Living Liminal Lives: Army Partners' Lived Experiences and Perspectives of Navigating and Negotiating Avenues for Support

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I declare that this thesis is my own work; has not been submitted in substantially the same form for the award of a higher degree elsewhere; and that the word length conforms to the permitted maximum.

Emma Long, October 2019

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This thesis is dedicated to John Jeffery

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Contents

Abstract

Army partners (APs), defined as individuals in a relationship with a currently-serving member of the British Army, are key members of the Armed Forces Community (AFC). This thesis presents the findings of a qualitative study exploring APs' perspectives and experiences of the return of their serving partner post combat-related deployment. Through the thematic analysis of interviews with 26 APs and 26 individuals working within support services, it explores APs' navigation and negotiation of coping strategies including informal and formal support options. By examining data alongside relevant theories - militarisation, liminality, gendered identities, and stigma – it critically engages with the impact that military culture(s) and expectations have upon APs' experiences of support-seeking. The reintegration process is complex, influenced by experiences and perspectives of other periods of the deployment cycle, and engagement with military life. APs live 'liminal lives' marked by change, pressure to adapt/cope, and the negotiation of military-governed disruption to the family. APs reflected on what it means to be an Army partner and by doing so presented identities which related to their exposure to the military, military processes, and the AFC. It is likely that these identities gave APs a sense of stability, strength, and pride in a world marked by flux – influencing everyday practices, especially in 'being an Army partner' managing deployment and its effects. Whilst descriptions of identities varied between APs, common factors related to their perceived role to support their SP/the military. Problematically, perpetuating some Army partner identities, which were militarised constructs, limited the likelihood of support-seeking when required. Identities are (re)created and maintained through the disciplinary techniques of the gaze, performance, and stigma. Hence, APs preferred to 'manage on their own' and were concerned that seeking support publicly risked being judged as 'needy', the antithesis of the valued traits of a militarised AP.

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Glossary

Army Partner (AP) – someone who is 'in a relationship' with a currently-serving member of the British Army.

Army Families Federation (AFF) – acting as an independent voice for Army families, aiming to improve their quality of life. It also signposts families to relevant agencies.

Army Welfare Service (AWS) – the Army's professional welfare provider.

Commanding Officer (CO) – an Officer in charge of a military unit (i.e. regiment, battalion) and who is responsible for the welfare of their unit. Has full powers of command over their personnel.

Combat-Related Deployment – movement of personnel and/or equipment for military action.

Formal Support Workers (FSWs) – a person working in a welfare/support capacity.

Off-Patch – not living in military quarters or accommodation.

Officer Commanding (OC) – an Officer in command of a sub-unit within a unit. Usually works for a Commanding Officer.

On-Patch – refers to military families living in military quarters or accommodation – includes service families accommodation.

Rest and Recuperation (R&R) – mandatory break from duties given to serving personnel.

Service Families Accommodation (SFA) – subsidised housing provided to military families.

Serving Partner (SP) – a person serving in the British Army and who is 'in a relationship' with a non-serving partner.

Unit Welfare Officer (UWO) – responsible for the welfare of soldiers and families within a unit. Often used as a first contact for support. Responsible to the Commanding Officer.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Army partners (APs), defined as individuals who consider themselves as 'in a relationship' with a currently-serving member of the British Army, are key members of the Armed Forces Community (AFC)[1]. Their lives are impacted by military-related demands including managing the absence of their serving partner (SP) around the deployment cycle. Deployment separates the SP from the home, creating familial disruption that is managed, negotiated, and adapted to by the AP. APs are absorbed into militarised cultures and expectations and because of the demands the military makes of them, they could be considered members of the armed forces too.

There is scant research exploring APs' experiences within the context of the British Army and the field is dominated by research conducted in the United States (US). This is problematic as the context is different, for example in terms of the size of the military, relations with 'civilian' society, cultures, and the formal support system available to the AFC. The available research conducted within the United Kingdom (UK) typically focuses on SPs' experiences, or takes a quantitative, positivist approach to understanding APs' lives. Thus, there is a lack of research critically engaging with the nature of APs' absorption into military cultures and the impact upon their lives. One aim of this thesis is to give APs a voice as their experiences are rarely brought to the fore (Fossey, 2012). They are absorbed into the military due to its demands, managing the absence of their SP, the awareness of the threat to mental and physical health and frequent relocations. For APs, living under the 'spectre of deployment' is the key feature that differentiates them from civilians.

[1] Complex, but in this case defined as those who serve in the Armed Forces and their family.

The Army has identified an inextricable link between the wellbeing of the family and its impact on the wellbeing of the SP (Jervis, 2011). Therefore, the Army offers a programme to APs to help and support them through their military-associated lives. The primary purpose of this is to maintain the operational capability and effectiveness of the serving personnel as problems at home may cause worry for the SP which can result in compassionate leave (serving personnel can return from deployment on compassionate grounds – see MoD (2018a)). However, little is known about the impact military lifestyle has upon British APs. Additionally, AP perspectives of help-seeking practices are not yet understood in the wider literature and instead formal support relies upon anecdotal evidence. This research focuses on APs' perspectives of help-seeking around the period of reintegration post combat-related deployment as it has been significantly under-researched than other areas of the deployment cycle (particularly during deployment). I have not defined 'reintegration' as it varies in time (from one week to ongoing) and in difficulty (where complexity varies), and thus encouraged those interviewed to define/discuss it on their own terms.

There are various avenues an AP may pursue if they decide to seek support. One method is to engage with the formal support available from the military institution, wider public sector, and related military charities. Another is to access informal support groups within the AFC – these are facilitated and maintained directly and indirectly by military-provided formal support and housing policies, charities, and APs themselves. It is also important to consider APs' lives beyond the AFC because they have exposure to the world 'outside' of the artificial boundaries of the military sphere and therefore may seek support from social connections including the wider family and non-military friends ('civilian friends'). They may also utilise their own personal coping strategies such as immersing themselves into employment.

It has been identified that APs are more likely to seek support from their informal network, rather than from formal avenues (Dandeker et al., 2006). However, it is not yet understood why this is the case, the experiences of seeking support, and the perspectives that inform choice amongst the AP community. Additionally, the formal support system offered by the Army rests upon the notion that 'a happy family means a happy soldier'. This renders APs' needs secondary to the SP and tertiary to the military. This discourse has permeated the rhetoric surrounding military family support systems since the mid-twentieth century. The existence of support systems is not a 'given' but instead has a complex history and context. The UK Government argues that 'threats' are increasing in scale, diversity and complexity (HM Government, 2015), and therefore it is important that experiences of deployments are thoroughly investigated as families continue to face challenges created.

This thesis responds to this gap by addressing the following questions:

What are the perspectives and lived experiences of APs accessing formal support and informal support networks, when dealing with military and non-military related stress, during the reintegration period post combat-related deployment?

Specifically, this involves the analysis of the following:

- What are APs' lived experiences post-deployment?
- How do APs manage/negotiate the military lifestyle? How do they access support - formal support (as offered by the military estate and associated charities), informal support (friends, family, neighbours etc.), and personally?
- What are the limitations to APs seeking support? A review of lived experiences and perspectives of access and efficacy.
- How effective are services in supporting APs and their families?

This research focuses specifically on the British Army as opposed to the British Armed Forces as the experiences of deployment vary, and therefore reintegration experiences likely differ[2]. Additionally, each of the Forces are provided with alternative routes of support, thus navigating pathways differ. I have chosen to study the Army because I am a partial insider as a daughter of an Infantry Officer. To situate my research, I focus on current support availability and the experiences of those who were deployed in the recent Afghanistan and Iraq wars (2001 - present). However, it must be considered that many of those interviewed have experienced other deployments and separation such as the Falklands, the First Gulf War, and training exercises.

This research captures the mundane, everyday experiences of APs, looking to understand what they consider to be important when addressing the research questions above. There is a small body of research exploring domestic violence in British military families (Gray, 2015, 2016a, 2017; Williamson, 2012), and, to a lesser extent, APs whose SP is wounded, injured or sick (Thandi et al., 2016). Some of the APs interviewed referred to the negative impact they considered deployment to have upon their SP's mental health and wellbeing, but none of their partners were discharged. Nor did the APs discuss issues relating to domestic abuse. This does not necessarily mean that they did not experience these issues, instead not referring to them could be indicative of stigma towards admission of a 'problem'. Regardless, domestic abuse was not mentioned by my participants and therefore it is not referred to in the data chapters. However, I do refer to studies such as Gray's (2015) who explored the relationship between domestic abuse, help-seeking, and operational effectiveness due to the relevance of its conclusions.

[2] There continues to be scant research exploring experiences of partners of Navy and Royal Air Force personnel.

To address my research questions, 26 APs and 26 formal support workers (FSWs) (both internal and external to the military) were interviewed, creating over 50 hours of audio data. FSWs include Unit Welfare Officers (UWOs), members of the Army Welfare Service (AWS), and contracted 'civilian' charities such as Homestart and Relate (see Chapter 3). When approaching this research, I defined APs as those in a relationship with a member of the Army – regardless of sex/gender, marital status, sexuality or whether they are the biological parents to children. I hoped to interview male partners or those in non-traditional family units. However, due to the continuing preponderance of heteronormativity of the military (with males as soldiers and women as wives: Enloe, 2007) and with currently only 9.3% of the British Army being female (National Statistics, 2018), I was unable to achieve this. Therefore, all APs interviewed for this thesis were female and were in heterosexual relationships. For this reason, when I refer to APs, I refer to them as 'female' and SPs as 'male'; by doing so I do not mean to neglect other identities, rather I reflect my participants. However, not all interviewees were married, and those that were reflected on how 'being married' altered their experiences of being in the AFC.

