. Six percent of participants reported that they had called the police about an ex-partner, and 4% about a current partner. Qualitative evidence in this study suggested evidence of coercive patterns of behaviour when their serving partner returned from a military-related separation, causing conflict during reintegration into the family. Military partners expressed concern around using military-based relationship counselling, due to fears of the stigma and impact on their serving partner's career.

More recent research, reporting on the Kings Centre for Military Health Research cohort study³⁰⁰, found that the prevalence of family violence (physical violence toward a family member) immediately following return from deployment was 3.6%. Family violence was also increased in Service personnel who had deployed in a combat role and those who reported mental health symptoms and aggression. However, family violence was lowest amongst RN/RMs personnel in comparison to the other branches. Family violence can include the maltreatment of children (i.e. abuse and neglect). However, the extent to which family violence was directed to children is unknown.

These studies raise concerns around the prevalence of violence and aggression amongst military personnel returning from deployment. However, we were unable to find any studies comparing the prevalence of domestic violence in military and civilian samples. US research suggests that rates of interpersonal violence in military women and military spouses are similar to that of non-military women³⁰¹. However, one SME highlighted the lack of reporting of domestic violence, which may lead to an underestimation of prevalence:

“We’ve always kind of taken the line previously that if it exist in Civvy Street then probably the prevalence is similar in the Armed Forces, although under reported, and we are beginning to think now, based on the work that [retracted name] did at Kings, that the prevalence is possibly more... the thing that we definitely know is that there are significant barriers to reporting of domestic abuse.” Interviewee 5



299 Williamson E. [Domestic Abuse and Military Families: The Problem of Reintegration and Control](#). The British Journal of Social Work 2011; 42: 1371-1387.

300 Kwan J, Jones M, Somaini G, et al. [Post-deployment family violence among UK military personnel](#). Psychological medicine 2018; 48: 2202-2212.

301 Black MC and Merrick MT. [Prevalence of Intimate Partner Violence, Stalking, and Sexual Violence Among Active Duty Women and Wives of Active Duty Men—Comparisons with Women in the US General Population](#), 2010. 2013.

SMEs highlighted the **cultural issues that might contribute to domestic violence** in a military setting:

“Certainly, in my experience, with the families I worked with, cultural differences with the parents is a huge issue. And especially in the way [that] what’s acceptable in one culture regarding discipline is totally unacceptable in another culture. In where I live and where I worked, we had 27 different languages at one stage on the patch and I can’t remember the actual numbers, but there was various different cultures and that brought with it specific issues, as far as family, domestic violence a d... the male dominant role in the family and the discipline of the children.” Interviewee 1

The **impact of domestic violence on children is significant**. Meta-analyses of the impact of domestic violence on children in the general population highlight a **range of emotional, behavioural and social problems**³⁰². Furthermore, one SME commented on the **potential transmission of violent behaviour** from Service personnel to their children:

“If the Dad was going away then I’m sure you’ve heard “You are the man of the house now” so the expectation weighed heavily on their shoulders... you are the man of the house and certainly some boys took that to the extreme. I don’t want to go into the detail, but to the extent that they would take on the domestic violence that was going on in the family. In my experience that was an 8-year-old boy who did that.” Interviewee 1

Whilst UK evidence does not differentiate violence against different family members, a number of papers related to child maltreatment were identified within the US context. This evidence suggests that in general, **rates of child maltreatment are lower in military** compared to non-military families³⁰³. However, risk factors for child maltreatment in military families include elevated rates of domestic violence, increased prevalence of alcohol use in Service personnel and deployment³⁰⁴.

Similarly to evidence of increased domestic violence following return from deployment,

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302 Evans SE, Davies C and DiLillo D. [Exposure to domestic violence: A meta-analysis of child and adolescent outcomes](#). Aggression and violent behavior 2008; 13: 131-140.

303 Rentz ED, Marshall SW, Martin SL, et al. [Occurrence of maltreatment in active duty military and nonmilitary families in the State of Texas](#). Military medicine 2008; 173: 515-522.

304 Gibbs DA, Martin SL, Clinton-Sherrod M, et al. [Child maltreatment within military families](#). Risk and resilience in US military families. Springer, 2011, pp.111-130.

US research suggests an **increased in the likelihood of child maltreatment, and severity of maltreatment, following deployment**^{305,306}. Together, the findings associated with domestic violence and child maltreatment suggest that **reintegration following deployment may present an increased period of risk for violence and abuse** in military families. Indeed, the 'Living in Our Shoes'³⁰⁷ report in the UK highlights responses from families indicating that Service Personnel experienced 'anger and rage' following return from deployment, causing significant relationship difficulties. One SME linked this to the control of negative behaviours and physical separation associated with deployment, which was then released on return to the family:

“Well, there's a lot more control, isn't there in deployment. So some of those negative behaviours are controlled if you're on a ship, for example, four months and then your opportunity to drink heavily and things is a different one to the one when you're home. And, you know, domestic abuse and so on, require a presence of some description. And even if it's a controlling relationship. And that's, again, it's very limited because of the contacts and communication controls when you're on deployment.” Interviewee 10

Key Findings

- Marital difficulties in UK Armed Forces are associated with deployment, financial difficulties, lack of support and childhood adversity. However, there is a lack of UK research looking at the impact of family breakdown on Service children.
- Service families undergoing divorce may experience housing difficulties if required to leave SFA and Service personnel may find that SLA is not appropriate for children.
- There is limited research on domestic violence and child maltreatment in UK Armed Forces. However, there is an indication that family violence is increased following deployment, and that families may fear the repercussions of reporting family violence.
- International literature suggests that there may be a decreased risk of domestic violence in the military compared to civilian population. However, reintegration following deployment appears to be a period during which there is increased risk of domestic violence and child maltreatment.

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305 Thomsen C, Rabenhorst M, McCarthy R, et al. [Child Maltreatment Before and After Combat-Related Deployment Among Active-Duty United States Air Force Maltreating Parents](#). *Psychology of Violence* 2013; 4.

306 Rentz ED, Marshall SW, Loomis D, et al. [Effect of deployment on the occurrence of child maltreatment in military and nonmilitary families](#). *American Journal of Epidemiology* 2007; 165: 1199-1206.

307 Walker J, Selous A and Misca G. [Living in our shoes: understanding the needs of UK armed forces families](#). 2020.

Our Recommendations

1. Considering the lack of UK research focused on family breakdown in the military, research is required to establish whether there are any unique impacts of family breakdown on Service children.
2. The limited research available on family violence in the UK does not differentiate between violence against adult and child family members. As such, further research is required to determine the risk of domestic violence towards Service children. In addition, further investigation is required to determine the potential for increased risk of family violence following deployment.

10. Children with additional needs and disabilities

A common theme identified in the literature and highlighted by SMEs, was the **further challenges experienced by Service children who have additional needs or disabilities**. In the UK, research with Service and ex-Service families in 2016³⁰⁸ estimated that between 6.2–7.7% of children had a serious illness or disability. Within Service families, fathers most commonly reported respiratory problems (33.3%) and mothers most commonly reported physical health problems (21.6%) in their children. For seafarers specifically, research for the Maritime Charity Group in 2016³⁰⁹ found that 25% of respondents reported that they or their children had a long-standing illness, disability or infirmity. The Forces Additional Needs and Disability Forum published their 30th Anniversary report in 2020³¹⁰. This study involved consultation with 225 respondents and suggested that the most common type of disability in UK Service families is Autism Spectrum Disorder (48%), following by learning disabilities/difficulties (17%). Key concerns for families in this report were health provision (41%), education provision (38%) and a lack of support from the Armed Forces (35%).

Mobility in particular presents significant challenges for Service families with children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). **The number of Service children with SEND in the UK is unknown**, and there is conflicting evidence as to whether having SEND is more prevalent in Service children compared to non-Service children. Data from the Department of Education in 2010³¹¹ suggests that the number is similar across

308 Khera CK, Stevelink SAM and Fear NT. [Parental reports of serious illness and disability among children aged 3–16 years from UK military families](#). Journal of the Royal Army Medical Corps 2017; 163: 255–258. DOI: 10.1136/jramc-2016-000671.

309 Maritime Charities Group. [The needs and aspirations of the dependant and families of seafarers under retirement age](#). 2016.

