

Deployment Experiences of British Army Wives Before, During and After Deployment: Satisfaction with Military Life and Use of Support Networks

Professor Christopher Dandeker

Department of War Studies
King's College London
Norfolk Building
Surrey Street
London WC2R 2LS
ENGLAND

Email: Christophe.dandeker@kcl.ac.uk

Miss Claire French, Miss Catherine Birtles, Professor S. Wessely

King's Centre for Military Health Research
King's College London
3rd Floor Weston Education Centre
Cutcombe Road
London SE5 9RJ
ENGLAND

Email: claire.french@kcl.ac.uk, Email: cate@cavb.freemove.co.uk,
Email: s.wessely@iop.kcl.ac.uk

ABSTRACT

Introduction and aims: During deployments, Service wives have to adapt to being alone and taking sole responsibility for their families and house-holds whilst dealing with the additional stress about whether their loved ones will return. 'Stress buffering' effects of support networks, whether within or outside the military community, are important factors in the general well being of military wives during deployments. This paper presents results on support networks British Army wives used during the deployment of their spouses to Iraq in 2004/5. Results are also presented (from a parallel study) of the opinion's of the deployed servicemen on the well-being of their wives and families.

Methods: A largely qualitative methodology was used based on semi-structured face to face interviews conducted with 50 British Army wives and their spouses.

Results: Of the initial 50 wives who were interviewed, 47 of their spouses did deploy. 42 wives were based in Germany and 5 in the UK. 23 of the wives were in paid employment. Post-deployment, the wives' response rate adjusted for active refusal (N=4) and ill health (N=1) was 100%. Of the total wives and husbands who were interviewed, 37 matched pairs completed both a pre- and post-deployment interview. Pre-deployment, the majority of wives (65.9%) reported that they did not worry about the additional demands placed on them as a result of their spouse being deployed. Less than one fifth of the wives reported that they had asked for help from the Regiment or other military sources in preparing for their spouse's departure, with the majority seeking their own family (95.7%), and other military wives (85.1%) for informal support. Both during and after the deployment, wives sought and received the most help from

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other military families and work colleagues. The majority of wives recognised that Regimental Unit Welfare Offices were a potential source of support during the deployment. Support services and charities for military families outside of the regiment were not utilised. The majority of Service husbands (89.2%) felt that home life was more important than their career and 4 (10.8%) stated they felt the deployment had a detrimental effect on their marriage, whereas none of the wives thought the deployment had a detrimental effect and 40.5% thought their husband's career was of equal importance to home life. Approximately half of the wives were not glad that their spouse was in the Armed Forces but a large majority (83%) wanted their husband to stay in the military with financial security being the main reason.

Conclusions: *In the context of living in an Army garrison town, wives favour informal social networks of support to provide a buffer against the stressors of deployment; and do not expect or choose the military as their first line of support. Army wives are much more tolerant of the pressures that the military place on them than the Soldiers who are less happy with the pressures they think that their career, and especially deployments, puts on their families.*

1.0 BACKGROUND

The health and well being of military personnel is key to the effectiveness of military operations. It is recognised that the well-being of military families is an essential part of this. The British Armed Forces and the UK Ministry of Defence are aware of how important it is to invest in family welfare and make sure that any problems are addressed as failure to do so will have negative effect on operational capability. One key problem is the extent to which the pressures and demands of both family and military life compete. This work-life balance is especially an issue in Armed Forces which are overstretched, and this paper addresses that topic.

Guest highlights five models of the relationship between work and life: (1) 'segmentation' - where the two are distinct spheres with no influence between them (2) 'spill-over' - either positive or negative - from one sphere to the other (3) 'compensation' - where people may find rewards in one area to make up for being unfulfilled in the other (4) 'instrumental' - using one sphere as a means of making gains in the other for example using work as a means to an end outside work (5) 'conflict' - which proposes that with high levels of demand in all spheres of life, some conflicts and possibly some significant overload on an individual occur'. [1] This latter model can be linked to the concept of 'greedy institutions'. [2]

It is recognized that the military is not alone in making 'greedy' demands on its employees, as with other As with other areas of employment such as war correspondents, humanitarian workers, and the police, the military makes 'greedy' demands of its employees, requiring sacrifice, frequent mobility, dealing with physical danger, and responsibilities that extend beyond the normal boundaries of duty hours and workplace. However, deployment commitments and the implicit assumption that soldiers will, where required, deliberately go into harm's way, result in an usual contract of 'unlimited liability'. [3,4]

The traditional family, is also a greedy institution. [2,5,6] Changes in gender relationships and in perceptions of home and family work, have led to debate on whether work and family demands are becoming greedier of their members' commitments. The traditional military family has been part of an institution in which it supports and gives priority to Service life [7,10] and the importance of military wives' unpaid and often 'invisible' contribution to the armed services has been fundamental. [5,6,11] Since the 1970s, the military has become less institutional and women have played a wider, more integrated role in Service employment. [12] Military spouses have also become less dependent upon their service partners and build lives of their own, expecting more time and attention from their service partner - particularly in terms of family duties. [13] Indeed, some claim that spouses of UK service personnel have become less tolerant of their traditional support role seeking social and employment opportunities that are less restricted by their ties to the Armed Forces (Lizzie Iron, Chairman Army Families Federation (AFF) personal communication, 2003).