This thesis critically engages with the impact military culture and, more specifically, expectations have upon APs' experiences of their military-associated lifestyles and help-seeking. Moses and Knutsen (2007: 11) state that 'rather than uncovering a true account of reality, constructivists seek to capture and understand the meaning of social action for the agent performing it', which drives the approach of this work. It explores the phenomena of help-seeking with reference to the social contexts in which APs exist and the meanings they associate with practice. By exploring multiple perspectives amongst APs and FSWs, this thesis questions how knowledge and meaning is 'made' between social actors and the influence this has upon exclusionary/inclusionary boundaries/opportunities with regards to help-seeking. This thesis does not draw upon quantitative data such as how many times an AP accessed

different forms of support as this would echo previous studies which have already indicated that APs tend to prefer to seek support from friends and family, rather than formal support services (Dandeker et al., 2006). Nor does it provide a breakdown of the issues leading APs towards one avenue of support over another as, although asked in the interviews, APs did not consider their options in these terms.

It is also important to comment at this point that this thesis considers APs, and AFC, as both distinct and interlinked with the civilian community. APs are exposed to civilian norms and cultures and are technically civilians themselves. However, their emotional, social, and financial immersion into the military sphere renders their experiences different and therefore worthy of being explored as a distinct group. They manage the effects of deployment, are aware of threat to the mental and physical health of their SP, manage relocations according to military demands, and are subsumed into the cultural norms and expectations of the military. Additionally, the existence of formal support services that are only available to the AFC renders it necessary to explore APs as 'non-civilians' to understand the efficacy of these systems.

To increase the impact of this research project, it critically evaluates the effectiveness of formal military processes and initiatives in supporting APs (and by proxy, their families), identifies what works well, and develops a series of recommendations for potential improvement. As far as I have been told, the military does not collect data relating to the effectiveness of their services, which is surprising given the ongoing drive for public organisations to provide 'more for less'. This thesis identifies which aspects of formal support are most valued and therefore should be protected in the politics of austerity and change.

Chapter 2 reviews the current literature available and makes clear the gap the research questions address. It is split into four sections: (1) research taking a non-critical approach; (2) research

taking a critical approach; (3) the limitations of the emotional cycle of deployment (ECD), and; (3) coping strategies.

Chapter 3 outlines the thesis' methodology. Interviews were conducted with APs and those who work in support-related organisations. Data was audio-recorded, transcribed and coded using data analysis software NVivo to identify key themes. This chapter reflects on the nature of knowledge and how interpretations can be made from the data gathered. Throughout the methodology, my subjectivity and positionality are considered, both as a strength, and as an element of the research to be managed and reflected upon. Being a member of the AFC has made accessing the research population easier and our shared identities and experiences have led to rich accounts of the APs' lived experiences and perspectives. For this reason, the knowledge presented in this thesis was co-produced between researcher and researched. Following this, Chapters 4-6 outline the key findings which emerged from thematic analysis of the interviews with APs and FSWs, going some way to addressing the research questions.

Chapter 4 starts by showing how APs make sense of their military-associated lives. Although this thesis originally aimed to focus on the reintegration period post combat-related deployment, different stories emerged from the interviews. I found separating the military experience into specific stages of the deployment cycle is unhelpful as APs' lived experiences are not so easily categorised. Therefore, this chapter presents the ways in which APs experience the military lifestyle as a complex flow of moments which are impacted by previous experiences and expectations for the future. APs' lives are liminal[3] as they move from one stage of the deployment cycle to the next, experiencing changing roles within the household as they manage and negotiate military-enforced disruption. They never quite reach the 'new

[3] 'Liminality' is discussed in Chapter 2. It refers to a period of limbo in which an individual's role, status, and understanding of self is ambiguous and yet to be realigned in the next social state (Thomassen, 2009).

normal' as they anticipate the next stage – the possibility of deployment is always on the horizon, and during deployment APs are highly aware of the changes and disruption to soon be re-experienced post-deployment. Post-deployment is not the end of the deployment cycle, as APs reflect on changes made in themselves and within their SP which can be difficult to manage as they wait for the next notice of deployment/absence. Chapter 4 shows that APs exist with a 'spectre of deployment' and therefore develop personal coping strategies to manage this spectre (and other forms of disruption) - in this sense they are militarised. Internal coping strategies are the first avenue APs employ, before reaching out to seek support from their informal networks.

Chapter 5 expands the understanding of APs' experiences of managing military-associated lives by discussing their experiences of informal support networks. The primary focus of this chapter is how informal support networks – wider family, other APs, and non-military friends – develop, are engaged with, and reflected upon by APs. It shows that APs tend to prefer seeking support from the wider family, primarily their mothers. Yet living far away (often caused by relocation due to the military) can lead to them preferring to seek support from APs living around them. A key finding in this chapter is that APs consider seeking support from those who have experienced the military lifestyle increased the effectiveness of the advice sought and understanding received. Another key theme running through Chapter 5 is how perspectives of accessing informal support networks, and for what purposes, reinforces expectations of their role as an AP, and the valorised practice this produces. These expectations relate to military cultures and expectations – indicating further that perspectives surrounding help-seeking are produced in-part through military lifestyles.

Chapter 6 presents APs' perspectives and lived experiences of accessing formal support. It focuses primarily on perspectives relating to the UWO, the primary avenue discussed

(unsurprising as UWOs are the first tier of support), and contrasts APs' views of the formal support framework to those expressed by FSWs. It shows that APs identified numerous limitations to accessing formal support including issues of access and stigma, as is often identified by literature relating to SP's experiences and civilian-focused research. This chapter extends this argument by showing that APs' experiences of barriers are profoundly gendered and relate significantly to military cultures and expectations.

Chapter 7 brings together the key findings of this thesis, showing how linking the concepts of the 'greedy institution' (Segal, 1986), liminality, gender, and stigma further develops understandings of how APs experience help-seeking post-deployment. Furthermore, it outlines the contribution to current literature, offers recommendations that those who offer formal support services to SPs, APs and families may consider adopting, and suggests opportunities for developing future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This thesis explores APs' experiences of seeking support to manage and negotiate their military-associated lives in the context of the period of reintegration post-deployment. This chapter critically reviews current research available, evidencing gaps in knowledge through both empirical context and theoretical application, and proposes an alternative approach to understand and theorise the deployment experiences among APs which drives the approach taken throughout this project. This research was inspired and is shaped by my personal connection to the military as a daughter to an Infantry Officer, partner to a Naval Officer, and AFC researcher within Sociology. These roles and identities inevitably inform and influence much of the critique of the contemporary research and welfare provision, which is further explored in Chapter 3. Therefore, this critical review of the research is developed through both my engagement with the literature and my own tacit knowledge.

Since World War I, APs' contribution to the military has been increasingly recognised by the State leading to the development of welfare policies supporting APs and their families. However, APs' health and wellbeing are typically only recognised in reference to military needs specifically orientated around maintaining operational effectiveness (increasing recruitment and retention). The link between the 'healthy and happy family' and the 'healthy and happy soldier' is a discourse that runs through much of the current military literature, leading to researchers working to mitigate negative experiences of APs in order to justify, maintain, and strengthen military actions/purposes. Thus, there is an abundance of literature exploring military families within the fields of psychology and medicine, often taking a positivist approach. However, there is also a growing body of literature that seeks to maintain a critical stand-point to military contexts and processes, questioning and interrogating the otherwise seemingly natural processes of the military institution, and generally adopting a

qualitative approach. This work is certainly empowering and provides researchers with an alternative lens with which to explore the military. These two bodies of work will be outlined – showing that whilst there is scant literature available exploring APs' experiences of post-deployment within the UK, it often takes a problem-solving approach, subsequently neglecting criticality. It also often focuses on APs who are experiencing specific challenges such as caring for an SP who is injured or who have experienced domestic abuse. Furthermore, there is a significant gap in current research exploring the experiences of those in a relationship to personnel in the British Army. The field is otherwise dominated by research conducted within the US. This is highly problematic due to differences in culture, military structure, and available formal support services.

This literature review is separated into four sections. Firstly, it provides an overview of the ECD, indicating the key trends identified in the pre, during, and post-deployment phases. These studies have been grouped together as 'non-critical' which does not mean they do not criticise their specific cases, but rather, that they naturalise, depoliticise and sometimes obscure military processes from associated lived experiences. To counter this, the literature review then explores some of the 'critical' approaches taken, uncovering processes of militarisation/militarism to show how this theoretical framing could be applied to this thesis' research to reveal alternative interpretations to those described in non-critical literature. Following this, the review critiques the linear nature of the ECD, instead suggesting that the concept of liminality could provide more nuanced reflections upon AP's experiences post-deployment[4]. Finally, it reviews literature which explores help-seeking and coping strategies, highlighting a further gap this thesis addresses.

[4] This critique was discovered through my analysis of the data collected for this study. Therefore, although I have presented arguments relating to liminality in this chapter, it was not a lens in mind when planning and conducting the interviews. Rather, the notion of liminality was born from data analysis.