310 Forces Additional Needs and Disability Forum. [30th Anniversary Report: Families Fighting On](#). 2020.

311 Department for Education. [The Educational Performance of Children of Service Personnel](#). 2010.

these groups. However, data reported by the AFF in 2013³¹² found that SEND was more commonly reported by Army vs non-Army children in both Year 6 (23.8% vs. 4.8%) and Years 10&11 (9.8% vs. 3.9%). It should be noted that the sample size in this study was fairly small (144 child participants) and was limited to Army children. As such, figures should be treated with some caution and not generalised to the wider Service child population.

In 2011, Ofsted reported that some schools in England **lacked coordination when transferring children’s records and were unprepared to meet the needs of children with SEND**³¹³. The main issues recorded for SEND children related to a **lack of continuity in support and difficulties transferring statements of need** when moving schools. Children often need to be **reassessed for their educational needs as they move to different regions**, and there is currently no standard approach to meeting the needs of SEND children across LAs in England or the devolved nations. Indeed, Educational Health and Care Plans (EHCP), the legal documents that outline the support a child requires to meet their needs, are not accepted outside of England. This problem was echoed across other UK reports^{314, 315, 316, 317} and by a number of SMEs:

“So, we have seen experiences where families have come into a local authority and the frontline staff haven’t been completely aware of the situation and it’s taken quite a while for us to get children into, say, a special school or into a setting that can support their needs. So that’s quite a big issue for us... and ensuring that if they have a, any kind of document and whether that’s a document, like for example the EHCP in England or a scan that the MOD schools produce or like an ALS document from Wales. Whenever anyone moves there has been in the past at a challenge that you will turn up and originally what would happen is the assessment would start again. And if someone is getting a good provision somewhere else we want that to continue.” Interviewee 11

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312 Noret N et al. [The Educational Attainment of Army Children](#). 2013

313 Ofsted. [Children in Service Families](#). 2011.

314 Walker J, Selous A and Misca G. [Living in our shoes: understanding the needs of UK armed forces families](#). 2020.

315 Children’s Commissioner. 2018. [Kin and Country](#)

316 Brady D, Low N, Neogi R, Vinson N and Summerfield L. [The education of Service children: findings of a National Audit Office consultation](#). 2013.

317 Forces Additional Needs and Disability Forum. [30th Anniversary Report: Families Fighting On](#). 2020.

“I think one of the challenges they face in terms of receiving good support is just as a direct result of transition between schools and jurisdictions, gaps and SEND not being identified. Because of those changes and because of poor transfer of data between schools... the issues with special educational needs and their education and healthcare plans not being transferable and the impact that has on identifying learning needs for children when they are moving” Interviewee 3

If a family is in SFA, it is possible to request to remain in SFA whilst a statutory assessment for SEND is being completed³¹⁸. However, this isn't the case for many families. In some cases, Service families report that their **child was still waiting to be reassessed when they were posted to a new location**. Indeed, a report for the AFF in 2013³¹⁹ found that **6% of those reporting children with SEND had moved again before reassessment**. This issue was also highlighted by one SME:

“It is so so difficult for local authorities to get an assessment done even if they don't move, you know that takes forever and it can take the duration of an entire assignment for a child to be assessed and then it's time for them to move again. So families are faced with that choice of either they don't move in order to get the support in place for the child, they don't move and then don't see the serving person, because obviously they then can't be at home they've got to go without them.” Interviewee 5

Two SMEs felt that assessments were sometimes purposely delayed, based on the assumption that families would be moving again very soon:

“We had one young person in particular... I think they'd got a diagnosis of autism and they were about 15 or 16, and it said it was late diagnosis. But they have been in the Army and moving every two years and a teacher had actually say to their parent 'well actually things have been highlighted', but it was almost like the schools were thinking, 'well, actually, they're going to be moving soon by the time the assessment process goes through, we're not really going to get very far'. So, it was almost like it was delayed” Interviewee 6



318 Walker J, Selous A and Misca G. [Living in our shoes: understanding the needs of UK armed forces families](#). 2020.

319 Noret N et al. [The Educational Attainment of Army Children](#). 2013

“it’s the pressures and resources that local authorities have and, dare I say it, we’re all experiencing it... they would rather delay something because of families moving or they would say ‘well, what’s the point of putting it in place here’” Interviewee 7

Issues with continuity of support for Service children with additional needs is echoed in the international peer-reviewed literature. Recent research in Canada^{320,321} and the US^{322,323} highlights the **impact of mobility on access to support services**, and the emotional toll the stress of this takes on Service families. Families also highlight a **lack of training and understanding from teachers** as to the needs of children with SEND. Furthermore, parents who chose to prioritise being able to access appropriate SEND services, felt that this had significant implications for their own careers.

Just under a third of teachers in the AFF survey³²⁴ felt that **Army children with SEND had greater difficulties at school** compared to non-Army children with SEND. Teachers also felt that difficulties were **exacerbated by deployment**, during which the remaining parent was less able to provide support to them at home. These additional challenges are likely to have an impact on children’s education. Indeed, a consultation by the National Audit Office in 2013³²⁵ found that **half of parents with children with SEND felt that moving home had a negative impact on their child’s school performance**. The ‘Living in Our Shoes’ report in 2020³²⁶ highlights a number of cases in which children with SEND were out of school for a number of months as appropriately supported school places were difficult to organise. However, this report also highlights that DCYP are working to address this problem in England through the MOD Local Authority Partnership and have developed a set of principles to support a smoother transition of SEND children across regions of England. Furthermore, they are working to share good practice throughout the devolved nations.



320 Ostler K, Norris D and Cramm H. [Geographic mobility and special education services: Understanding the experiences of Canadian military families](#). Journal of Military, Veteran and Family Health 2018; 4: 71-80.

321 Cramm H, Smith G, Samdup D, et al. [Navigating health care systems for military-connected children with autism spectrum disorder: A qualitative study of military families experiencing mandatory relocation](#). Paediatrics and Child Health (Canada) 2019; 24: 478-484.

322 Aronson KR, Kyler SJ, Moeller JD, et al. [Understanding military families who have dependents with special health care and/or educational needs](#). Disability and Health Journal 2016; 9: 423-430. DOI: 10.1016/j.dhjo.2016.03.002.

323 Jagger JC and Lederer S. Impact of geographic mobility on military children’s access to special education services. Children & Schools 2014; 36: 15-22.

324 Noret N et al. [The Educational Attainment of Army Children](#). 2013

325 Brady D, Low N, Neogi R, Vinson N and Summerfield L. [The education of Service children: findings of a National Audit Office consultation](#). 2013.

326 Walker J, Selous A and Misca G. [Living in our shoes: understanding the needs of UK armed forces families](#). 2020.

Key Findings

- There is mixed evidence as to the number of Service children with SEND and whether the prevalence is higher in the Service or civilian child population.
- Service families' mobility can compound and create difficulties for Service children with SEND; problems exist coordinating the transfer of records and statements (with no standard accepted document or approach across the whole UK). This can leave schools unprepared and create a lack of continuity of support,
- It is clear from the evidence that SEND pupils face difficulties in getting their support needs assessed or reassessed prior to relocating, and difficulty finding an appropriately supported school place.

Our Recommendations

1. Research should be undertaken to provide a better understanding of teachers' awareness of and attitudes towards SEND Service pupil, to inform the development of better information and training programmes.
2. Further to the recommendations in the Living in our Shoes report⁴ urgent consideration should be given to enabling Education and Health Care Plans (EHCP), for military children who move due to service requirements to be transferable and accepted across authorities and devolved administrations.