While the family has become more demanding, so has the military during the post-Cold War period, leading to debate about military “overstretch”. Smaller forces perform an increased number of operational commitments worldwide [14] but with fewer human resources so that families are separated more frequently.[15,16] This study focuses on the extent to which military personnel and their spouses encounter conflicting pressures due to the increasing demands of both the military and family.

The opportunity to study this question arose because the study team were already engaged in investigations of the health and well being of service personnel deployed to Iraq in 2003 (Op TELIC 1) and subsequently 2004-5 (Op TELIC 5). During periods of deployment, work-life balance may be particularly difficult. This is because those who are ‘left behind’ may have to adapt suddenly to being alone – such as paying bills or looking after children; they may have few support mechanisms and some will experience financial difficulties. In addition, they may be unaware of the duration of the deployment, and experience additional stress about whether their loved ones will return. Stress is not always on the same level, but varies through time and is clearly related to the perceived risk of the deployment.[17] U.S. research indicates that the ‘stress-buffering’ effects of social support networks are important factors in the general well being of military wives during deployment of their spouses.[18-20] Measures of organizational support for US Army wives during the 1991 Gulf War found that young junior enlisted spouses with unrealistic expectations about what the Army could do to assist families during deployment manifested a strong link, post deployment, to their wives requesting that their spouse leave the Army and/or becoming divorced.[21,22] However, we have limited information on these issues from a UK perspective.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

2.1 Research Aim

To investigate the experiences of Army wives during a 6 month deployment period when work life tensions are likely to be at their most intense.

2.2 Research Objectives

- (i) To investigate work-life tensions demands between service families (especially wives) and the British Army and to examine whether traditionally defined work-life boundaries between these two institutions are changing.
- (ii) To identify the extent to which Army families (and especially wives) seek different types of support during three distinct phases of deployment – pre, during and post - and whether support is sought within or outside the military community.
- (iii) To explore factors that moderate and aggravate work-life tensions between families (especially wives) and the military.

Our research considered a number of questions. First, do soldiers and their spouses feel trapped between the competing demands of the military and family? Second, we focused on how spouses negotiate ‘drawing a line’ between work and family life. Third, we focused on spouses’ adaptations to separation during periods of deployment. Fourth, we wanted to analyse the part played by informal and formal networks in how spouses dealt with the stresses that occur during periods of deployment. Previous research has shown that social support for families is a buffer against stress, and this can be provided by official channels – normally a ‘top-down’ process; by informal social networks – normally a ‘bottom up’, grass roots approach; or by a combination of both mechanisms through partnership, or cooptation. Fifth, we wanted to know if geographical distance from major cities increased spouses’ dependence on the

military community. However, there were limits on how far we were able to answer this question because, for this deployment (named TELIC 5), the great majority of the spouse sample (89%) were drawn from German garrisons where spouses were closer to, and dependent on, Army support services. Thus, this research provided a representative sample of the Units that deployed to Iraq rather than a sample of the UK Army as a whole. Our sixth question asked if spouses who are satisfied with the quality of military life, their marriages, and their own personal development, are more likely to be supportive of their partners' military careers.

3.0 METHODS

3.1 Study design

The study combined both qualitative and quantitative research methods [23] and comprised three distinct phases: face-to-face interviews at the start and the end of deployment (phases 1 and 3) and a mid-deployment postal questionnaire (phase 2).

3.2 Sample

The sample of service wives was derived from a parallel study investigating the health and well-being of regular British Army personnel deploying to Iraq in 2004. 193 soldiers took part in the parallel study, of which 80 (42%) were married and living together. All spouses of married participants were invited to take part in this study via an invitation forwarded to them by their respective Unit Welfare Office (UWO). 51 (64%) spouses were recruited.

The sampling strategy was to identify patterns and differences across ranks and length of service. The purpose was to differentiate wives who were new to army life from those more experienced who have progressed through the rank structure. The sample was stratified by

- a) less than 4 years service
- b) 4-12 years service
- c) greater than 12 years service

These groups were then proportionally stratified by rank

3.3 Data collection process

3.3.1 Phase 1

Study participants were interviewed shortly after the main departure date of each of the deploying Units. The face-to-face interviews (as with phase 3) mainly took place in the privacy of each UWO, although spouses were offered the choice of being interviewed in their own home. Interviews took on average 90 minutes using a semi-structured interview schedule which covered socio-demographics, employment, support networks, general health including the 12-item General Health Questionnaire [24], marital satisfaction using the Enrich Marital Satisfaction (EMS) Scale [25], and deployment issues including the well-being of children.

3.3.2 Phase 2

Spouses were sent a brief mid-deployment postal questionnaire, which further investigated support networks, reactions to 'Rest and Recuperation, (a two week leave period known as 'R and R' which is

granted to soldiers deployed overseas), potential deployment stressors, perceived adjustment of children, and repeated the GHQ-12.