I have focused this literature review on research conducted in a British military context. Yet, due to the scant literature have sometimes outlined research conducted beyond the UK, primarily within the US. As already stated, applying these findings to the UK context is problematic. Where possible, research conducted within the UK is presented but where there are gaps, US data is reflected upon (this is indicated throughout).

Taking a Non-Critical Approach: The Emotional Cycle of Deployment

The ECD, refined by US researchers Pincus et al. (2001), presents five stages – pre-deployment, initial deployment (first month), sustainment (the majority of deployment time), re-deployment (the last month), and post-deployment (up to six months after deployment). The British Army refers to the ECD when advising families how to manage the deployment cycle (see *Deployment – A Families Guide*, 2011; *Homecoming – A Families Guide*, 2011; MoD, 2011a). It is generally accepted that each stage creates different emotional challenges for the military family, therefore requiring different coping strategies (as described by Pincus et al. (2001) and outlined in Table 1).

Research within a UK context relating to the post-deployment period primarily focuses upon the impacts of deployment upon SPs and veterans. Research focussing specifically upon APs' experiences is often framed around the acute effects of war such as SP's mental health issues, limb-loss, and propensity for domestic violence (see for example Williamson, 2012; Murphy et al., 2016; Thandi et al., 2016; Verey et al., 2016; Engward et al., 2018). That said, Gray (2015, 2016c, 2017) explores domestic violence but suggests that this experience should not be framed simply as a post-war effect, rather it should be reviewed through gendered analysis (discussed later). This thesis expands this work, focusing on the post-deployment period, to consider how experiences are not simply the product of deployment but rather influenced by numerous other military affects. Furthermore, it does not focus on a specific issue such as

domestic abuse or the caring for discharged personnel, but instead expands the focus to incorporate a more diverse range of experiences and perspectives.

Table 1: Military family ECD[5]

	Pre-Deployment	Initial Deployment	Sustainment	Re-Deployment	Post-Deployment
Emotional Challenge	Anticipation of loss/denial Training and separation Mental/physical distance Arguments	Disorientated and overwhelmed Upset – loneliness, abandonment, numbness Difficulty sleeping Anxiety about coping	New sources of support and routines Increased independence and confidence Communication with SP is unidirectional Rumours develop about deployment	Anticipation of homecoming Excitement Apprehension Difficulty making decisions	Honeymoon period Loss of independence Need for own space Renegotiate routines Reintegration into family
Coping Strategy	Preparation and creation of 'how to' lists Aim for increased intimacy	Communication with SP Involve SP in family celebrations via communication technologies	Social networks organised by the military Relationships with family and friends	High expectations and rush to complete 'to-do' lists	Give each other space Patient communication Counselling
Time Frame	Variable depending on notice and level of training	First month starting from SP's departure from home	After the first month of deployment to last month of deployment	Last month of deployment	Three-six months after deployment

[5] Table developed from Pincus et al. (2001).

The ECD framework refined by Pincus et al. (2001) does not account for the different roles family members adopt during the deployment cycle, instead presenting 'experiences' as the product of the whole family. Researchers who have reviewed APs' experiences of deployment tend to focus on specific moments – 'pre-deployment', 'deployment' and 'post-deployment' – and if they do consider the whole cycle, these are presented as distinct periods of time. What follows is a presentation of the experiences of APs during each phase identified by these scholars, concluding that this categorisation over-simplifies experiences separating them into a series of linear moments. That is not to say that the research below is unhelpful as it illuminates how each moment differs from the next and of course, each stage of the cycle presents different challenges and experiences. Many of the experiences outlined below show that APs' lives are gendered due to their exposure to military demands, yet this fact is obscured as it is not reflected upon by these researchers.

Pre-deployment

Very little research has been conducted exploring APs' experiences of the pre-deployment phase. Timings of the announcement of the deployment date vary, some being given more notice than others. However, the pre-deployment phase marks the beginning of the gradual separation, mentally and physically, of the SP from the family (Pincus et al., 2001). Dandeker et al. (2006) interviewed British APs – the majority lived on garrisons in Germany - and found that separation from their SP caused by operational exercises and deployments was the main cause of work-life tensions within families. Their research was conducted in the context of Operation TELIC (British invasion of Iraq during the 2000s), and in the lead up to this 70% of APs interviewed were satisfied with the period of notice yet 53% felt that they were unable to spend time with their SP due to the increased workload/training.

Dandeker et al.'s (ibid.) research focuses primarily on the practical concerns of APs, yet experiences of APs are much more complex than this. US-based researcher Marnocha's (2012) qualitative review found that when notice for deployment was announced, emotional disruption occurred within the household as family members begin to anticipate separation. APs start to imagine their lives during deployment and focus on preparation such as completing unfinished tasks (installing a boiler), organising childcare (with their mothers), and families were encouraged by formal welfare to ensure that the SP's will was up-to-date. Another US-based study found that SPs who did not have preparation strategies for maintaining the relationship with children during deployment experienced more stress after deployment than those who had strategies (Louie and Cromer, 2014). Findings from this research evidences that APs 'live' deployment before the departure of their SP – transition is not immediate and exists in both the 'real' and the 'imagined'.

Deployment and Sustainment

The period of deployment is the most researched stage in the ECD both within the UK and US – albeit much more frequently explored within a US-based context. Pincus et al. (2001) identify the first month of deployment as the most troublesome for APs. APs worry about how they are going to cope as their SP usually manages a share of the domestic and childcare responsibilities (Lapp et al., 2010; Dandeker et al., 2006), rendering APs more susceptible to stress (Spera, 2009). Pressure increases due to childcare responsibilities primarily relating to children's awareness and emotional reaction to the deployment and absence of their father (Marnocha, 2012), and assuming the role of a single parent (Williamson, 2012; Lapp et al., 2010). Anxieties may also develop from feelings of loneliness, financial difficulties, and worries about the relationship with their SP (Dimiceli et al., 2010).

APs can experience increased confidence and independence as they manage increased responsibility of household and childcare duties. Confidence boosters such as learning new skills, saving money, weight loss, and accessing informal networks have been identified as increasing an AP's ability to cope with the absence of the SP (Dandeker et al., 2006). APs are more likely to use the word 'individual' when describing their experiences of deployment, suggesting increased autonomy and independence (Williamson, 2012). This is echoed in US-based literature as 'taking the reins' of the household, childcare responsibilities, and adopting tasks that were originally their SP's such as bill-paying and car maintenance builds confidence (Marnocha, 2012). However, US-based research has also found that awareness of this increased independence contributes to difficulties for the AP relinquishing control post-deployment (Lapp et al., 2010). Furthermore, although the challenges faced by APs when assuming the role of a single parent are like their civilian equivalents (for example responsible for children's upbringing, compromising employment), APs 'lack the recognition and support that society offers to 'true' single parents' (Herrity et al., 2011: 41). These experiences are highly gendered and relate to masculine and feminine ideas surrounding domestic-roles, yet the research stated above does not discuss gender as an organising principle, reducing the criticality of interpretation.

There are also unique pressures experienced by military families raising children. White et al. (2011) conducted a literature review, identifying nine US-based studies, concluding that military children are at a higher risk of psychosocial problems when compared to civilians, ranging from moderate to severe emotional and behavioural problems. A key consistency in the research reviewed was that children's ability to cope with deployment is mediated by their relationship with the AP. APs with poorer mental health reported more difficulties with children (Chandra et al., 2009), parental stress being a significant predictor of children's psychosocial functioning (Flake et al., 2009), and APs with children have 'reported trying to

be strong for fear that their feelings of depression and fear will be mirrored in their children' (Dimiceli et al., 2010: 365). De Burgh et al. (2011) argue that there is a relationship between community support, parental support, and children's coping.

There is a growing literature exploring the experiences of British military children. However, it has yet to fully consider how APs manage their children's experiences. There is consensus in the literature that deployment and overall military lifestyle impacts Army children but the extent of this varies (Greg, 2016). According to Dandeker et al. (2006), 61% of APs with children reported negative changes in their behaviours: tantrums and aggression (78%), sleeping problems (70%), emotional upset (52%), general insecurity (30%) and fixations with death (26%). To negate the negative impacts upon children during deployment, they found APs would try to protect them from news reports relating to the deployment and some argued that a longer period of notice ahead of departure would enable better preparation. Some APs in the study applauded their military school for the ways in which the situation was handled; a padre[6] came to speak to those affected and by showing pictures and facilitating conversation, the mothers reported that children were able to come-to-terms with the absence and felt more comfortable.

A more recent UK-based study published by the Children's Commissioner (2018) found that during deployment, children experienced emotional problems such as isolation, worry, breakdown of relationship between themselves and the remaining parent, increased arguments with siblings, and missing the absent parent. Additionally, they experienced practical issues such as having more household responsibility and helping to care for younger siblings. The researchers were also surprised to find that children were highly aware of details of their

[6] Ordained clergy who are members of the British Army's all-officer corps The Royal Army Chaplains' Department.

military-associated lives and received comments such as this from a 10-year-old boy: 'now my Dad's a seaman, which is like, the third rank. Pilot's the highest, but because he's a seaman, the activity is like a warrant officer […] and that means he has to go to other ships to check if they're doing the right job' (ibid: 3). Additionally, military children are highly aware of the challenges and uniqueness of their military lives caused by high levels of mobility and regular separation, which on the one hand gives them a sense of identity, whilst estranging them from relationships with civilian children. This report is useful but by not reviewing children's experiences in tandem with APs (or the wider family network), it obscures the key role and relationship between children and the at-home parent.