11. Lack of awareness of Service children's needs

Despite the additional research (54 papers) that has been carried out in the UK and culturally aligned countries since the original report was published in 2009, SMEs emphasised a **general lack of awareness of the needs of Service children in the UK**. This was both within the context of meeting their educational needs and in the wider health and social care sector:

“General, sad to say, but just a general lack of understanding of the issues, a lack of awareness of the issues in education staff in particular, but also in health staff and social work staff. And in education it's just a lack of awareness of the issues and when they are pointed out, it's not a lack of willingness to take on board the issues or consider them but it's just a lack of awareness. But then they are pointed out to them, it's a lightbulb moment, 'I never stopped to consider that, never stopped to think about it, ask them how they are feeling' or whatever.” Interviewee 1

The importance of having **access to culturally competent support** was emphasised by Service children consulted for the Children’s Commissioner Report in 2018³²⁷. Children indicated that being able to identify a named member of staff within their school with the responsibility of supporting Service children was important to them. SMEs posited that a **lack of awareness and understanding of the military culture** and Service children may mean that professionals and practitioners are not always able to support their needs:

“But like I said the inability of schools and other stakeholders to address that because they have low awareness of Service children’s needs... With these additional layers and the centrality that military life has in the culture or their family, as well as the fact of mobility, separation and when they transition out, well that makes it a very complex picture for Service children and to address the support needs that they have... means that practitioners are perhaps not so well equipped to support, but also whatever support they need to provide needs to be as personalised as possible.” Interviewee 3

The SCiP Alliance have emphasised the importance of **raising awareness of the needs of Service children** amongst those who have little experience in working with this cohort. In a consultation with stakeholders³²⁸, SCiP found that those with more experience working with Service children were more likely to agree that Service life can have a unique impact on children’s education. Indeed, a third of Welsh primary schools surveyed in 2019 suggested that **‘gaining an understanding of the Armed Forces lifestyle’ was one of the most significant challenges they faced** in supporting Service children. Furthermore, 41.5% of primary and secondary schools in this survey indicated that they don’t currently provide any specific support for Service children. RN/RM families consulted for the Maritime Charities Group Report 2016³²⁹ felt that **more could be done by charities to raise awareness** in schools of the needs of Service children in order to meet the commitments set out in the Armed Forces Covenant.

SMEs perception of a **lack of awareness of Service children’s needs extended to policy makers and politicians**, leading to limited consideration of the needs of Service children in the development of policy and legislation:



327 Children’s Commissioner. 2018. [Kin and Country](#)

328 The SCiP Alliance. [Identifying shared priorities for action to ensure the educational success of Service Children, and to better enable their progression through further and higher education into thriving adults and careers](#). 2018

329 Maritime Charities Group. [The needs and aspirations of the dependant and families of seafarers under retirement age](#). 2016.

“What we found unless the MSPs [Members of Scottish Parliament] and policy makers have already that sort of knowledge of Service children, they tend to just be a group that we haven’t really thought of before... a big bit of our policy work has actually just been those initial steps of actually raising awareness and actually making the case to say ‘actually do need to be looking at children and young people in Armed Forces Families’.

Interviewee 6

As highlighted earlier in this report (See *Practical difficulties associated with moving schools*) there is a **lack of reliable data on Service children in the UK**. SMEs discussed the link between a lack of data and research in the UK, and a lack of awareness and understanding of the needs of Service children from practitioners and policy makers:

“Now, obviously, the children and young people aren’t saying to us that ‘there isn’t any data on us’, but what they have said is they do feel that there’s not really awareness or sort of an understanding of the experiences and we’re saying, ‘Well, actually, we need to try and get this data to understand a bit more about that’. And also, I think what we’ve definitely found is when we are trying to go and engage with policymakers, engage with politicians, they want to know that data, those facts. So, they’re very interested in what the young people directly have to say, but they’re also then saying have you got to any data on attainment, have if you’ve got any data on mental health and we don’t.” Interviewee 6

In order to raise awareness and understanding of the needs of Service children, **considerably more data collection and research is needed in the UK**. Furthermore, SMEs emphasised the **importance of giving Service children a voice**, and focusing on their perspectives in research, rather than relying on parents and families to respond on their behalf. In our scoping review **the majority of papers (26 of 47 UK papers) involved no consultation with children**, future research could benefit from increased involvement of children.

“So, what I’ve sort of found is in the military sector... there hasn’t been as much of a focus on the children and the young people sort of in their own right. There is the Family Federations, but we found that sometimes the children’s voices can become sort of subsumed within the family and often that the family can actually mean the partner of this service person rather than the children and the young people sort of in their own right.”
Interviewee 6

Key Findings

- Whilst additional research since 2009 has deepened our understanding of the challenges facing Service children, a lack of awareness and understanding among education and healthcare professionals, politicians and policy makers remains and affects the success of efforts to support Service children.

Our Recommendations

1. More research and reliable data on UK Service children is still needed. In light of the number of UK studies identified that did not include the voices of Service children directly, it is imperative that any future research includes Service children’s perspectives.
2. We recommend that future research is used to develop awareness training for education and healthcare professionals to educate them on the challenges and issues faced by Service children in the UK.

12. What do children gain from their parent’s service?

Most of the UK literature that discusses the positives of parental Service for children is found in papers discussing other adjacent topics^{330, 331}, with only 2 papers focused directly on this issue^{332, 333}. A cohort study in the UK³³⁴ asked parents to report the perceived overall impact of their Service on their child. This study found that **51% of Service personnel reported a negative impact**, 29% no impact and 20% a positive impact. Parents were more likely to report that the impact on their children was negative if they were an NCO compared to other ranks, deployed for longer than 13 months, not in a relationship, had 2 or more children, were a full-time regular (as opposed to reservist) or had symptoms of mental health disorders or PTSD.

A key theme of the literature and SME interviews was **children’s pride in their parent’s Service**^{335, 336, 337, 338}. UK survey research³³⁹ has examined the best and worst aspects of having a serving father from the perspective of Service children. The **top responses** (both endorsed by 25% of the sample) **were “financial benefit” and “pride or respect”** for their parent’s Service. This is supported by qualitative research with Canadian Service children^{340,341} aged between 8–13 years. This study found that children reported being proud of their parent’s Service and happy that their parents are doing something that makes them happy or contributes to the ‘greater good’. The majority of our SMEs mentioned pride in parent’s Service as a key positive:



330 McCullough J and Hall M. [Further and Higher Progression for Service Children](#). 2016.

331 Bowes RE. [Researching the experiences of children and young people from Armed Forces families](#). 2018.

332 Jain V, Stevelink S and Fear N. [What are the best and worst things about having a father in UK Armed Forces? Analysis of free text responses](#). Journal of the Royal Army Medical Corps 2017; 163: 115–118

333 Bullock A and Skomorovsky A. [Children’s positive experiences growing up in Canadian military households](#). Journal of Military, Veteran and Family Health 2016; 2: 21–28.

334 Rowe S, Keeling M, Wessely S, et al. Perceptions of the impact a military career has on children. Occupational medicine 2014; 64: 490–496.

335 McCullough J and Hall M. [Further and Higher Progression for Service Children](#). 2016.

336 Jain V, Stevelink S and Fear N. [What are the best and worst things about having a father in UK Armed Forces? Analysis of free text responses](#). Journal of the Royal Army Medical Corps 2017; 163: 115–118

337 Bullock A and Skomorovsky A. [Children’s positive experiences growing up in Canadian military households](#). Journal of Military, Veteran and Family Health 2016; 2: 21–28.

338 Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund. [Growing up in the RAF: The wellbeing of children and young people who have serving parents](#). 2021

339 Jain V, Stevelink S and Fear N. [What are the best and worst things about having a father in UK Armed Forces? Analysis of free text responses](#). Journal of the Royal Army Medical Corps 2017; 163: 115–118

340 Bullock A and Skomorovsky A. [Children’s positive experiences growing up in Canadian military households](#). Journal of Military, Veteran and Family Health 2016; 2: 21–28.

341 Skomorovsky A and Bullock A. The Impact of Deployment on Children From Canadian Military Families. Armed Forces & Society 2016; 43: 654–673. DOI: 10.1177/0095327X16670691.