3.3.3 Phase 3

A post deployment interview took place between 4-6 weeks after the return of the Service partner and once Post Operational Tour Leave (POTL) had ended. Interviews with spouses during POTL were logistically impossible as many families went on holiday during this period. Interviews took on average 45 minutes and covered issues such as patterns of family readjustment, the EMS scale, sources of support, employment, health and well being (repeating the GHQ-12) and feelings about Army life.

All phase 1 and phase 3 interviews were audio taped with participants' permission and later transcribed. Where husbands returned home prior to mid deployment, spouses were interviewed over the telephone investigating the early return of their husband and any readjustment difficulties. These data were analysed together with the main group. At phase 3, participants who were not available on the day of our scheduled visit were, where possible, interviewed over the telephone.

3.4 Methods of analysis

Quantitative data were double entered on to SPSS and, where relevant, paired sample t-tests were undertaken to compare mean values. Qualitative data from the transcripts were analysed using the constant comparative method.²⁶ A member of the research team examined the transcripts and coded the blocks of text into themes generating 5 main categories from the data. This process was verified by a second member of the research team. Results from the quantitative data were used to cross-examine and test the qualitative conclusions and to prompt further investigation into any possible disparities and counter-explanations. In the results, quotations showing a non-identifying respondent ID have been used to illustrate the generated themes.

3.5 Pilot study

The mid deployment postal questionnaire was piloted at the Army Families Federation (AFF) offices in Upavon. The instrument was emailed to the deputy chairman and circulated to colleagues who were also wives of serving soldiers. A focus group was convened to discuss each item on the interview schedule. Appropriate changes to the instrument were made accordingly.

3.6 Ethical approval

The study received ethical approval from King's College Hospital Research Ethics Committee and from Ministry of Defence (Navy) Personnel Research Ethics Committee (MOD (N)PREC).

4.0 RESULTS

Quantitative and qualitative data are presented together. Where relevant, husband's results from the parallel TELIC 5 study have also been integrated.

4.1 Response rates

4.1.1 Phase 1

Of the 80 spouses invited to participate, 51 Army spouses opted into the study (64% response rate). The 3 spouses whose husbands did not deploy along with the single male spouse have been excluded from the analysis giving an adjusted sample of 47 Army wives.

4.1.2 Phase 2

44 mid-deployment questionnaires were posted to wives and 40 (89%) completed questionnaires were returned. 3 wives whose husband's returned prior to the questionnaires being sent were followed up with a post-deployment interview.

4.1.3 Phase 3

42 wives completed an interview post deployment. The 5 active refusals were reportedly due to 'busy schedules' (n=4) and ill health (n=1).

4.2 Matched Couples

Of the total wives and husbands who were interviewed, 37 couples both completed a pre- and post-deployment interview.

4.3 Demographics

Demographics of wives are shown in table 1. The average length of marriage of the sample was 7.7 years while the average length of time the husbands had served in the Army was 8.7 years. This highlighted the fact that many spouses had 'married into' the army, their husbands being serving soldiers before marriage. The large majority of wives (89%) resided in Germany, with the remaining 5 wives living in the UK. Most of the wives lived in Service accommodation with only 3 choosing to live in their own private accommodation. All of the wives except one lived in close proximity to other military families.

4.4 Five main categories generated from the data

4.4.1 Category one: Work-life tensions between Army Wives and the British Army

Just over half the sample (51%) thought their marital relationship was negatively affected by their husband being in the military and 47% considered their husband's career as being in conflict with family life. Emotional conflict accounted for the majority of comments (63%). Examples of this type of conflict included emotional stress caused by long periods of separation, and husband's missing special family occasions due to work commitments. It also included volatile marital and family relationships and estrangement from children following husband's return from deployment. Practical conflict (37% comments) included military routines clashing with family routines making it difficult to co-ordinate or plan family activities, and time together, and husbands not being to share the responsibilities of married and family life.

"It was [name of baby] first firework night...he was just loving it, following every firework no crying, just loving it.. I was looking at him thinking 'I wish your dad was here to see you'." [W8326]

"Sometimes it's upsetting if there's things going on. He was there when our children were born but I know people who didn't have that same luck, that kind of thing and that's gone on all our married life – "Is he going to make it for whatever or is he not?" – There's no end to what they can ask him to do really." [W7828]

"Yes his career is in conflict with family life, obviously he's trying to get on and get a higher rank, he's having to take on more responsibilities and be doing these tours. They [soldiers] live a separate life from what we have here. They're almost single and we're left with all the responsibilities." [W2124]

Of the wives who thought there was conflict, 91% had talked to their husband about this. Only one wife said her husband was attempting to address the conflict caused by his career. The rest of the couples had taken no action largely because they felt very little could be done as “it was just the way the Army is” combined with accepting conflict in favour of the financial security provided by the Army.

“Husband was going to get out the Army and I persuaded him not to do it because he’s only got another six years left and if he got out now he wouldn’t get his pension straight away and I think he’d only get about £8000, but if we wait until his time’s up; the full 22 years, he’ll get £40,000 plus his pension straight away, so finance does come a great deal into it.” [W3214]

“Yes we [husband and I] do talk about him leaving. They get as fed up as you. Nothing comes of the conversation, you can’t do anything except sign off, then he’d still have to work a year and would lose his pension.” [W5733]

Of the 37 matched couples who both completed a pre and post deployment questionnaire, 41% of the wives thought their husbands’ careers were of equal importance to home life whereas 89% of husbands felt home life was more important.