Deployment also places pressure upon relationships between the AP and SP. Dandeker et al. (2006) found that 51% of APs felt their marital relationship was negatively affected by the military. They argue that the military and family are greedy institutions, each making demands causing irritation when SPs could not attend key family events (the concept of greedy institutions will be explored shortly). Furthermore, US-based research found that APs are astutely aware that their SP is unlikely to be the same when he returns, nor will they be due to the level of responsibility and independence gained (Lapp et al., 2010). US-based research also found that military relationships were more likely to experience marital discord than their civilian counterparts (Asbury and Martin, 2012).

There is very little research indicating British APs' experience of mental health issues, especially when compared to serving personnel's experiences. Dandeker et al. (2006) argue that deployment had a significant negative impact on APs' mental health, yet this was not the case for those with the lowest levels of education. Generally, APs became more mentally robust as deployment progressed which the researchers suggest is due to the specific deployment in question being 'relatively quiet' with fewer casualties than was expected compared to other

deployments to Iraq (ibid.). US-based research has found that APs generally report higher levels of stress compared to civilian counterparts (Padden et al., 2011) and the longer the deployment, the more stress caused to the AP (Miller et al., 2018; Theiss and Knobloch, 2014; Asbury and Martin, 2012; Mansfield et al., 2010). However, US-based research conducted by Erbes et al. (2017) found that 79% of APs they researched were 'resilient' to both depression and alcohol misuse throughout the deployment cycle and therefore warn that just because a population has been considered high risk, it cannot be assumed that the individual will be experiencing this.

Since the early 2000s there has been a growing focus on protective factors for APs' management of deployment, again primarily dominated by US-based research. Much of this focuses on increasing APs' resilience but this has the consequence of excluding those who are not resilient from the story and makes it seem as though resilience is a state that is accessible to all (discussed shortly). The following explores some of the protective factors identified by previous research.

A lack of communication can cause the AP stress (Tollefson, 2008) and just hearing their SP's voice can confirm safety (Merolla, 2010). Yet, communication is much more complex as APs are cautious about what they discuss to protect the SP from emotional distress and distraction (Cafferky, 2014) and SPs hide emotions to maintain 'battlemind' (Bowling and Sherman, 2008). However, Rossetto (2013) found that maintaining communication enabled APs and SPs to experience intimacy, fears to be confronted, and by being open there was increased closeness, a smoother reunion, and avenues for emotional outlet and protection. Martindale-Adams et al. (2016) argue that better communication opportunities are likely to facilitate more joined-up decision making, making the post-deployment transition easier as the SP has not been as emotionally absent. Relying on communication can impact the AP as they become

'captive', waiting for the phone-call which results in apprehension if it is missed (Lapp et al., 2010) as telephone-based communication is unidirectional (AP cannot call the SP).

In her review of US-based research, Davis (2011) identified further protective factors that render an AP more likely to cope including having experience of multiple deployments (Johnson et al., 2007), having children (Wood et al., 1995; Weins and Boss, 2006), and seeking support from informal networks (discussed shortly). A US-based study conducted by Cafferky and Shi (2015) identified three ways APs attempt to manage separation from their loved one. Some APs were more susceptible to feelings of depression, loneliness, and anger at the military if they pursued unrealistic closeness to their husbands, through sitting by the phone waiting for it to ring and consuming all news stories available. Ignoring the realities of deployment created problems, and thus it is suggested that allowing emotional absence to develop bolsters the AP. Others chose to preserve themselves by pushing their SP away, claiming increased independence, denying the reality of the deployment (avoiding details) and actively developing strategies to avoid emotions. For example, keeping busy, avoiding thinking about their SP, and being on their own. Other APs found comfort in 'romancing' themselves – smelling clothes and writing diaries – maintaining the emotional connection. Many researchers have found that APs report numbness during deployment (Marnocha, 2012), suggesting that their lives are in suspension during this period and that it is just something to 'get through'. These coping strategies are various amongst APs, so there is no singular approach. Although deployment is not the focus of this thesis, these themes influence the post-deployment phase.

Rest and Recuperation

Rest and Recuperation (R&R) refers to a brief period in which a serving member may return home during a deployment. There is very little qualitative research available about APs' experiences of this. Dandeker et al. (2006) state that the experience is 'mixed'. Many of their

cohort thought the experience was positive as children were able to see their father and they could enjoy being a complete family unit. However, some experienced negativity due to the inability to select return home dates and disruption to the family once the SP left again. Over half of the APs interviewed said that they would prefer to trade R&R for a shorter deployment, whilst all SPs interviewed said it was an important feature to take a break from operational stress. This thesis explores in more detail APs' experiences of R&R as it is a period in which reintegration occurs, albeit for a short while, again addressing a gap in the scant literature.

Re-Deployment and Post-deployment

Immediately after deployment, British personnel undergo a period of 'decompression'. This means that personnel must spend a short period of time (up to two weeks) in a location that is not a theatre of war nor home (usually Cyprus) in which they may unwind and readjust. They are given the opportunity to share experiences in a structured yet informal manner with their peers and are provided with mental health education and other prevention activities. After this, personnel go through a normalisation period where they undergo structured activity and reintegration into the home-base. Generally, APs support this process as it helps SPs to adjust post-deployment; however, many felt that SPs should have 'access to their families during this period' (Dandeker et al., 2006: 11).

During the normalisation period, the US conducts mandatory health screening, but the UK does not and instead rely upon commanders and peers to detect mental health issues with little/no training (Fertout et al., 2011). This is highly problematic as issues may be missed or, at worst, ignored due to perceived stigma around mental health and help-seeking (discussed later). Indeed, returning personnel may carry home an array of issues post-deployment, ranging from physical disablement to the less visible mental health scars which will affect the reintegration process – potentially including issues associated with witnessing traumatic events, difficulty

with concentration and memory, PTSD, substance abuse, difficulty connecting with others, increased propensity towards violence both within and outside of the home, and missing the structure and camaraderie of military service (Bowling et al., 2008; Fear et al., 2010; Sundin et al., 2011; Kwan et al., 2017). In looking at the UK specifically, Fertout et al. (2011) argue that deployments to Afghanistan and Iraq have been characterised by varying degrees of stress ranging from often intense combat exposure, long periods of separation, austere living environments, and substantial rates of death/injury.

Building on the earlier point about the military relying on serving personnel's peers to identify possible problems, the military currently issues a 'pocket guide' to personnel outlining possible signs of a mental health related issue, and organisations the person may access (MoD, 2018b). It champions a system of "looking after your mates" to help personnel identify issues within the team, develop understandings of the complexity of suicide, knowing when to intervene/support/report and where to get support. The guide has been developed by the MoD and Samaritans and, whilst it is too early in the scheme to comment on its effectiveness, it does not seem to acknowledge previous research which has already identified various problems with personnel help-seeking perspectives and practices. For example, when suggesting personnel encourage their 'mate' to seek support from formal services such as welfare workers, it does not address concerns that have already been identified by researchers as possible barriers such as worrying about the impact this may have upon their career (discussed shortly).

Little is understood about APs' health and wellbeing within the UK, especially post-deployment, unless in relation to specific circumstances. For example, APs whose SPs experience mental health difficulties or are 'wounded injured and sick' may experience significant stress levels, alcohol problems, depression, generalised anxiety disorder, and symptoms of probable PTSD (Murphy et al., 2016; Thandi et al., 2016). One recent PhD study

conducted by Bennett (2017) expanded understandings by exploring the general mental health experiences of UK military partners finding that they evidence significantly greater levels of clinical depression, anxiety, stress and perceived stress when compared with general adult and clinical populations[7]. Post-deployment, Bennett (ibid.) found a reduction in depression, stress and perceived stress amongst the cohort. However, she also found that post-deployment, partners are more likely to present 'attachment avoidance' behaviours which are considered as attempts by partners to rationalise their difficulty in re-establishing emotional connections with their returned SP, or a defence mechanism against perceived 'abandonment' experienced during deployment. Research has found that a traumatised soldier often returns to a traumatised family (Hutchinson and Banks-Williams, 2006), and unsurprisingly it has been found that poor mental health in either the AP or SP renders the family more vulnerable to a problematic reintegration period (Rowe et al, 2013; Marek and D'Aniello, 2014).

US-based researchers Bowling and Sherman (2008) identify four main tasks that families navigate post-deployment. Firstly, they look to redefine familial roles and expectations to agree on a model of division of labour. The researchers state that within this process, pre-existing issues regarding power and control may (re)emerge – partners at home may have developed confidence and independence that they had not had previously and relinquishing these may be difficult. Secondly, families attempt to manage any 'strong' emotions. Happiness and pride which are enhanced by the warm welcome they receive on return wear off eventually, particularly when long lasting problems such as PTSD and anxiety emerge or become heightened. Additionally, mental health issues such as depression may emerge upon reintegration, particularly when role renegotiation is complicated. Thirdly, families aim to abandon emotional constriction. The researchers argue that personnel work to abandon strong

[7] A group of people studied to asses public health.

emotions other than anger (which is acceptable in combat) such as fear, worry, and vulnerability. This can create an air of numbness which may be counterproductive during the reintegration period as 'dropping the wall' for both the personnel and partners has been proved to be an important step towards the development of more positive feelings of attachment, trust, and intimacy (Pincus et al., 2001). Finally, they work to create intimacy and a shared meaning which has often been neglected during the absence. Personnel are likely to have built a strong sense of community with their unit, whilst partners will have built attachments with other families going through similar situations or even work colleagues and other friends. Bowling and Sherman (2008) suggest that building a shared understanding of what deployment looked like for one another, and the family, can help to bridge this gap created to cope with separation. These themes are also evidenced in the work of other US-based researchers (see Chandra et al., 2009; Lapp et al., 2010; Marnocha, 2012; Louie and Cromer, 2015; Bommarito et al., 2017).