“Top of the list is always pride. Sense of pride, strong sense of pride and quite rightly so.” interviewee 1

“I think there's a real, a real sense of pride that the children have. And I think that that pride is acted out in these celebrations and in the ceremonies and things that are quite unique and quite special.” interviewee 4

However, one SME did caution that this may not be a uniquely military characteristic:

“There is that, although I would suggest that if parents were open with their children tell them what to do at work that [would] probably be for any child. They'd be proud about what their parents [are] doing. I mean, for me, I suppose, I look at the moment that you've got nurses, doctors, etc.” interviewee 9

Financial security was also identified as a positive in the literature^{342, 343, 344} and SME interviews:

“I mean one of the big protective factors and coming out of Covid is going to be particularly relevant is Service in the Armed Forces is a secure job. So there is that kind of financial security.” Interviewee

“The strength of stability from the financial income, although some will say, “I don't get paid enough”, but actually there is a massive sense of stability from a financial perspective.” Interviewee

Additional findings from the UK survey research discussed above³⁴⁵ suggest that **children felt “moving home” (21%) and “learning new things” (12%) were positive aspects of being a Service child.** This theme of **new experiences** is echoed by Canadian



342 Jain V, Stevelink S and Fear N. [What are the best and worst things about having a father in UK Armed Forces? Analysis of free text responses.](#) Journal of the Royal Army Medical Corps 2017; 163: 115–118

343 Bullock A and Skomorovsky A. [Children's positive experiences growing up in Canadian military households.](#) Journal of Military, Veteran and Family Health 2016; 2: 21–28.

344 Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund. [Growing up in the RAF: The wellbeing of children and young people who have serving parents.](#) 2021

345 Jain V, Stevelink S and Fear N. [What are the best and worst things about having a father in UK Armed Forces? Analysis of free text responses.](#) Journal of the Royal Army Medical Corps 2017; 163: 115–118

qualitative research³⁴⁶, which found that some Service children enjoyed moving due to the **excitement of travelling and seeing new places**. Additionally, the prospect of experiencing new places and meeting new people was identified as a positive of having a serving parent by RAF children and young people in the UK³⁴⁷. Furthermore, a UK survey of primary, secondary and undergraduate Service children carried out by the University of Winchester³⁴⁸ found that children reported enjoying unusual experiences unique to service life on the move.

SMEs remarked upon the benefits of these unique experiences for children:

“When you meet these children and they talk about where they’ve lived and what they’ve done and what they’ve experienced. It’s amazing.” Interviewee 11

“They also get access to things that most kids would love. So my kids have flown in helicopters and been in family’s days and walked round air stations and visited ships and been to military balls and stuff like this.” interviewee 2

“See when the children in my school have been in a jungle, you know, they know what a monkey looks like on a tree, you know, because I’ve been to Brunei, they’ve had great things like that.” interviewee 12

Children’s part in the wider military community was also identified by the literature and SMEs as a beneficial aspect of Service life, with children gaining access to a sense of identity and additional support^{349, 350}:

“There is sort of a sense of identity that comes with being a Service child for some Service kids, but that’s probably more the case if you are in the areas where there are lots of Service families and people understand what that looks like, so you have your people.” interviewee 5



346 Bullock A and Skomorovsky A. [Children’s positive experiences growing up in Canadian military households](#). Journal of Military, Veteran and Family Health 2016; 2: 21-28.

347 Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund. [Growing up in the RAF: The wellbeing of children and young people who have serving parents](#). 2021

348 McCullough J and Hall M. [Further and Higher Progression for Service Children](#). 2016.

349 McCullough J and Hall M. [Further and Higher Progression for Service Children](#). 2016.

350 Jain V, Stevelink S and Fear N. [What are the best and worst things about having a father in UK Armed Forces? Analysis of free text responses](#). Journal of the Royal Army Medical Corps 2017; 163: 115-118

“The biggest one for me is identity. They know who they are. They know what their sense of belonging.” interviewee 7

“Sense belonging to the bigger family, the military family, and youngsters sometimes say, ‘My family is the military’, and that sense of belonging and identity” interviewee 1

Some Service children responded to surveys that they felt that there were **no positives to Service life**. This is also evident in some comments from SMEs that suggested that positives were limited or that Service children themselves would not recognise them:

“Oh gosh I just wondered if my teenagers overheard this conversation and would probably say, ‘Nothing’.” Interviewee 8

“I don’t know if there are any benefits... I suppose that if the serving person gets overseas draft, you get to go with them and you experience a different culture, and I certainly know my two children have done that and really remember that experience. But, I’m not sure if I would say if there are any other positives.” Interviewee 9

Whether Service children gain from their parent’s Service by developing resilience was a topic that split our SME interviews. In the UK, research carried out by the University of Winchester³⁵¹ suggests that **children gain resilience and numerous other positive characteristics** all consistent with the picture of what makes a child resilient (i.e. courage, bravery, confidence, independence, responsibility and adaptability). In a comparison of Army and non-Army children from the perspective of parent and school professionals, Army children were characterised as having **more developed coping skills and better problem solving and communication skills** than non-Army children.³⁵² Further to this, a report for the AFF³⁵³ found that teachers often described Service children as resilient, and RAF children report the development of resiliency and adaptability as a positive aspect of having a serving parent³⁵⁴. Several SMEs discussed examples of resilience in Service children:



351 McCullough J and Hall M. [Further and Higher Progression for Service Children](#). 2016.

352 Paradis P. [An exploration into the risk and protective factors to school adaptation as experienced by children living in army compared to non-army families](#). 2014.

353 Noret N et al. [The Educational Attainment of Army Children](#). 2013

354 Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund. [Growing up in the RAF: The wellbeing of children and young people who have serving parents](#). 2021

“I’ve put [in a list of positives], coping strategies to deal with change, and again that word resilient is used a lot and many of them build really strong coping strategies to actually cope with the changes that they face in their lives.” Interviewee 1

“I hate to say, I don’t want to use the word resilient, but the children are often resilient, but also... they are just children, you know, there is nothing extraordinary about them in a strange or negative way” Interviewee 11

“I think they gain resilience, social [resilience] generally I think... They will go to lots of events so they’re good at talking to other adults.” Interviewee 12

However, there was much scepticism from SMEs around whether Service children really were resilient, and concerns were expressed around whether resilience is used to excuse, rather than properly deal with the challenges Service children face:

“There is also a presumption that they are resilient, over and over again, people see, “Well that’s their life. They get on with it that is what they do. They are fine”. And they do get on with it, I personally don’t like the word resilient, but I mean they do get on with it. But at what cost and that’s the important bit. Isolation and loneliness, a lot of our youngsters will tell us they feel isolated.” Interviewee 1

“I don’t like the word resilience, because there is an indication that clearly there is something wrong, that people then have to fight against, and I think that we should be looking at ways to kind of get rid of the problem as best we can, that people are having to learn how to be resilient to.” Interviewee 11

Some stressed that resilience depends on the individual child:

“What we don’t know well enough yet is what is the difference. Why should one child respond in one way and another way? Or one child in one certain situation at one point of their life and differently in another one? If you know the resilience and determination literature, then you know these things are fluid and change over time and are quite complex.” Interviewee

“It depends on the child... I get a bit twitchy about when people start talking

about how wonderfully resilient Service children are... Actually, are they? Are they really? We like to think so don't we and there is lots of ways that we as adults like to put a positive spin on things, because it makes us feel better and we need to be able to do that to live with ourselves. So we kind of do that a bit around Service children." Interviewee 5

One SME suggested that we must not consider older Service children as more resilient to challenges and practised at separation, as each separation is experienced differently:

"But it's almost as if they experience every separation and every deployment differently because they are at different stages of development. So how a toddler experiences a parent being away is completely different to how a teenager might do and the kind of, just their ability to understand what's going on. Never mind their questions about what might be going on around that. It's a bit like different people experiencing [it], because you know children change so rapidly. So there is a sort of perception that they get used to it" Interviewee 5

The **lack of consensus** in SME interviews and dedicated research in the literature leaves us unable to say firmly whether Service children are more resilient than civilian children. Indeed, the RAF Benevolent Fund report in 2021, 'Growing up In the RAF' emphasises that whilst Service children are often seen as being resilient, it is important that they know 'It is okay not to be okay' (pg. 14)³⁵⁵. Further research into if and why Service children are more resilient could be useful in highlighting ways in which support could help to develop resilience in Service children and other children to whom it doesn't come naturally.

In a comparison of Army and non-Army children³⁵⁶, Army children were found to benefit from their Service parents' parenting style and positive family values, both of which were associated with better adaptation to the school environment. SMEs spoke about the positives of **discipline**:

"They get parents who are disciplined. That discipline by osmosis, by example, goes to the kids" interviewee 2

.....
355 Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund. [Growing up in the RAF: The wellbeing of children and young people who have serving parents](#). 2021

356 Paradis P. [An exploration into the risk and protective factors to school adaptation as experienced by children living in army compared to non-army families](#). 2014.