The vast majority of wives thought their children both benefited from and were disadvantaged by military life. When asked how, the most common response was ‘frequently relocating due to husband’s postings’ which exposed children to different cultures, but also meant children repeatedly lost their network of friends and had to start over as the ‘new kid’.

4.4.2 Category two: Factors that moderate and aggravate work-life tensions

Wives identified numerous factors that aggravated and moderated conflict between themselves and the Army. These were coded into five sub-categories:

4.4.2.1 Relocations

Relocation due to military postings was the most common factor that wives reported as a ‘pay off’ against tensions of Army life.¹ The mean number of times wives had relocated as a result of husbands’ postings was 3.74. Relocations were reported as giving life variety and gave wives greater self-confidence; however they also caused problems such as disruptions to children’s schooling, loss of social networks, and loss of wives’ employment.

Of the 23 wives in paid employment, 20 reported they were happy with their job but 19 said the demands of their husband’s career had a negative impact on the kind of work available to them. Of the 24 wives not in paid employment, 22 looked after children full time however just under 90% expressed a desire to be in employment or education but reported a lack of (affordable) childcare and employment opportunities in the local area. Over 70% of Germany based wives admitted that their employment status would have been better if they were living in the UK.

“There are no career prospects for spouses when you’re in the Army because you’re moving around all the time...It [the Army] limits your opportunities and your qualifications and training and everything.” [W9714]

“It’s just a matter of finding the right thing and obviously, over here, it’s relatively limited as a ‘wife of’. We’re subject to moving around with our husbands, you’re not here in your own right. You haven’t come because there’s a job you want to do, you come because of your husband.” [W1516]

¹ Postings involve a change in job. Relocation involves a change in residence – the first need not involve the second but when it does this can cause difficulties.

4.4.2.2 Deployments and separation

Separation from husbands caused by operational exercises and deployments was reported as the main cause of work-life tension between the Army and military families.

Over 70% of wives reported they were satisfied with the period of notice given for TELIC 5 but 53% felt they did not have enough quality time with their husband before he left primarily due to an increase in his workload or training prior to his deployment

“They knew they were going so their training and everything should have been done, not left to the last minute so we see less of them. For those last couple of weeks it was manic! They were working long hours and they had days here and there and some of the leave they were supposed to have they didn’t get. We all thought as wives, they [the Army] knew they were going, deal with it and then give their families time together before they went....it was just a total nightmare.” [W7143]

Of the 31 wives whose husbands had served on previous deployments, two-thirds of the wives felt that the lack of quality time proceeding TELIC 5 was worse than previously encountered.

4.4.2.3 Non-negotiable demands of the Army.

All the wives except one reported they did not have a say in their husband’s work commitments but 53% wives accepted this was the nature of the Army. Other responses were; frustration with the non-negotiable demands of Army life; belief that civilian jobs are also demanding; and -for a few wives- feelings that it’s not the place of a wife to say.

“If you marry a soldier you marry their job, it’s the way it is. You can’t argue with the Army.” [W8842]

“Yes, I’d prefer to have a say but it would be the same if I was in a career progressing job then I’d probably put in all the hours I wanted to and he wouldn’t have a lot of say in the matter...so if the roles were reversed, it would probably be just the same.” [W2741]

“I feel like a second class citizen basically. It’s not down to me what I want regards his [husband’s] working hours and when he is away, but at the end of the day he can’t listen to me because it’s his job....” [W1114]

Wives commented on uncertainty of family life due to their lack of control over their husband’s absences, postings, housing, healthcare and children’s education.

4.4.2.4 Belonging to the wider military family

A fifth of all moderating comments were related to perks that wives were entitled to and enjoyed as members of the wider military family. These included tax breaks, quality of living, subsidised schooling, good medical care, generous block holidays, and the improved social status that came with their husband’s promotion up the chain of command.

“Housing – it’s much cheaper [than civilian housing]and it’s close to his work place and it’s in an accessible area because you’ve got all the shops and education centre and the crèche that my daughter goes to, so I think it’s a great advantage for us. My husband and I don’t know how to drive so most of the time we make use of the military transport because it’s free of charge.” [W2117]

“We lived in poverty and drugs etc before we moved and there was not a garden. When we came it was the first time my son had a garden. There’s no crime and if there’s a problem, you can report it to the guardroom and it’ll get sorted.” [W1935]

“Schooling here is very good. They get funded quite well and my son is doing very well at school here...so that’s a big advantage.” [W7935]

Conversely, some wives expressed frustration at the way they were often expected to adhere to military rules and regulations in areas such as housing and family welfare. Some wives also perceived rank as a social stigma and resented the fact they were categorised and judged by the rank of their husband as opposed to being judged by their own merits.

“Here it’s your husband’s rank that’s rammed down your throat. You’re under military rule, you have to have permission for your family to come to your house!” [W412]

Of the total sample of wives, only one did not live in close proximity to other service families. As a result, another fifth of all aggravating comments were related to lack of privacy due to living within a tight knit military community.