An indicator of an unsuccessful reintegration period is relationship breakdown. UK-researchers Dandeker et al. (2006) found that most of the SPs interviews thought that deployment to Iraq was detrimental to the relationship yet none of the APs did. Interestingly, half of APs interviewed did not like the fact that their husband was in the military, yet most of them tolerated it due to financial stability. Unsurprisingly, higher levels of PTSD symptomology leads to both APs and SPs reporting lower marital satisfaction (Allen et al., 2010), suggesting there is a limit to APs' willingness to provide informal care. UK researchers Thandi et al. (2017: 562) state that deployed SPs 'perceiving that deployment had a negative impact on intimate relationships and children was associated with psychological distress, and traumatic stress symptoms' and was mostly experienced by those who felt they were at risk of being injured or killed.

There is limited research focusing on the experiences of the military child during reintegration within a UK-context – although military children's voices are being increasingly explored within other contexts such as 'weekending'[8] (Gribble and Fear, 2019). Children are not a direct focus of this research, as it instead aims to capture the perspectives and experiences of APs in relation to the family. However, I will briefly indicate some of the issues that have been identified by US-based research. Creech et al. (2014) examined the parent-child relationship and by reviewing the literature identified key trends: (1) across all age groups deployment of a parent may be related to increased emotional and behavioural difficulties for children including higher rates of healthcare visits related to psychological problems during deployment, and (2) symptoms of PTSD and depression may be related to increased symptomology in children and problems with parenting during and after reintegration. During reintegration, role and boundary negotiations, and reestablishment of relationships are challenging. Increases in PTSD symptoms were associated with self-reported poorer parenting practices in a sample of National Guard[9] fathers one year after returning from a combat deployment to Iraq (Gewirtz et al., 2010). In Blow et al.'s (2013) study, depression, alcohol use, and PTSD symptoms were correlated with parenting stress for both service members and partners. Marnocha (2012) found that most significant arguments between APs and SPs were about children as Officers return from deployment expecting children to follow commands. Interestingly, UK-based researcher Williamson (2012) found that controlling behaviour could transpose onto the relationship between AP and SP in her review of domestic abuse among military couples. Difficulties may also be exacerbated by long deployments as individuals may have changed significantly and children may not recognise their returning parent (Barker and Berry, 2009; Riggs and Riggs, 2011).

[8] SP living away from the family home during the working week.
[9] The reserve component of the US military.

An internationally informed edited book collection titled *Military Families and War in the 21st Century: Comparative Perspectives* states that much of the current research does not review reintegration beyond the immediate return of the SP (Moelker et al., 2015). Gewirtz et al. (2011) suggest that military family reintegration challenges may last for up to 3 years – showing that the impacts of deployment do not end upon return. It has also been argued by US-based research, conducted by Marek and D'Aniello (2014), that early research of the reintegration period assumes that deployment-related stressors subside during reintegration, yet later research suggests that reintegration carries new problems, and that the family never returns to its pre-deployment state. Therefore, this thesis explores 'reintegration' as a period that is defined by the interviewed APs to understand how they 'make sense' of deployment.

Considering current literature, this thesis addresses a gap by conducting a qualitative review of British AP's experiences, as they work to reintegrate the family unit, focussing primarily on the post-deployment phase as this is most neglected within UK literature. It is not exploring a specific deployment but rather combat-deployments and absences as a whole – aiming to capture APs' perspectives of multiple absences. Nor does it limit reflections to those captured shortly after the return of the SP, instead enabling APs to reflect upon long-term experiences of their families covering whatever time period they deem appropriate. Furthermore, this thesis adopts an alternative approach to much of the research just outlined which holds a largely non-critical standpoint. Instead, this thesis reviews the post-deployment phase through the theoretical lens offered by Critical Military Studies (CMS) literature, which will now be discussed.

Taking a Critical Approach: Militarism and Militarisation

The empirical work presented in the previous section, exploring APs' experiences, does not frame discussions around the impact of structures or power and thus obscures the gendered and

gendering nature of the demands/expectations made of APs due to (1) the demands of the military, and (2) masculinities and femininities within/around the military. However, there is a range of literature that does take a critical stance towards the military enabling researchers to interpret lived experiences within the context of the military as a cultural field which (re)produces power relations. Much of this work uses the concepts of militarism and militarisation to critique military processes. Although definitions vary (Stavrianakis and Selby, 2013; Dyvik and Greenwood, 2016), militarism can generally be understood as 'an ideology that prioritizes military force as a necessary resolver of conflict' and militarisation as the 'multi-faceted set of social, cultural, economic and political processes by which military approaches to social problems and issues gain both elite and popular acceptance' (Woodward, 2014: 41). Most importantly, militarism and militarisation should not be understood as politically neutral (Woodward, 2004).

Gray's (2015: 103) definition of militarism captures the everyday mundane social relations which make war possible: 'the normalised, every day, gendered social relations of the preparation for, and conduct of, political domination and control for which the use of organised violence is a viable option'. After all, war is the apex of a pyramid, contingent upon less visible material practices/military activities, and discursive strategies of militarisation, making war possible (Woodward, 2004). Gray's (2015) definition is most applicable for going forward as I will explore how AP's everyday experiences and perspectives of deployment, focussing specifically on the post-deployment phase, are influenced by military expectations which thus make war possible. Therefore, like Gray (ibid.), this thesis uses the concept militarism to refer to social relations whilst militarisation refers to processes which makes these social relations possible. With this I will explore AP's experiences of seeking help during the post-deployment period, moving beyond the non-critical approaches previously outlined.

CMS was born out of the frustrations experienced by academics whilst trying to conduct research within military and security studies. In their paper, Basham et al. (2015) define the purpose of CMS, whilst keeping definitive boundaries open to enable the field to grow. Key features of CMS are that it does not simply review the military to provide recommendations on how it can improve – instead it is theoretically informed, political, interdisciplinary, and moves beyond dominant quantitative approaches (Basham et al., 2015; Basham and Bulmer, 2017). Exemplifying and justifying this approach, Enloe (2015) argues that militaries, war, and militarisation are fragile processes that rely on a series of complex and gendered assumptions. She offers the example of recruitment campaigns and asserts that if researchers do not take seriously questions about how recruiters imagine and target specific masculinities and femininities, they risk rendering invisible truer accounts of the costs and outcomes of war. By adopting a critical feminist approach when reviewing seemingly trivial situations and relating these to militarisation processes, researchers speak to broader questions about how militaries are created, sustained, and deployed. Enloe (ibid.) argues that to not take a critical standpoint is to play a part in your societies' process of militarisation, rendering invisible the fragility of the system. She wrote earlier that 'the militarization of women takes such humdrum forms, because it tends to insinuate itself into ordinary daily routines where it is rarely heralded or even deemed noteworthy' (Enloe, 2000: 3). That is, in the case of this thesis, to not critically review seemingly unimportant moments and processes within an AP's experiences of managing/negotiating and coping with deployment is to render their 'emotional' and 'family' work invisible. By failing to take questions relating to APs' experiences seriously, military researchers cannot fully understand how militaries are sustained via the support (or lack of support) of the SP's loved ones.

Very little research relating to British AP's experiences of their military-associated lives considers how the gendered military culture influences their lived experiences. Previous

research has certainly illuminated the gendered nature of serving person's lives – for example by exploring recruitment processes/becoming, and post-military lives (Higate, 2003; Woodward, 2003; Woodward and Winter, 2004; Brown, 2012; Bulmer and Eichler, 2017). There is no doubt that the military is a gendered institution as the roles available carry gendered expectations of individuals' suitability and these assumptions are justified through division of labour, organisational culture, ideology, and identity interaction (Carreiras and Alexandre, 2013; Carreiras, 2017). A significant body of research has identified military culture as traditionally masculine in nature, meaning that characteristics such as stoicism, independence, rationality, and strength are most valued, leaving little room for displays of emotions - especially within combat-related roles (Enloe, 2000; Higate and Cameron, 2004; Coll et al., 2011). These have been (re)produced through recruitment, socialisation, role-allocation, hierarchy, and discipline (Carreiras, 2017). Popular imagery and language produced in Army recruitment campaigns and recruitment offices pertain to warrior-images. Slogans such as 'Be the Best' evidence this and campaigns embrace 'excitement-seeking' through using language such as 'weapons', 'combat' and 'soldier' (Strand and Berndtsson, 2015).