“They grew up in a family that highlighted the moral and ethical choices in life.” Interviewee 4

“A bit more of a sense of duty I guess, it sounds a bit corny really. People go away and they do things they do, and they are doing it for a common good. For something that is bigger than them... Service children have it modelled that idea that you put your something bigger than you like as a priority”. Interviewee 5

A final theme, **the positive effects of role models**, was highlighted by some SMEs, but was not present in the literature:

“It’s up to the parent as [to] how they provide that role model for their children, but if you are in the military I think it is no different than if you are a doctor in the NHS right now, you are a role model aren’t you?” Interviewee 2

“Going to a remembrance service during the Herrick times... I was supporting people that had two three limbs blown off and significant injuries. They saw both sides of that and our children from the Service do and I think they get a wider understanding of what the good and the bad bits in life were”. Interviewee 7

The literature and SME interviews suggest there are **many potential positives** for Service children namely: having pride, financial security, new experiences, being part of the military community, resilience, being disciplined and having positive role models.

Key Findings

- The literature and SME interviews highlight numerous positives of parental military Service for Service children: pride, financial security, new experiences, being part of the military community, resilience, being disciplined and having positive role models.
- There is a lack of consensus regarding the resilience of Service children, and concerns that this narrative is used to excuse the challenges they face as a result of military life.

Our Recommendations

1. We recommend that research is carried out to investigate if and why Service

children are more resilient than civilian children. Increasing our understanding of resilience could be beneficial in developing support and interventions for promoting well-being in Service children who are struggling with military life.

13. Support and interventions for Service children

Our review of the available literature **did not identify any peer-reviewed evaluations of support or interventions for Service children in the UK**. However, the NSPCC published a report in 2019³⁵⁷ outlining an evaluation of the services they provide at two NSPCC centres in Tidworth and Catterick.

This NSPCC report focused on **‘early help’ services provided to military connected children** at these sites, with ‘early help’ referring to support aimed at preventing problems before they become difficult to reverse. The three services were:

- 1. Drop-in services for parents and children under 5 years** – these sessions provide ideas for activities, and opportunities for learning and socialising for children, and support for parents from other parents and professionals.
- 3. School lunch clubs for children ages 7 to 13 years** – these sessions involve activities to support emotional resilience development, and opportunities to discuss issues specific to Service children.
- 5. A group-based intervention for children ages 7 to 10 years** experiencing anxiety and emotional problems – a six-week intervention promoting social interaction, development of peer relationships and prosocial coping strategies.

These services use a **strengths-based framework to promote family strength and child development** and reduce the risk of child maltreatment and neglect. Drop-in services were well attended and regarded by parents and resulted in **greater confidence in parenting abilities** in over three quarters of users, and **less anxiety at follow up**. For Service children, attending the school lunch clubs provided **opportunities to talk about their feelings**, and make new connections with other Service children. Furthermore, the group-based intervention resulted in **increased understanding and awareness of emotions, more confidence and resilience in Service children**, as reported by children themselves, and their parents and teachers. The authors emphasise the utility of a strength-based framework to **build protective factors using positive encouragement** with both parents and children. This report identified the aspects of these services that were particularly effective at building family strength, including a non-stigmatising approach, gaining parents’ trust, and providing opportunities for learning and support from both professionals and peers. Additionally, the use of **universal services for**

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357 NSPCC. Early Support for Military-Connected Families. 2019.

military and civilian children was recommended. This was discussed by SMEs in this study, who expressed reservations about the ability of universal services to meet the unique needs of children:

“So, I have a real sort of cynical side of me that a lot of local authorities and universal services will not uphold the Armed Forces Covenant because of the Service child, but they will treat them like any other child... I think, ‘Do the universal services really understand Service children? Should we have a specialist sort of arm of the veterans UK that understand children?’”
Interviewee 7.

The ‘Living in Our Shoes’ report³⁵⁸ identified a number of other support services for Service children in the UK. These included:

- 1. Home Start**, which provides a variety of support services to military families with children under 5 years.
- 2. The RAF Benevolent Fund Airplay programme**, which provides activities for children on RAF stations to keep them safely occupied and enable them to engage with other Service children.
- 3. Relate Cambridge**, which offers counselling to RAF Service children and young people in partnership with RAF Wittering.
- 4. The Kings Active Foundation**, which provides activity camps for RN children across 8 Naval base locations in the UK during the school holidays.

However, a lack of published evaluation feedback and outcome data mean we cannot be sure of the efficacy of these support services and interventions.

SMEs in this study highlighted an increasing reliance on the UK military charity sector for support, and praised the work being carried out by military charities, such as the Naval Children’s Charity and Little Troopers, in supporting Service children and families:

“The Naval charities [are] spending a lot more money, almost propping up the Navy to help retention and typically that sits around family events and children. So, I’ll give you some examples. So, King’s Camp that runs during the summer holidays. It provides structured childcare for Service personnel, Naval personnel. That’s highly subsidised and for vulnerable families it’s fully paid for. That all comes out of Naval charities and the Royal Navy doesn’t

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358 Walker J, Selous A and Misca G. [Living in our shoes: understanding the needs of UK armed forces families](#). 2020.

pay a penny for it. They use some of our personnel volunteers to help and it's used at one of our venues, but they – think they get charged for.”

Interviewee 8

“So, especially the Naval Children’s Charity, to make sure that the family has what they need to, obviously, to build that resilience and resourcefulness within their families. I think as I said this last few years and resources build considerably... we also have another charity now and I don't know if you come across it called Little Troopers.” Interviewee 9

“Well, let's start with my favourite charity, which actually is the Naval Children's Charity and I think there's very few children of the country that would have access to such an amazing amount of funds. I was only explaining to my wife, this morning I said, ‘Look, if anything ever happens to me. Then, you know, use the Naval Children’s Charity, because they are just amazing’. And they absolutely are... so friendly and supportive.”

Interviewee 8

A 2019 literature review outlines the types of programs aimed at improving the lives of Service children across NATO countries, reported on as part of a NATO Research Task Group³⁵⁹. This paper highlights the variability in the availability and type of **evidence-based support** (i.e. programmes had to provide evidence of child-related outcomes) provided in different countries, with the US and Canada providing the most support to Service children. Countries that offer state-funded healthcare (i.e. the UK and Scandinavian countries) were more likely to focus on universal rather than military-specific interventions for families. This report also showed that out of the participating NATO countries, the **UK and Romania reported the least amount of evidence-based support tailored specifically for Service children**, with the UK reporting financial support (Service Pupil Premium) and family activity breaks only. The authors **highlighted the lack of evaluation and research** to support the efficacy of many of the support programmes, and recommended the use of comparative groups and mixed methods evaluations to strengthen the evidence base.

A systematic review of the literature in 2017³⁶⁰ found **14 peer-reviewed evaluations of behavioural interventions for military connected youth** (0-17 years of age), all



359 Mogil C, Heiselberg MH, Clement A, et al. [Programs for children in military families](#). Journal of Military, Veteran and Family Health 2019; 5: 97-115.

360 Moore KD, Fairchild AJ, Wooten NR, et al. [Evaluating behavioral health interventions for military-connected youth: A systematic review](#). Military medicine 2017; 182: e1836-e1845.

originating from the US. The interventions covered a number of different programmes including home-based multimedia training for children that focused on different military-related challenges (i.e. deployment, parental injury), parental skills training, joint parent and child skills training and education, summer camps, and module/presentation-based school interventions. The **majority of these studies reported positive outcomes for Service children**, with improved coping, mental health/well-being and social competence, as well as improved family communication and parenting skills reported. The authors highlight the **importance of providing opportunities to connect and socialise with other military children** in these interventions. However, most studies focused on one Service branch, and some didn't report the characteristics of their samples, making it difficult to apply the research to the wider population of Service children.