“Being involved with the same people all the time, no matter what you do, everyone knows about it even your husband even if he’s in Iraq!” [W7335]

“You get the goldfish bowl syndrome as I like to call it, where everybody seems to know what everybody else is doing all the time.....and when your husband’s home you can never get away from work, you’re always bumping into people to do with work” [W6816]

However, wives also reported the social framework provided by the military community as a benefit of Army life, especially during periods of deployment. Social networks during deployments are looked at in further detail in category five.

4.4.2.5 Financial security

Wives appreciated the job stability and financial security provided by the Army and it’s perceived good wages and ‘substantial’ pension at the end of service. Many wives believed their quality of life was better than if their husband was a civilian where he might have limited choices of employment with poorer pay.

“Pension when he gets out – the security, that’s a big factor in the Army. You know you’re not going to get made redundant like on civvy street. You know you’ll always have a roof over you head and a regular wage and I know the soldiers moan but it’s a decent life...” [W2521]

4.4.3 Category three: Wives’ adaptations during deployment

Comments within this category have been grouped within 4 subcategories: the 3 phases of deployment plus the overall impact of the deployment period.

4.4.3.1 Phase 1

(i) Husband’s absence

The majority of wives (81%) felt the length of deployment was acceptable, although 71% felt that the husband’s absence was not easy to deal with. 41 wives (87%) said that, as a result of their husband’s absence, additional demands would be placed on them at home. Of these 41, approximately a third were worried about how they would cope as the majority of their husbands usually did a share of the household chores and child care. Nearly all husbands (95%) were confident their wives could handle key responsibilities in their absence.

4.4.3.2 Phase 2

(i) Mixed blessings of 'R&R'

Of the 40 wives who completed a mid-deployment postal questionnaire, 37 husbands had already been home for the two-week period of R&R granted to soldiers whilst deployed. Of these 37, over 90% (n=34) of wives reported their husbands spent all the R&R with them and over 80% (n=30) of the wives reported this as being a good experience for both of them.

"Both relieved to be a whole family unit again and they [children] could see their dad was safe and well for themselves, rather than telephone calls." [W8636]

Negative feelings about R&R were due to no choice of dates for R&R and having to readjust and say goodbye for a second time.

"I found that after R&R it was hard to get back to routine. In the two weeks I settled into "family" life again and found it quite depressing and lonely to face 3 more months without him again." [W4310]

Of the wives with children living at home, 80% reported their husbands spent time with the children during R&R and 70% of wives thought the R&R was a positive experience for their children. However most wives, along with those who thought R&R was a negative experience, thought it was difficult for the children to say goodbye and adjust for a second time.

"My daughter is too little to understand where he [Daddy] is and why he went away again after R&R, although we remind her that Daddy is just away at work and that he loves her very much." [W9039]

"R&R is positive for children as they get to see their Dad [but] it upsets them...they're just getting used to the idea of Dad being home and he has to go away again." [W4133]

The majority of wives (61%) expressed a preference for no R&R in return for a shorter deployment period. In contrast, 100% of husband's who returned a mid-deployment questionnaire said R&R was an important part of deployment. Most soldiers worked a 7 day week whilst deployed and R&R was perceived as a crucial period when soldiers could unwind away from operational stressors. Even the small minority who suggested shortening the tour by a couple of months stated that a period of R&R was still required.

"We work 7 days a week ...I have noticed that I am less tolerant of people than usual and get frustrated more easily but put that down to not having much time off.....R&R is very welcome." [Husband A13]

"It's better if the men stay away and not get R&R until deployment is finished as it only upsets the apple cart more for both wives and children, as you are just getting used to being a family again when they have to go away again." [Wife W1133]

4.4.3.3 Phase 3

(i) Wives' positive gains of the deployment period

Post deployment, 26 of the wives (61.9%) reported a positive gain whilst their husband was deployed. The majority of comments regarded personal development, e.g. weight loss, learning new skills and acquiring greater self-confidence through coping without the husband. Wives also spoke about being able to save money and expanding social networks through having more free time.

Of the 23 wives who were in paid employment at the start of the deployment, none of the wives employment status changed as a direct result of the deployment.

(ii) Wives' negative experiences of the deployment period

Over three quarters of wives reported feeling lonely during the deployment. Just over a fifth of wives reported difficulty comforting children and explaining 'daddy's absence' and another fifth reported a lack of regular contact with their husband especially during Christmas. (Just over 40% of husbands reported problems contacting home whilst deployed due to lack of telephones and internet terminals, and unreliable telecommunication systems.) Just over a third of wives stated they found it difficult running a home alone and dealing with finances.

(iii) Husband's reintegration into the family

The majority of wives (89%) supported a period of decompression for soldiers post-deployment, believing it helped readjustment to normal military routine but felt husbands should have access to their families during this period as family readjustment was also important. Married soldiers perceived decompression differently believing they did not need or benefit from it.

4.4.3.4 Overall impact of the deployment period

(i) Overall impact on marital satisfaction

Of the 37 matched couples, 4 husbands felt the deployment had a detrimental effect on their marriage, whereas none of the wives thought the deployment had an overall detrimental effect. Interestingly, of the 4 wives whose husbands thought the deployment had been detrimental, 3 of the wives thought the opposite, that the relationship had been strengthened by the deployment.