However, the gendered nature of the military is much more complex than a simple binary between male: female, masculine: feminine as the military encourages 'softer' skills such as communication and compassion due to increased peace-keeping operations (Duncanson, 2013). From conducting ethnographic research alongside the UK's Military Stabilisation Support Group, Greenwood (2016) argues that although their core role is less like the traditional 'warrior' - by supporting the regeneration of local infrastructure, liaising with other stakeholders, maintaining legal and moral obligations, and awareness - it evidences 'chameleon masculinity'. Furthermore, masculinity is 'hidden under a cloak of empathy and 'tea parties' – the ultimate aim still being to 'destroy the enemy'' (ibid: 97). Therefore, rather than seeing changes in role, or the gender of soldiers, as evidence of the (re)negotiation of gender within

the military, it is evidence of the fluidity, adaptability, and durability of masculinity. The recent Army recruitment campaign 'This is Belonging' (see Triuneself, 2018) focuses on how the military is a supportive environment, offering friendship and support – contrary to research arguing that serving personnel experience significant barriers to seeking support (Murphy and Busuttil, 2014). Higate and Manchanda (2018) summarise the message it purports which claims that the Army will accept you, without judgement, no matter who you are – female, gay, a practising Muslim, emotionally vulnerable or unfit. However, they warn of its appeal, saying that it ignores sexism and racism, instead presenting itself as the paragon of justice as it constructs itself as diverse and liberal, thus constructing those it positions itself against as otherwise. Furthermore, recruitment campaigns have been rightly criticised for portraying military life as superior to civilian life, glossing over the realities of military life, tokenising and stereotyping diversity, exploitation of adolescent vulnerability, and the depoliticization of the military purpose through the promotion of self-development (Louise and Sangster, 2019). Ultimately, these messages fail to resemble the realities of SPs, and of course their families', lived experiences.

Not only has previous research identified the military as a gendered institution, but it is also gendering, gender-granting and/or a gender-defining institution (Carreiras, 2017). Researching from a UK-context, Woodward and Duncanson (2017: 2) state that 'the gendering of military institutions is not a peripheral, additional or incidental issue but is foundational to them' and this occurs in more 'striking' terms than is evident in other civilian institutions. Previous research by Enloe (1983: 1) states that 'military men have sought to control women to achieve military goals' through the history of the marginalised camp follower (a woman who cooked, cleaned, and provided sexual gratification for the soldiers), to the modern, yet not entirely different, figure of the military wife. Enloe (ibid: 5) argues that the military relies on specific

ideas of sexuality so to mould both women and men into performing roles which contribute to the sort of organisation it needs, specifically:

> To portray the soldier's regiment as a 'family' which cares for him and to whom he owes loyalty is one solution. But without women, this is a difficult enterprise. If women can be made to play the role of wives, daughters, mothers, and 'sweethearts', waving their men off to war, write them letters of encouragement and devotion in the field, reminding them that women's and children's safety depends on men's bravery, *then* women can be an invaluable resource to the community.

Enloe (1983) argues that women have been utilised by the military to (1) foster support for the military by giving it a less brutal public image, (2) provide emotional support to male soldiers, (3) provide cheap labour for social agencies operating around the camp, (4) maintain and perpetuate the ranking system by performing it among themselves, and (5) bear children to produce the future military. The AFC is exposed to gendered norms and expectations and by negotiating these, they are reinforced and/or resisted in complex ways. Gender is created through social interaction/relations rather than through biological fact. For example, Harrison and Laliberté (1993), researching in a Canadian context, argue that combat ideology directly impacts military members and their families by perpetuating an idea that the fighting force must always be combat-ready. Combat-readiness is maintained through the militaries' control of members and that male bonding is essential to unit cohesion. By interviewing the wives of Canadian serving personnel, serving personnel, and FSWs, they found that wives' work was organised by military structures and operational imperatives – the context they focus upon specifically is the high mobility experiences by military families. Work involved domestic labour, childcare responsibilities, socialising with other military wives, and organising tasks around postings. This work, if not conducted 'successfully', is considered the wives' fault

rather than a product of the pressures upon them or the absence of their SP – their unpaid labour is rendered invisible due to its relegation to the private sphere, yet the work is critical to combat effectiveness. Additionally, 'the military seems to create the conditions of isolation and joblessness [due to high mobility], only to subsequently take advantage of this in order to acquire unpaid work that will be gratefully performed' (ibid: 63). Similarly, researching the wives of British Army Reservists, Basham and Catignani (2018) argue that their everyday domestic and emotional labour constitutes the home as a space to be protected, thus making war possible. This research shows how fragile the military system is, as it relies on women's compliance to perform these roles in order to justify, legitimise and make possible combat.

Furthermore, research exploring APs' experiences of military culture within Israel found the division of labour was profoundly traditional and gendered as APs were almost exclusively responsible for 'family work' (Eran-Jona, 2015). This occurs within households where the AP is 'an intelligent young woman' (ibid: 47), in a wider societal culture where men are taking on more 'family work', showing that the military's 'gender regimes' lag behind civilian society. This is enforced and justified by the 'culture of sacrifice' in which the combat-officer sacrifices the family unit to adhere to military expectations and demands. These include 'an exhausting workload, physical hardship, life-risking situations, lack of control over time, uncertainty regarding career track, and absence from home' (ibid: 53). These demands gender the family and the APs' role and identity as she is 'tacitly recruited into the military by assuming her husband's role at home' (ibid: 53). What is pertinent here, as has been discussed by other researchers exploring gender, is that her AP identity and role is understood in relation to his (SP).

Woodward and Duncanson (2017) argue that the relationship between gender and the military is also relevant to the ways in which wider society perceives, and thus lives, gender as militaries

are intertwined with the history of the nation-state and gendered roles - male as protector, female as protected. They argue that military and civilian constructions of gender are dialectical, influencing one another. The home/hearth is framed as a sacred space to be protected from harm, which in turn justifies military force – blurring the boundaries between the public and private spheres (Basham and Catignani, 2018; Gray, 2016a). As mentioned earlier, war is made possible by women's everyday gendered labour within the home. Therefore, within research on militaries (as gendered and gendering institutions), it is also important to consider the civilian context as it is intertwined with the military and militarisation. On initial consideration, one would assume that changes in gender relations challenge this notion, as women expect to have an equal say in the public sphere and men expect to have more involvement with child-rearing. Within the military, research has found that APs also expect their SP be more involved in family duties than in the past (Jervis, 2011). Yet, Higate (2001) argues that the military lags behind wider society in terms of exemplifying values relating to diversity.

There is a growing body of research exploring APs' exposure to the masculine, militarised culture and how this affects their lived experiences and perspectives through macro and micro levels. However, this remains limited, especially within a UK-context. Through her analysis of a series of interviews with military partners who have experienced domestic abuse and have since left the relationship with their SP, Gray (2015, 2016a) argues that the divisions of the porous, mutually constitutive public/private, masculine/feminine divides are framed through the needs of operational effectiveness. For example, the military 'allows' APs to live in military accommodation, whilst at the same time denies them a secure position as their inclusion depends on their relationship with the SP. Additionally, support services do not prioritise APs' needs, as their focus is upon personnel and operational effectiveness. This is problematic for issues of relationship breakdown and domestic abuse as it impacts women's ability to leave;

Gray (2015) refers to this practice as structural violence. APs are fundamentally disempowered due to their exposure to the military as an institution and it begs the question – is welfare not flawed if it treats part of its population as secondary to another? Although Gray (2016c, 2017) reflects upon the post-deployment phase in terms of whether domestic abuse is framed as being *caused* by SP's exposure to war/trauma, accusing this framing of unhelpfully depoliticising domestic abuse, she does not explore the everyday experiences of military partners post-deployment in terms of how they experience reintegration with their SP and family. Furthermore, as it is beyond the scope of her project, the analysis does not consider those who have not experienced domestic abuse or who have not separated from their SP. Therefore, this thesis will build upon Gray's work by reviewing help-seeking within the context of post-deployment instead of the specific case of domestic abuse.

Much of the current research exploring APs within the UK treats them as a homogenous group whose identities, interests, and values are the same. However, femininities, like masculinities, are multiple, as is evidenced by the various AP identities that have been identified in previous research exploring the 'ideal military wife' (Harrison and Laliberté, 1993; Enloe, 2000; Horn, 2010; Aducci et al., 2011; Gray, 2017). The ideal military wife is one who performs the gendered division of labour to support their SP, the military, and military objectives. By extension, *she* exhibits self-reliance, stoicism and resilience which may lead to the avoidance of help-seeking. This research suggests a continuum of roles and identities, rather than a fixed notion of the feminine AP. Enloe (2000: 36-37) argues that the notion of a good wife has been deliberately manoeuvred by military officials and civilian state authorities which are responsible for waging war, mobilising women's femininity and labour so effectively that often these ideals are internalised and naturalised. The manoeuvring of the figure of the Army wife is a process rooted in history (for example the camp follower), providing the military with not

only the much needed domestic, emotional and sexual labour, but also symbolism to identify 'what must be protected' (ibid.).

Yet, APs interpret the militarised cultures that they are exposed to in different ways as they do not live exclusively within a military sphere and crucially they have agency. For example, Hyde (2015, 2017) argues that British APs are not necessarily and irreversibly militarised subjects. In her ethnographic study exploring APs' experiences of their mobile and ambiguous positionality between military and civilian spaces whilst living on an over-seas camp (Germany), she argues that APs are both subjects and agents of militarisation. They are sometimes complicit in its reproduction, but there are also moments where they resist or negotiate its effects. Examples include the ways in which APs consider the permeability between 'military' and 'non-military' dualisms such as combat-zone/home and civilian/military. The ways in which they perceive the interrelatedness of these categories presents the negotiations they make in understanding their everyday lives. Hyde (2017: 205) states that 'it is women's selective mobilisation of these discourses in flux around them that is key to their capacity to bargain with the terms of their militarisation' – even if through their bargaining, paradoxically they become agents of the militarisation process. For example, on the one hand perceiving divisions between the combat zone and home, and on the other acknowledging the permeability between the two spaces – indicating their agency and negotiation of military affects. Therefore, Hyde (2015) argues that militarisation (and by extension its gendering effects) is not a process that is monolithic, top-down and absolute, but rather is unevenly dispersed amongst different populations, contexts, and is fluid across social relations.