Qualitative research carried out in the UK by the RAF Benevolent Fund³⁶¹, discusses ways in which RAF children and young people feel they could be better supported. Children in this research emphasised the importance of having someone they can trust to talk to about their anxieties and concerns. A 'safe' or 'neutral space' to go to if they are feeling sad was suggested by children, and the importance of having a support network of family, friends and professionals was emphasised. Deployment was identified as a period in which Service children and young people may require additional support. Whilst the RAF Benevolent Fund already provide a number of services and activities for RAF children, some of the children in this study were not aware of the support available to them. This report recommends that services for children are promoted widely and that deployment information provided to Service personnel and families provides adequate information on the impact of deployment on children and highlights the support available to children.

Key Findings

- There is a lack of evidence-based interventions for Service children in the UK. The evidence that does exist supports the use of a strengths-based framework to promote the development of protective factors for family well-being.
- Research conducted across NATO countries suggests that the UK is more likely to focus on universal support than military-specific interventions. Some SMEs, however, were sceptical about the extent to which a universal service can understand the needs of Service children.
- Research in the UK suggests that children desire a safe place to go to, in which they can discuss their feelings and concerns with trusted individuals.
- SMEs highlighted an increasing reliance on the UK military charity sector for supporting Service families.

361 Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund. [Growing up in the RAF: The wellbeing of children and young people who have serving parents](#). 2021



Our Recommendation

1. In order to strengthen our understanding of what effective support looks like for UK Service children, peer-reviewed evaluations of support and interventions should be undertaken, using comparative groups and mixed method evaluation tools where appropriate.

Recommendations and directions for UK research

Throughout this report we have used international literature and SME interviews to identify a number of significant gaps in our understanding of Service children in the UK. We have made 27 recommendations for the direction for future research, which are shown in the table below:

Table 4. Recommendations for future research with Service children in the UK.

#	Recommendation
The impact of deployment-related separation	
1	The Emotional Cycle of Deployment Model is now over 20 years old. We recommend that further research is carried out to reconfirm or update how the deployment is experienced by families taking into consideration changes to modern life and communication during the past two decades.
2	In order to achieve Recommendation 1, we recommend that further research is carried out to increase our understanding of the impact of increased communication via social media during deployment on the parent-child relationship.
3	The Naval Transformation programme will impact on the amount of time that Naval Personnel spend separated from their families due to deployment. It will be imperative for the MOD to monitor and evaluate the impact of these changes on Service children and families.
4	In light of suggestions from subject-matter-experts, the impact of gender (of both the Service child and serving parent) on reactions to deployment is an area that requires further investigation.
5	There is a significant gap in our understanding of how parental coping and well-being during deployment impacts on Service children in the UK. We recommend that research is commissioned to investigate this further, and how support for the non-serving parent may also benefit Service children.

The impact of lone parenting	
6	There is a significant lack of UK research looking at the impact of lone parenting on Service children. We recommend that research be conducted to investigate the challenges faced by children of dual-serving and single-parent families, and how these families might be better supported. Additionally, research is needed to better understand the impact of temporary lone parenting during weekending, on the parent-child relationship.
7	Very little is known about the prevalence of military Young Carers, particularly those who take on temporary caring responsibilities during separation. We recommend that research is carried out to identify this hidden population and their unique support needs.
8	The MOD is currently trialling new policies around accommodation (the FAM) and childcare (Wraparound services in two RAF bases). We recommend that the MOD facilitates independent evaluations of these policies to explore their impact on the well-being of military families. In particular, it will be important to determine the impact of the FAM on dispersed living and access to welfare support for military families.
The influence of the media	
9	Considering the high use of social media by children, we recommend that further research is conducted to investigate the potential benefits and negative consequences of social media for Service children.
10	Associated with this and the discussion in the first section (The impact of deployment-related separation on Service children), we also recommend that research is required to explore the positives and negatives of increased communication with deployed parent(s) via internet based communication and social media, and its potential implications for operational readiness.
Family adjustment following deployment	
11	Very little research exists on the experiences of family reintegration in the UK, and the impact of this on Service Children. Therefore, we recommend research is conducted to identify the main challenges faced during reintegration, in order to determine how best to support military families.

The impact of mobility	
12	SMEs interviewed for this report felt that mobility led to Service children lacking ‘geographical roots’, which is supported by the international literature. As such, we recommend that future research should explore the impact of mobility on Service children’s identity and sense of belonging.
13	The data in the UK on the educational attainment of Service children is mixed, with indication that mobility may be a key factor. We recommend that research is needed to investigate this further, to better our understanding of the impact that mobility and other aspects of military life have on educational attainment.
14	The findings of this report suggest that schools are often unsure of how best to use the SPP to support Service Children. We recommend that best practice for utilising the SPP is collected and developed into guidance for schools.
15	Researchers should continue their efforts to understand Service children’s progression into further and higher education, traineeships, employment or other destinations and the reasons for these choices.
Dealing with stigma and bullying	
16	In light of the lack of evidence related to the impact of public perception of the Armed Forces on Service children, we recommend that research should be undertaken to explore whether Service children experience military-specific bullying and to examine whether Service children are impacted by stigma associated with military life.
The impact of parental illness or injury	
17	Considering the mixed findings in relation to the impact of parental mental health on Service children in the UK, further research is needed in this area. In particular, research looking at non-PTSD parental mental health disorders, and the children of Servicewomen is required.
18	Research is needed to explore the impact of physical injury on Service children. Whilst we are not currently at war, it is necessary to prepare for future conflicts by reflecting now on the challenges faced by children in military families in the context of physical injury, in line with work already undertaken by Blesma on adult carers. Evidence-based service models and interventions that may mitigate the effects observed in some of the international research may provide further avenues for research.

Impact of parental bereavement	
19.	There is a significant lack of research in the UK looking at the impact of paternal death and suicide on Service children. Considering indications of a significant impact on family functioning and adjustment from the international literature, research is required to provide a better understanding of how best to support bereaved Service children and families.
Family relationships and breakdown	
20	Considering the lack of UK research focused on family breakdown in the military, research is required to establish whether there are any unique impacts of family breakdown on Service children.
21	The limited available research on family violence in the UK does not differentiate between violence against adult and child family members. As such, further research is required to determine the risk of violence towards Service children. In addition, further investigation is required to determine the potential for increased risk of family violence following deployment.
Children with additional needs and disabilities	
22	Research should be undertaken to provide a better understanding of teachers' awareness of and attitudes towards SEND Service pupils, to inform the development of improved information and training programmes.
23	Further to the recommendations in the 'Living in our Shoes' report urgent consideration should be given to enabling Education and Health Care Plans (EHCP), for military children who move due to service requirements to be transferable and accepted across authorities and devolved administrations.
Lack of awareness of Service children's needs	
24	More research and reliable data on UK Service children is still needed. In light of the number of UK studies identified that did not include the voices of Service children directly, it is imperative that any future research include Service children's perspectives.
25	We recommend that future research is used to develop awareness training for education and healthcare professionals to educate them on the challenges and issues faced by Service children in the UK.

What do children gain from their parent’s service?	
26	We recommend that research is carried out to investigate if and why Service children are more resilient than civilian children. Increasing our understanding of resilience could be beneficial in developing support and interventions for promoting well-being in Service children who are struggling with military life.
Support and interventions for Service children	
27	In order to strengthen our understanding of what effective support looks like for UK Service children, peer-reviewed evaluations of support and interventions should be undertaken, using comparative groups and mixed method evaluation tools where appropriate.

Conclusions

In this research we have comprehensively reviewed the literature relating to military children and tested the themes from that literature and from the original 2009 Overlooked Casualties of Conflict report with a diverse group of 12 SMEs. We have set out our findings using the headings originally proposed in the 2009 report with additional in-depth analysis and observations, drawing on new research that has been conducted in the intervening years. Additionally, we also identified a number of emerging themes that were not included in the previous report, **specifically interventions for Service children and the advantages gained through being members of military families.**

Over the last 10 years the military families' policy landscape has changed dramatically, although issues of devolution have meant that the application of policy and practice has not been universal. What remains of great concern is that **new innovations and programmes, wherever they are delivered across the UK, are rarely, if at all, evaluated** and consequently very little is known about their efficacy. Although SPP has been introduced in England to provide schools with some resource to improve the experiences of Service children, **there remains no way of knowing how many Service pupils there are, how this money has been spent, and importantly whether Service pupils' needs are being met.** Schools undoubtedly approach the issue with alacrity but (with the exception of the excellent and emerging work of the SCiP Alliance) there is **no comprehensive database outlining how SPP could be best spent** and what services and interventions have an evidence base or importantly could be evaluated.