(ii) Enrich Marital Satisfaction (EMS) scale²

Table 2 shows that, of the 37 matched couples, average EMS scores for both wives and the soldiers did not show a statistically significant change across the deployment period. However, soldiers' mean scores for overall marital satisfaction across the deployment were slightly higher than their wives and, by the end of the deployment, husbands were, on average, significantly more satisfied with their marriages than their wives (Table 3). There were no statistical differences between the mean Positive Couple Agreement (PCA) scores.

EMS scores across the deployment were also examined by the education levels of wives (table 4) and the rank of their husbands. At phase 3, couples whose wives had lower levels of education (GCSEs/equivalent or lower), had significantly improved mean PCA scores (~11%). The main agreed area of improvement was how they related sexually followed by management of leisure activities. However, when comparing mean scores between couples at phase 3, wives with lower levels of education were significantly less satisfied with their marriages than their husbands despite their improved PCA scores [table 5]. This was not apparent in wives with higher levels of education. Differences in rank were not found to be a factor although the Officer sample size (n=3) was too small for meaningful comparisons.

(iii) Overall impact of deployment on children

At phase 1, 23 (61%) wives with children living at home reported negative changes in their children's behaviour following their husband's departure, including: tantrums & displays of aggression (78%, n=18), sleeping problems e.g. nightmares, not being able to sleep alone, and bed-wetting (70%, n=16), being more emotionally upset (52%, n=12), general insecurity (30%, n=7) and fixations with death (26%, n=6). Most wives stated that during the period of their husband's deployment they tried to shield their younger

² The size of the mean differences in EMS and GHQ-12 scores are presented in this report along with comparisons between mean differences using the P-value. The latter should be interpreted with caution due to the small sample sizes involved.

children from the media's reports of Iraq which tended to dwell upon the negative aspects of the deployment.

"The biggest one, he's been dry for 2 years, out of nappies but now he's bed wetting. If my husband phones in the night to say 'goodnight', then my little boy is OK, otherwise he wets the bed. This started a week after he left." [W1147].

"It really hit them that [daddy] had gone away. Strange behaviour, tantrums, saying they didn't want him to go. It was my eldest really, he was saying [daddy] was going to die in Iraq and he'd just do really strange things; he'd sit and put my husband's uniform on..... he has been starting drawing picture of tanks and people in tanks with blood all over them and that quite upset me, but my husband said he used to do things like that when he was younger and I actually talked to social workers about that." [W1127]

"My daughter went through a period of stuttering which she'd [previously] got over, wetting the bed and arguing.... They [the children] always get up in the night and get into my bed, they didn't do that much before." [W1142]

Of the 15 (39%) who reported no adverse changes in their children's behaviour, three mothers stated their children (<12 months of age) were too young to notice their father's absence and those mothers with several months advance warning of the deployment said it had helped to 'prep' the children in advance so they were more mentally prepared for the deployment. Five of the Germany based mothers also applauded the local military school for helping the children adapt to fathers' absences.

"She [daughter] was helped by the school...the school invited the padre in to talk about it [Iraq] and he'd been to Iraq and brought back photos and spoke about what he'd seen there and what their dads and mummies would be doing when they were out there and we've never looked back since...It's been ok with her since then. She came back from school and said "I know where daddy's going now, I've seen it and the padre showed us pictures" and she was chatting about it and that was that." [W119]

By the end of the deployment, nine wives and five husbands individually thought the deployment had been detrimental to their children, while only one husband and wife who concurred on this point.

(iv) Overall impact of deployment on mental health – GHQ-12 scores

Overall mean scores for wives' GHQ-12 decreased as the deployment progressed (Table 6). A significant drop (i.e. improvement in mental health) in overall mean scores occurred between phase 1 and 3 (Table 7). However, a significant decline of scores across the deployment was not found in wives' with the lowest levels of education i.e. GCSEs/equivalent or below, although this group had the lowest mean score for GHQ-12 at phase 1.

4.4.4 Category four: Spouse's networks of support during the deployment period

The majority of wives felt that, by staying within the local military community during the deployment, they were better informed about regimental news from Iraq. News flowed by wives' word of mouth and through Unit Welfare Offices (UWOs).

Less than one fifth of wives reported they had asked for help from the regiment or other military sources in preparing for their husband's departure, with the majority (96%) seeking their own family and other military wives (85%) for informal support. Both during and after deployment, wives sought and received the most help from other military families and where applicable, work colleagues.

The majority of wives (69%) recognised that Regimental Unit Welfare Offices were a potential source of support during the deployment largely for more practical issues such as transport. Of the 37 matched husbands, 64% believed the military were providing sufficient support to their family whilst they were deployed. However, some wives whose husbands were attached to a Regiment expressed concern that they were not included in the social welfare package provided by the host unit as they were not perceived 'as one of them'. Support services and charities for military families outside of the regiment were not utilised.