Factors such as encouraging and supporting more APs into employment, and the increasing number of women joining the British military, are also likely to have an impact on the culture

of the military and APs. In the Portuguese context, Carreiras (2015) argues that since the 1960s more APs have been entering the employment market and it is therefore considered by the military estate that APs have developed other social connections beyond the AFC, thereby validating the general absence of institutional support. For this reason, military families are becoming less visible and accessible to the military estate. It could be argued therefore, that the general move of more APs gaining employment reduces their reliance upon the military. However, research within a Turkish context found that as more APs became employed, they required more support as long working hours and the absence of the SP clashes with childcare responsibilities (Varoglu et al., 2015).

APs live gendered lives, as do other women in society. However, what renders APs' experiences unique is the specific ways in which gender(ing) is influenced by military demands, policies, and expectations. At this point, there is little theoretically-informed research available exploring how the post-deployment experience genders British APs' roles, expectations, experiences, and help-seeking perspectives/practice. This gap is addressed, moving beyond uncritical interpretations of APs' lived experiences through considering processes of militarism and thus contributing to the work of scholars such as Harriet Gray.

The Limitations of the 'Emotional Cycle of Deployment': The Case for Liminality

Previous research that separates the experiences of deployment into the ECD is useful as it shows how families face different challenges within each stage (although limited by a lack of research on the UK context). However, this thesis proposes an alternative approach, moving away from the linear metanarrative model of the ECD, to expand and improve theoretical understandings of the lived experience of APs. One quantitative study in the US explores the turning points, in terms of marital satisfaction, experienced by Army wives within each phase of the deployment cycle (Parcell and Maguire, 2014). By doing so, it shows that there are

multiple trajectories within each phase, and that experiences of marital satisfaction cannot be simply framed in the broad categories offered by models such as the ECD. Furthermore Norris (2001: 55), who reviewed Canadian military partners' experiences of deployment, contends that the ECD obscures practices enacted by female military partners and argues that:

> [D]eployment may not be just a discrete event or a period of time which periodically punctuates the lives of female military partners, but a process involving purposive activity and practices. Conceptualizing deployment in this way enables one to see that deployment may not just be a military phenomenon that "happens" but may actually be accomplished in part through the work of female military partners.

Additionally, Faber et al. (2008) looked at how partners of US reservists experience the absence of their SP. They consider Boss' (2007) concept of ambiguous presence - when a family member is perceived as physically present but psychologically absent - to show how Army families experience loss outside of the actual deployment period. They focus on the post-deployment phase, but the concept of ambiguous presence can be extended into more areas of the deployment cycle and military experience to present the complexity of the 'cycle'.

This qualitative thesis will be open to complexity by facilitating the analysis of experience as intertwined with the past and expectations of the future. To do this, I propose using the concepts 'greedy institutions' (Segal, 1986) and liminality (Turner, 1967) which are defined shortly. By doing this, this thesis is able to explore whether the challenges faced by APs and the resulting help-seeking behaviours are caused less by the fixed moments of the deployment cycle, but rather the reactions to the disruption, transition, and breaking down of social practices caused by often non-negotiable military demands.

Time, as a concept, occupies an undercurrent in much of the literature exploring deployment, but is not overtly discussed in the research outlined earlier. Some publicly available information alludes to the temporal influences upon experience: the British Army expects to deploy much more regularly, for longer periods, and at shorter notice by 2025 (MoD, 2015a). Families are unlikely to experience a singular absence, but rather repeated and regular absences due to deployment, training, and other military requirements. Furthermore, when family relationships start to regain normalcy post-deployment the SP may be recalled, thus repeating the separation process (Lapp et al., 2010). Deployment is just one military-specific factor that causes separation, enforcing a suspension of normalcy, creating a sense of 'waiting'. High levels of mobility are experienced by many Army families – relocating on average every 2-3 years (Families Federations, n.d.). Families may choose to serve accompanied or unaccompanied – accompanied tending to mean they will move with the SP and live in Service Families Accommodation (SFA) (subsidised military housing), whilst unaccompanied means that they likely live separately with extended absences from the SP who they may only see at the weekend. Further separation may be caused by training and exercises – these can occur at any point and take place globally for months at a time. The nature of military life is one of cumulative absence where the military career constantly impacts family life (Gribble and Fear, 2019). This cumulative absence likely impacts the temporal experiences of family life, routines are disrupted, social roles are suspended and altered, due to the imposition of militarised times and demands.

Adding to how time has been understood within military families, research disagrees at which point families complete reintegration and become 'normal'. Reintegration is likely to be a subjective period dependent upon various factors which are family/context-specific (Gewirtz et al., 2011; Creech et al., 2014). Current studies tend to focus on the immediate reintegration challenges, obscuring how deployment continues to impact the lives of Army families, thus

assuming the 'normal' is accessible and achievable. Studies which do this reproduce an idea that the effects of deployment have an end point – that pre-deployment is the start, deployment the middle, and post-deployment the end. My personal experience instead indicates that military families are marked by their experiences of deployment and there is no going back to 'normal' post-deployment as family roles and expectations will have changed. Framing the deployment cycle as a process APs progress through, where each stage is independent of the other, limits the complexity of this experience. Not least as some research indicates how previous stages of the ECD continue to inform and impact experiences later - Gambardella (2008) found that previous marital conflict negatively affects the smooth transitioning of reintegration.

There is a push/pull logic here, where the military appears to impose upon and impact the rhythms of time within the family. This tension has been well captured by research which deploys the concept of Segal's (1986) 'greedy institutions' (see Moelker et al., 2015) – a tool which typifies the military and the family as greedy, where they compete for the immersion of the serving person into its rules, norms, and expectations. The military requires sacrifice, frequent mobility, physical danger, and responsibilities that often extend beyond normal working hours. Whilst the traditional family demands high levels of both emotional and financial input from the parents, who are expected to live lives of compromise for their significant other and children. Enloe (1983) has argued that military commanders prefer to treat their troops as eternal bachelors, and the prospect of them marrying worries them due to the possibility of split loyalties. Key areas of tension between APs and the British Army includes the emotional conflict caused by SPs missing events such as births, the estrangement from children due to deployment-related demands, and the difficulty in coordinating leisure-time (Dandeker et al., 2006). Creating a work-life balance between these two institutions is

extremely difficult and continues to be a problem for the military hoping to recruit/retain its personnel.

This disruption to family time and routines, to accommodate military time and routines, could be captured by utilising the concept of liminality. Therefore, moving beyond the simplistic categorisation of experience contextualised within specific moments. The concept of liminality generally refers to a stage of ambiguity between separation (pre-liminal) and reincorporation (post-liminal) with society or a social order (Turner, 1967). During this state of limbo, individual's roles, statuses, and understandings of their self are ambiguous and yet to be realigned with the next social state. Thomassen (2009) argues that liminal periods are evident when social hierarchies are revised or temporarily dissolved, continuity with tradition may become uncertain, and future outcomes thrown into doubt. Liminality may be used to understand in-between periods and how individuals react to liminality by considering their thoughts and experiences (ibid.). Furthermore, liminal periods facilitate the development of a new social status, allowing for persons to become reflexive about their situations and develop new imaginaries about their futures (Shields, 2003).

Thomassen (2009: 16) argues that liminality may be applied to multiple subjects, temporal, and spatial dimensions, developing understandings of the experiences of transition and the adjustments individuals make to manage that change:

> Experiences of liminality can be related to three different types of subject: 1) single individuals, 2) social groups (like cohorts, minorities), 3) whole societies, entire populations, maybe even 'civilizations'. The temporal dimension of liminality can relate to: 1) moments (sudden events), 2) periods (weeks, months, or possibly years), 3) epochs (decades, generations, maybe even centuries). The spatial dimension of liminality can relate to: 1) specific places, thresholds (a doorway in a

> house, a line that separates holy from sacred in a ritual, specific objects, in-between items in a classification scheme, parts/openings of the human body), 2) areas or zones (border areas between nations, monasteries, prisons, sea resorts, airports), 3) 'countries' or larger regions, continents.

It is useful to consider liminality alongside the concept of transition. Transitions, defined as inner reorientation that individuals experience when faced with a disruptive life event or change (Bridges, 2004), occur within every individual's life course. They may be driven by the move from childhood to adulthood, relationship change, having children, relocation, physical and mental health, and the negotiation of the labour market. Petch (2009) states that transitions are a process rather than a singular event involving adjustment and recalibration. Petch (2009) stresses that transitions may have both positive and negative elements, as even change that is 'for the best' is likely to invoke a level of uncertainty and doubt. Equally, transitions that are negative may also create positive impacts such as development of coping skills. Meleis et al. (2000) argue that individuals will often experience more than one transition at a given moment and that they are best managed when recognised and the individual develops reflexive skills, situating themselves, increasing the likelihood of developing coping resources leading to more fluid and adaptive ways of being. Transition caused by disruption requires the individual to change their sense of self, this is a psychological process of adaptation in response to disruption (Kralik et al., 2006). Each of these points should be taken into consideration when exploring APs' experiences of deployment. Most importantly, that the transition caused by the various stages of deployment will not be the only transition AP's face during these specific times – they and their children age, they may relocate, they may have a child for example.