Undoubtedly, there has been a steady increase in the research to explore many aspects of Service children's life in the UK over the last 10 year, but the majority of the research projects and associated publications still come from the US. Whilst many of these US studies provide us with an extremely useful barometer, the **cultural and structural differences between the US and the UK mean that it would be unwise to draw directly from their findings.** However, to use the well-worn aphorism the "absence of evidence is not evidence of absence", and the significant gaps in the UK understanding of Service children mean that **more work is required to ensure that our Service children are provided with a level playing field.** And where they are at a disadvantage, in the spirit of the Armed Forces Covenant, all efforts should be made to redress this balance.

There remain **significant and considerable gaps in the provision of educational and healthcare support** for Service children who have to move due to military mobility. Whilst many children readily assimilate, such moves often pose considerable challenges for young people with physical, developmental or psychological/mental health problems. The disparities are more acutely felt in the UK when children **move between the devolved administrations** where there are **differing levels of provision** and very little or no harmony in documentation. If a Service child is assessed as requiring SEND provision by one Local Authority, this assessment should be accepted wherever and act as a passport for appropriate service provision. Similarly, for children with healthcare needs, the provision of equitable services between different NHS providers continues

to be a lottery. Unfortunately, this may be even worse for children with the most serious mental health conditions where waiting lists for specialist support are very long.

Since the original report was commissioned and produced in 2009 there have been **significant leaps in technology for social media networking and communication**. Facebook was launched in 2004 and the first Apple smartphone was launched in 2007 – although the eye-watering prices probably put this out of reach of most Service children for the first year or two. Now smartphones are ubiquitous and there are an unfathomable range of different social media communication platforms. Whilst in 2009, 24-hour news channels, such as CNN, were filling living rooms with reports from the frontline, now the consumer has considerably more control as to their preferred news source. Whilst choice is to be welcomed, like everyone else, **Service Children are also at the mercy of misinformation, disinformation and flagrant lies**. We know little about how they consume and respond to social media and importantly how they use different platforms to communicate with the Service person in their family.

What this report has illustrated is that the **research that exists tends to focus on perceived problems or challenges**. Very little research focuses on the positive aspects of Service life. With the drawdown from Germany there are now far fewer Service children growing up within diverse cultures, as described by the American anthropologist Ruth Useem as Third Culture Kids (TCK)³⁶², with all the positive attributes of social chameleons and cultural nomads. Whilst this research attests to the positives of making new friendship groups and integrating into different schools, it also shows that Service children in more stable boarding schools fare better – and this shows a distinct class advantage.

The SMEs interviewed for this research were at great pains to emphasise the positives of Service life and where this has been examined by researchers, **pride in their parents' achievements and pride in belonging** to the UK military family are the outstanding findings.

362 Useem, R.H & Downie, R.D. (1976). Third-culture kids. Today's Education 65.3: 103–105

Appendix 1: How to use the Veterans and Families Research Hub

The VFR Hub is easy to use and will allow you to access all the research referenced in this report and other useful research, discussions and features.

To access the research referenced within this report you have two options, simply click [here](#) to be linked directly to the page or click on the **search repository** bar on the [homepage](#) and enter the following keywords exactly: “children & families research”.

Registering on the Hub gives users additional features. For example, being registered allows users to save their repository searches and subscribe for email updates when new items are added to the Hub which match their chosen themes/topics/key words. You can register [here](#).

For more information on how to create an account and use all the Hub’s features, please watch this [short tutorial](#).

Appendix 2: Methods

A mixed method approach was taken consisting of two parts: part one consisted of an updated scoping review of the literature around Service children and the challenges they face and part two a series of subject matter expert (SME) interviews. The findings of this report are a product of the analysis of both parts.

Scoping review

A scoping review was undertaken to assess the literature from 2000 onward focused on Service children and the challenges they face. The review following Arksey and O’Malley’s (2005)³⁶³ five-stage framework, our choices at each stage are explained below.

1. Identifying a research question:

According to the framework, this should include the study population, any outcomes, exposure or intervention. The research questions were:

What are the challenges faced by Service children? What do Service children gain as a result of their parents' service?

The study population for this scoping review was Service children. For the purpose of this report a Service child was understood to be a child with at least one parent who was or had served in the Armed Forces in either a regular or reserve capacity, regardless of



363 Arksey, H., & O’Malley, L. (2005). [Scoping studies: towards a methodological framework](#). International Journal of Social Research Methodology, 8(1), 19–32.

whether this is or was a biological or stepparent. The scope was kept broad to collate all related research post-2000, with the search terms aiming to capture a broad literature as well as the specific challenges named in previous 'Overlooked Casualties of Conflict report'; these challenges are:

- stresses associated with deployment;
- the impact of a temporary single parent or no parent family;
- media influences;
- adjustments to family life upon parental return;
- impact of moving;
- stigma of military "brat" label;
- dealing with parental death, illness or injury;
- divorce and family breakdown;
- extra challenges posed for children with a disability or special educational needs.

2. Identifying relevant studies:

The following databases were searched: Web of Science, PubMed, Scopus, PsychINFO, British Education Index, Child Development & Adolescent Studies, Education Database, UK Parliamentary Papers. Additionally, searches were carried out in the VFR Hub and Google Scholar.

The search terms used are outlined in Table below. Boolean logic was used to combine the general keywords AND the words of each challenges. Due to the numbers of papers being returned in our initial searches being unfeasible for the scale of this study, we limited the search terms to their appearance in a paper's title. For example:

TITLE ("Service children" OR "Service Kids" OR "Service Famil*" OR "Military Famil*" OR "Army Children" OR "Navy Children" OR "Naval Children" OR "RAF Children" OR "Marine Children" OR "Royal Air Force Children" OR "3rd Culture Children" OR "Third Culture Children" OR "3rd Culture Kids" OR "Third Culture Kids" OR "Young People") AND TITLE ("social media" OR "Facebook" OR "Twitter" OR "Broadcast" OR "newspaper" OR "Radio" OR "Television" OR "Media")

In addition, a search was carried out in each database for just the general keywords to identify any research outside of these challenges. Limiters were applied to only capture papers published post 2000.

Specific Challenge	Keywords
General	"Service children", "Service Kids", "Service families" Military Famil*, "Army Children", "Navy Children" "Naval Children" "Marine Children" "RAF Children" "Royal Air Force Children" "3 rd Culture Kids" "3 rd Culture Children" , "third culture children" "third culture kids" "Young People".
Stresses associated with deployment	Deployment, transition, development, stress, mobility, separation, coping
The impact of a temporary single parent or no parent family	"Single parent famil*", "no parent famil*", deployment, "blended famil*" "young carer" "lone-parenting" "co-parenting"
Media Influence	"social media", "Facebook", "Twitter", broadcast, newspaper, radio television, Media
Adjustments to family life upon parental return	Deployment, transition, development, stress, post-deployment, "weekending", "readjustment", "reintegration" "gatekeeping" "roles"
Impact of moving	Relocat*, mov* educat*, dispersed, displacement, migration, "tied-migration" "public school" "boarding school" "Continuity of Education Allowance" "CEA"
Stigma of military "brat" label	Perception, "brat", reputation, "Pad Brat"
Parental Death	Parent, mother, father, death, bereavement, loss.
Parental Injury or Illness	Parent, famil*, parental AND injury, illness, health, mental health, co-morbidity, physical health
Divorce and family breakdown	Divorce, split, "family breakdown".
Extra challenges posed for children with a disability/ disabilities or special educational needs	"special educational needs", disabilit*.

3: Study selection:

Initial database searches returned 57403 papers, many duplicated across multiple databases and searches. No limiters were applied in terms of country of origin of the research in order to collect the broadest possible selection of papers. After refining by title, 1945 papers remained, once duplicates were removed this number was 804 papers.

Due to the number of papers returned, the authors decide to focus initially on the UK literature followed by literature returned from countries deemed closest to the UK

in terms of culture, aspects of military set up and culture and healthcare systems. Countries included on this basis in the final report were Canada, Australia, Holland and Portugal.