I turn to friends here...they're going through the same as what I'm going through...got children and husband's away. I know it sounds silly but you feel that you're all in the same situation, you're all in the same boat. Back home, they support you but they don't understand because you have to be living this life to really understand I suppose. My life is here and I feel I've got more support with what's happening to my husbands by being here." [W6424]

"I got leaflets, advice etc [from the base] but I've had no contact with them. It could be down to me, the facilities are there, I could go over there but I'd rather go to my family members." [W9897]

4.4.5 Category five: Wives' overall satisfaction with military life

Only 9 of the 47 wives (19.1%) did not share the same views on the deployment and mission of TELIC 5 as their husband. At the start of the deployment 83.3% of the wives felt proud of their husband's career and what he does but approximately half of the wives were not glad their spouse was in the Armed Forces. However the large majority (83%) wanted their husband to stay in the military with financial security (i.e. regular income and attractive pension) being the main reason to remain in the Armed Forces. By the end of the deployment this figure had increased slightly to 88.1%

"No I'm not glad he's in the Army but I do want him to stay in. He has only got 7 years left and it is for financial reasons that I want him to stay in, not for anything else. We have got a family, we have got a mortgage to pay, we have financial commitments and the moment it [Army] pays well...so like everybody else in the UK, I'm sure they don't do jobs that they want to do, they just do them because they are financially rewarding" [W1182]

"Husband's career just revolves around providing food and water and shelter. We look forward to the day he gets out the Army, it's gonna stop at 22 years. Although we're at that point now where we're trapped!.... but we're at that point where if he left now he would give up his pension" [W1173 whose husband had 4 and a half years service left to complete.]

5.0 DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Wives recognised both benefits and disadvantages of Army life, accepting that commitment to their husbands' military career also included the work-life tensions of frequent postings, separation, lack of privacy from community living, and the non-negotiable demands of the military. Their greatest source of dissatisfaction was separation from their husbands due to long deployments exacerbated by periods of pre-deployment training. Previous research by Drummet et al [27] found separation resulted in high levels of stress for US military spouses. However, our sample of wives became more mentally robust (GHQ-12 scores) as the deployment progressed. This may be partly explained by the context of TELIC 5. The British Army's previous deployment to Iraq was particularly stressful and subsequently soldiers and wives preparing for TELIC 5 had expectations of the same. The reality turned out to be a relatively quiet deployment with fewer casualties than expected.

Within the context of an Army garrison town, wives favoured informal social networks of support to provide a buffer against the stressors of deployment, and did not expect or choose the military as their first

line of support, whilst recognising that Regimental UWOs were a potential source of support for more practical problems should they occur and generally appreciated this 'safety net'. This mirrors similar results from military families in Australian and American populations [28,29] in which informal support groups have been positively linked to military families' separation adjustment. Further research is required within less institutionalised families of British Army personnel who live outside Army garrison towns (and in the UK not Germany) to see if support networks differ.

Both wives and husbands agreed that better telecommunication facilities for soldiers in Iraq was an important factor in reducing deployment-related stress and reported problems communicating with each other due to insufficient and unreliable systems. Military families have come to expect good communications which increase military families' ability to cope with separation and help decrease alienation and loss of marital intimacy. [30]

Throughout the deployment, a recurring theme was the diverging perceptions between soldiers and their wives, including: wives' ability to cope during the deployment period and use of formal support networks, impact of deployment on marriage, and the importance of R&R and family life. For example, husbands' perceptions of the importance of their careers compared to home life differed to that of their wives. Wives made it clear they disliked aspects of military life, which often conflicted with family demands, yet over 40% of wives conceded their husbands' career were of equal importance. This contrasted with the great majority of service husbands who felt that home life took priority over their military careers. Most husbands believed that their commitment to the Army depended on the level of commitment of their wives. As one soldier in the TELIC 5 study stated, "A happy wife, makes a happy, long-term soldier."

Wives accepted their husbands' military careers, but not unconditionally: job and financial security play a major role in career decisions and military wives are no exception. Most wives considered the long term financial benefits as a counterbalance to the negative aspects of Army life including: unpredictable and frequent demands upon their husbands' time, non-negotiable compromises in important areas such as their own employment, choice of housing and children's schooling. Desivilya & Gal state in their research on military families [31] that competing conflicts and subsequent high levels of tension often result in significant compromises on behalf of the civilian spouse in order to 'survive'. However, the Army wives in this study were largely willing to compromise in order to 'win' financially. One can infer from this that the British Army will need to ensure that financial as well as other incentives continue to be provided to ensure that military spouses are willing to make the compromises that military life asks of them.

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Table 1. Wives' Demographics Phase 1

Variable	N = 47	(%)
Age of Participants:		
19-24	7	14.9
25-29	11	23.4
30-34	10	21.3
35-39	15	31.9
40-44	3	6.4
45-49	1	2.1
Ethnic Group:		
White	43	91.5
Other	4	8.5
Country of residence:		
Germany	42	89.3
UK	5	10.6
Rank of Spouse:		
Officers	4	8.5
Other Ranks	43	91.5
Role of Spouse:		
Combat	32	68.1
Combat Support	7	14.9
Combat Service Support	8	17.0
Length Of marriage (in years):		
Less than 5 years	14	33.3
5-10 years	12	28.6
11-15 years	11	26.2
15+ years	5	11.9
Missing	5	
Time spent in army whilst in relationship:		
Less than 4 years	5	11.9
4-12 years	20	47.6
13 years or more	17	40.5
Missing	5	
Children under 18 years of age that resided with participant:		
0	8	17.0
1 or more	39	83.0
Type of Accommodation:		
Service Accommodation	44	93.6
Own Home	3	6.4
Level of Education:		
No qualifications	1	2.1
O level /G.C.S.E's or equivalent	20	42.6
A Levels or above	26	55.3
Employment Status:		
In paid employment (inc those on maternity leave)	23	48.9
Not in paid employment	24	51.1
Of those in work (n=23):		
Full Time	8	34.8
Part Time	15	65.2

Table 2. Mean marital satisfaction scores for wives and soldiers across the deployment period.