The majority of literature around Service children is US focused. However, due to significant cultural and military differences between the US and the UK, the authors decided to employ the US literature strategically to fill gaps in and support areas where UK research lacked. This was with the caveat that where the US literature is considered, further research is needed to establish whether its findings hold or differ in the UK context.

Inclusion criteria:

- Papers of any methodology were included, with the exception of reviews.
- Research directly investigating the Service children, military families or a specific challenge outlined above.
- Original research with primary data published in peer reviewed journals, grey literature and governmental reports.
- Research focuses on the UK and culturally aligned countries.
- Published after 2000

Exclusion criteria:

- Articles not written in English.
- Article addressing issues unrelated to Service children, military families or a specific challenge outline above.
- Published prior to 2000
- Review Articles. References of review papers will be scoped to ensure all papers that fit the inclusion criteria therein are included.

In addition to the papers returned from the database searches, further papers were identified by scoping the references of review papers that were topic relevant and forward backward citation searching of papers included from the initial search. These additional papers were the considered for inclusion based on the same criteria outlined above. After both authors had reviewed the abstracts, papers were excluded based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria above.

Following a review of the titles and abstracts, 62 full text papers remained and were reviewed independently by both authors and tabulated.

4: Charting the data:

The following information was extracted and charted: title, author, year, journal, service branch (if specific), study population, intervention type (if any), study aim, methodology type, outcome measures, and main results/findings, limitations.

5: Collating, summarising and reporting the results:

The articles were read by both authors and data summarised. Results from the quantitative were be summarised and tabulated. A thematic analysis was used to identify the most common themes from the papers. The themes emerging across the searches and the charted data are summarised across the 13 different sections of the report.

Subject Matter Expert Interviews

Due to the anticipated lack of UK focused research and gaps in research surrounding Service children, qualitative interviews with SMEs were undertaken to add to and deepen our understanding of the challenges and benefits of Service life for children.

Participant selection:

Potential candidates for interview were identified in conjunction with the Naval Children's Charity and were based on interviewees having a professional connection with Service children and a wealth of knowledge on this topic. Participants' professional backgrounds were diverse in order to capture as many professional viewpoints as possible including: Service children's charities, welfare providers, statutory service providers and education providers. Many participants had personal connection to the Armed Forces either having served, been in relationship with a serving partner and raised children during their or their partner's service. In total 18 individuals were invited to participate with 12 interviewees conducted, giving a response rate of 66.6%.

Data Collection:

Due to the constraints surrounding the Covid-19 pandemic, interviewees took place over video conferencing software and were recorded for ease of transcription. The interviews were semi-structured in order to ask specific questions relating to previous highlighted areas of challenge and positives of service whilst also giving space for interviewees to raise their own thoughts "rather than being restricted by researchers' preconceived notions about what is important"³⁶⁴. The use of a semi-structured style also allows us to gain the maximum benefit from the SMEs insight as "semi-structured interviews



364 Berry J. "Validity and Reliability Issues in Elite Interviewing". Political Science and Politics 2002; 35: 663-688.

allow respondents the chance to be the experts and to inform the research”³⁶⁵. Areas discussed were the challenges faced by Service children, whether these had changed in the decade since the previous report, if any challenges were specific to or different for Naval Service children, policies that help or hinder families ability to negotiate Service life and what the benefits of parents’ Service were to children. Importantly, each SME was given space to raise anything else that felt was important in the context of Service children. In addition, some interviewees highlighted relevant research and shared unpublished data or reports to include in this report.

Analysis:

After transcription, thematic analysis was undertaken in NVivo 12. Braun and Clarke’s (2006)³⁶⁶ method guidelines for quality thematic analysis were used to guide the process and ensure thorough analysis was undertaken. An outline of the steps taken is provided below:

- 1.) After active reading, initial coding of a portion of transcripts were undertaken by two researchers.
- 2.) Once both coders had reviewed and were satisfied with their initial codes, the two coding approaches were compared, discussed and reviewed in order to amalgamate the coding approaches into a single codebook.
- 3.) The codes were adjusted to line with this new codebook, a third researcher coded a portion of the transcripts of each of the two initial researchers in order to establish intercoder reliability.
- 4.) Findings that emerged from the interviews were combined with finding from the literature to compare our updated findings with themes from the previous report and highlight any new themes.

i. Scoping review results

Characteristics of the identified papers

In total our scoping review returned 62 papers that met our inclusion criteria. As this report relates to children within UK military families the authors focused on research from the United Kingdom and countries with similar cultural, military and healthcare provision. As such, the majority of the literature in this report is UK focused with 47 papers returned from the UK, 5 from Canada, 5 from Australia, 2 from Portugal and Holland respectively and 1 from across NATO countries. Most of the research returned was published after the last report (54 papers post 2010).



365 Leech B. [Asking Questions: Techniques for Semistructure Interviews Political Science and Politics](#) 2002; 35: 663–688.

366 Braun V and Clarke V. [Using thematic analysis in psychology](#). Qualitative Research in Psychology 2006; 3: 77–101.

The majority of research focused on tri-service children, with 45 papers including all Service branches in their studies. However, some were specific to a single Service branch with 8 papers researching Army Service children, 5 Naval Service children and 3 RAF Service children.

A wide range of topics are addressed in the literature, with many mapping onto themes established in the previous report. The Table below outlines the themes present in the literature and their frequency. Many of the papers discuss Service children generally covering a range of topics and challenges. The specific topics most frequently discussed in the literature are the impact of Service on children’s education and educational experience and the impact of the deployment cycle on Service families.

Topic	Number of Papers
Impact on education	15
General papers	14
Impact of the deployment cycle	14
Impact of moving homes, schools and communities	4
Impact of parental illness or injury	5
Extra challenges for children with special educational needs or disabilities	4
MOD statistics papers	2
Child Maltreatment	2
Positives of Service Life	1
Impact of family breakdown	1

Limitations of the UK research

The UK literature in this area is dominated by charity, government and consultancy reports. Indeed, only 11 out of 47 UK papers identified were peer-reviewed journal articles. Whilst grey literature has been extremely useful in developing the findings of this report, some reports lacked sufficient description of the research methodology, making it difficult to determine the rigour and validity of the findings. In comparison, during the scoping search carried out for this work, we identified almost 200 peer-reviewed publications looking at Service children and families originating from the US.

Furthermore, a significant portion of the UK research did not include children in their sample or consultation (26 out of 47 papers), instead seeking the perspectives of military parents and/or practitioners on the challenges experienced by Service children and families. This is likely due to the additional ethical and practical challenges of including children in research. However, including children and young people's voices and perspectives will be important in UK research going forward, to ensure the applicability and validity of conclusions regarding their experiences.

Finally, there was variation in the inclusion of participants across the different Service branches (see above), and across the devolved nations of the UK (England only: 5; England & Wales only: 2; Wales only: 1; Scotland only: 2). This makes comparison across studies difficult, due to differing Service-specific, government and educational policies impacting on military families and children across both Service branches and the devolved nations.

Thank you

About ARU

Ranked in the world's top 350 institutions in the 2021 Times Higher Education World University Rankings, ARU is a global university transforming lives through innovative, inclusive and entrepreneurial education and research.

ARU's research institutes and four faculties bridge scientific, technical and creative fields. We deliver impactful research which tackles pressing issues and makes a real difference to our communities. Our academic excellence has been recognised by the UK's Higher Education funding bodies, with 12 of our research areas assessed as world-leading.

We are the largest provider of Nursing, Midwifery, Health and Social Care students in England, and we are among the UK's leading universities for degree apprenticeship provision, working with employers including Barclays, Vinci and GlaxoSmithKline.

About Naval Childrens Charity

The Naval Children's Charity has been helping Naval Children since 1825, for nearly 200 years. We help children, up to the age of 25, whose parents have served in the Naval Service (Royal Navy, Royal Marines, QARNNS, WRNS, Reserves or Royal Fleet Auxiliary).

We help around 2000 children directly each year and many thousands more through our resources and work with communities and other organisations.

We believe that to be the child of someone who is, or has been, in the Naval Service should be a positive and enhancing experience – something to be borne with pride. For those children where life is more difficult, we are there to help.