	N*	Phase 1 Start of the deployment Mean Score	Phase 3 End of the deployment Mean Score	Difference	
				Mean (95% CI)	P value
Spouse	37	56.57	55.12	1.45 (-1.97 to 4.88)	.396
Soldier	35	58.40	60.66	-2.26 (-6.00 to 1.49)	.229
PCA**	35	44.29	47.43	-3.14 (-9.85 to 3.56)	.348

* Of the 37 matched couples, 2 husbands refused to complete the EMS scale at phase 3.

** PCA scores provide the percentage of marital satisfaction scale items on which both partners agree that the area is a strength for them e.g. communicating, parenting, sexual relationship.

Table 3. Mean differences of marital satisfaction scores between matched couples across the deployment period.

	N	Paired differences	
		Mean (95% CI)	P value
Soldier – Spouse Phase 1	37	1.86 (-1.91 to 5.64)	0.324
Soldier – Spouse Phase 3	35	6.11 (2.19 to 10.04)	0.003

Table 4. Mean marital satisfaction scores for wives and soldiers across the deployment period grouped by level of wives' education.

Level of wives' education	N*	Phase 1 Mean Score	Phase 3 Mean Score	Difference	
				Mean (95% CI)	P value
Wives GCSEs/ equivalent or lower	14	57.50	53.47	4.03 (-1.89 to 9.94)	0.165
Wives A levels/ equivalent or higher	23	56.00	56.12	-0.12 (-4.52 to 4.29)	0.957
Soldier GCSEs/ equivalent or lower	13	59.69	63.38	-3.69 (-12.70 to 5.32)	0.390
Soldier A levels/ equivalent or higher	22	57.63	59.05	-1.41 (-4.94 to 2.12)	0.416
PCA GCSEs/equivalent or lower	13	41.54	52.31	-10.77 (-21.37 to -0.17)	0.047
PCA A levels/equivalent or higher	22	45.91	44.55	1.36 (-7.32 to 10.04)	0.747

* Of the 37 matched couples, 2 husbands refused to complete the EMS scale at phase 3.

Table 5. Mean differences of marital satisfaction scores between matched couples across the deployment period grouped by level of wives' education.

	N	Paired differences	
		Mean (95% CI)	P value
Soldier - Spouse Phase 1 GCSEs/equivalent or lower	14	2.07 (-5.95 to 10.09)	0.586
Soldier - Spouse Phase 1 A levels/equivalent or higher	23	1.74 (-2.50 to 5.98)	0.404
Soldier - Spouse Phase 3 GCSEs/equivalent or lower	13	10.09 (1.68 to 18.50)	0.023
Soldier - Spouse Phase 3 A levels/equivalent or higher	22	3.77 (-0.32 to 7.85)	0.069

Table 6. Wives' mean GHQ-12 scores across the deployment by education and rank.

	N	Mean GHQ-12 scores		
		Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3
Overall	42	3.26	2.37	1.00
Education				
GCSEs/equiv or lower	16	2.56	1.75	1.06
A levels/equiv or higher	26	3.69	2.78	0.96
Rank				
JNCOs or lower	17	3.47	1.75	0.82
SNCOs	22	3.23	2.87	1.27
Officers	3	2.33	2.33	0.00

Table 7. Differences in the wives' mean GHQ-12 scores across the deployment by education and rank.

	Paired differences					
	Phase 3 - Phase 1		Phase 2 - Phase 1		Phase 3 - Phase 2	
	Mean (95% CI)	P value	Mean (95% CI)	P value	Mean (95% CI)	P value
Overall	-2.26 (-3.11 to -1.41)	0.000	-0.93 (-2.09 to 0.22)	0.109	-1.53 (-2.56 to -0.51)	0.005
Education						
GCSEs/equiv or lower	-1.50 (-3.10 to 0.104)	0.065	-0.93 (-2.53 to 0.697)	0.237	-1.25 (-3.47 to 0.97)	0.241
A levels/equiv or higher	-2.73 (-3.74 to -1.73)	0.000	-0.94 (-2.68 to 0.79)	0.267	-1.72 (-2.81 to -0.63)	0.004
Rank						
JNCOs or lower	-2.65 (-4.13 to -1.16)	0.002	-2.17 (-4.26 to -0.71)	0.044	-0.67 (-2.11 to 0.775)	0.331
SNCOs	-1.96 (-3.20 to -0.70)	0.004	-0.13 (-1.79 to 1.53)	0.866	-2.07 (-3.84 to -0.30)	0.025

Note: No paired differences of the mean for Officer's wives as sample size (n=3) too small for meaningful analysis.