To respond to my research questions, liminality can be used to understand individual and community experiences of post-deployment. It enables the opportunity for APs to frame time

in a way that makes sense to them – if post-deployment challenges are more prominent in the earlier stages or developed later, this may be captured. The framework also enables participants to describe the places/spaces which mean something to them – rather than prescribing specific localities.

The concept of liminality has been used in reference to the AFC. For example, Gray (2015) refers briefly to the liminal status of military partners when describing their identity within the British AFC – they are on the one hand included as 'supporters of SPs' and 'allowed' to live within military accommodation and given access to welfare provision, but on the other are excluded by being treated as secondary to the SP. Gray (2015: 143) notes:

> [T]he military institution both draws lines around the community in ways which bring civilian women married to servicemen inside, and that these women exist within the military sphere as dependents, as add-ons to their serving husbands, and not, therefore, as full and equal members of the communities in which they live.

Hyde's (2016) research has explored the complex nature of APs' liminal experiences between civilian and military spaces, focusing more on lived experiences than immersion into military policy. Based upon the 6-months' ethnographic study, she argues that temporality is important when thinking about militarisation and the everyday experiences of women, living over-seas in Germany, married to servicemen deployed to Afghanistan. She reviews the spatial and temporal register of militarisation to uncover how it shapes the experiences of these women, showing that the theatre of war is manifest in their everyday lives, troubling the division between the home and combat zone. This is caused by frequent communication between the two spaces (re)creating the presence/absence of loved ones in the different spaces though letters, calls, and pictures pinned to children's bedroom walls. Furthermore, the combat zone impacted everyday family-life when two soldiers were killed, leading to a communication blackout from the

military, wives being unable to gain formal information and thus relying on watching the news and talking to one another. In this case, the event is paused in terms of time whilst at the same time *happens* in Germany, blurring the boundary between the home and the combat zone. She concludes that 'militarisation – as a state of being, as a lived experience – is nothing if not the very conflation and confusion of military and civilian, the simultaneous coexistence of multiple times and spaces, a grey area' (ibid: 865). She does not specifically refer to liminality as a concept, but her analysis alludes to APs' liminal experiences as between military/civilian, home/combat-zone.

Later research conducted by Baaz and Verweijen (2017) explored liminality and agency specifically among Army wives in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Like Gray and Hyde, they also argue that the Army wives' status ambiguously sits between the military/civilian worlds due to military governing arrangements. They also explore the Army wives' agency in responding to these arrangements, arguing that not only does their tactical reversal of this militarisation indicate their agency, but also their complicity to certain features such as gendered domestic labour – showing how they invest and disinvest to their subject positions. As such, they are both agents of, and resisters to, militarisation.

These studies are deeply illuminating in understanding the in-between liminal experiences of APs in terms of their military/civilian identities. There is also a body of literature which shows that serviceperson's military/civilian identities are blurred, treating identity as 'doing', rather than 'being' and thus showing how they live in-between these spaces/identities (for example Atherton, 2009; Woodward and Jenkings, 2011; Herman and Yarwood, 2014). However, there is a gap in understanding how APs experience liminality specifically around deployment and the post-deployment phase which this thesis seeks to address. Furthermore, as outlined by researchers including Thomassen (2009) and Shields (2003), liminality as a concept can do

more than this: it can be extended to understand social hierarchies in flux, the breaking down of norms and traditions, the impact upon imagined futures, and facilitate space for reflexivity and potential resistance.

Coping Strategies and Help-Seeking

The final theme explored in this literature review focuses upon APs' help-seeking practices and related coping strategies, showing that although there are pockets of knowledge available, primarily within a US context, there remain gaps. Specifically, it is unclear how APs living within the UK navigate and negotiate the various support options available to them, how support comes into being, how and why one approach is used over another, and the effectiveness of specific avenues. Often research treats both formal and informal avenues for support as a given, assuming AP's have equal access and unproblematic experiences. Neither has research adequately considered the perspectives APs have of the formal support services that are made available via the military-estate. Furthermore, research exploring help-seeking practices often takes a non-critical lens which obscures the impact/role of gender and militarisation. Gray's (2015, 2016a, 2016c, 2017) work does, but as described earlier, it focuses upon military partners who have experienced domestic abuse and have since left their SP. This thesis will seek to address these questions and will apply a similar critical lens to Gray in order to understand help-seeking through both formal and informal avenues when managing life post-deployment.

It is also important to understand how APs navigate and negotiate the various support pathways available to them – framing this decision in terms of preference is problematic as it limits meaning and understanding. For example, UK-based researchers Dandeker et al. (2006) found that informal support networks are more often accessed and preferred by APs, generally living in Germany, as opposed to formal support offerings. However, no further information is offered

about the reasons for this and so it is implicitly suggested that informal support is quite simply the most effective mode of support. Yet, a survey of Royal Air Force partners found that 45% believed current support provisions were inadequate (Fossey, 2012) so it could be the case that APs prefer not to access formal support due to a perceived or actual inadequacy in service offering. Therefore, this thesis will address this gap in the literature. It also includes an exploration into formal support workers' (FSWs') perspectives to gain a better understanding of how the figure of the help-seeker/the AP is framed by those providing support. This may create an additional opportunity to consider the militarisation/gendering of the AP and help-seeking practice.

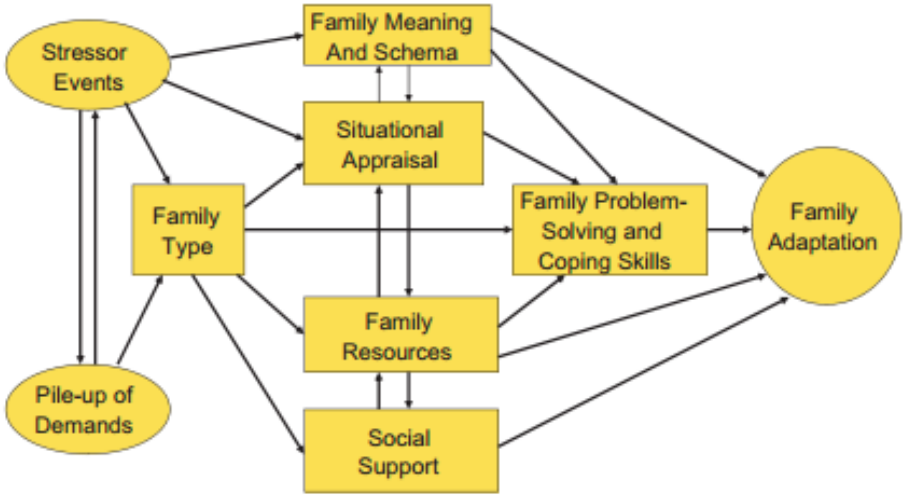
This review also reflects upon literature on the limitations of help-seeking, focusing primarily on stigma including the work of Goffman, Bourdieu, and the recent *Stigma Monographs* (Tyler and Slater, 2018b). Previous work exploring limitations to help-seeking within the AFC often cites stigma as a key barrier. However, this literature does not consider stigma at both micro and macro levels. Therefore, this thesis takes an alternative approach in its analysis of help-seeking barriers to understand if help-seeking is stigmatised, by whom, and for what purposes.

Family Systems: Resilience and Coping Strategies

Before outlining the research currently available that relates to AP coping strategies, Chapin's (2011) application of McCubbin's Family Resilience Theory to the military is presented. His work adopts a psychological approach to understanding coping behaviours which is beyond the remit of this thesis but is of interest as he develops a framework which outlines the interconnectedness of the family unit; after all, APs' identities and experiences are intertwined with their relationships and the experiences with other family members. McCubbin (1996) developed a tool to understand the stressors that military families experience and how they buffer against stress and operationalise coping techniques. The aim of this was to enable

researchers and support-workers to identify weaknesses in family systems, therefore indicating points of intervention. Figure 1 shows a simplified model of McCubbin et al.'s (1996) family resilience framework (image retrieved from Chapin, 2011: 529):

Figure 1: Family resilience framework



If a family has meaning, cohesion, problem-solving (coping skills), is adaptable, resourceful, and utilises its resources effectively the outcome can be positive when faced with stressful events. By following the arrows in the model, it is clear how factors and coping mechanisms interact with one another, therefore presenting processes as complex, overlapping, and certainly not linear.

Chapin (2011) applied the model to military families' experiences, arguing that its utility may provide social workers and mental health practitioners with a strengths-based approach for going forward (strengthening military families' resilience). Deployment can affect a family in multiple ways and can add strain to the family system. However, military families regularly face disruption - crisis is the norm. To apply the model to the military family experience, Chapin (2011) considered the framework within the context of three scenarios: the SP returning from deployment experiencing PTSD-related symptomology, being physically disabled, and

killed in action. These scenarios are outside of the remit of this thesis as its aim is to consider the experiences of APs managing 'less extreme' consequences of their military-associated lives. However, the application of the theoretical tool shows how practitioners may understand resilience to be bolstered from multiple areas.

The 'family meaning and schema' section represents the tools families use to identify themselves as a group and distinguish themselves from others. Often this comes down to identifying themselves as a 'military family', for others this may be affiliation with a sports team. Chapin (2011) argues that the identification as a military family may give it a unique strength, one which replicates the values of the institution itself will give meaning to deprivation, struggle, separation or violence, increasing its resilience. This is a key weakness of the study as it does not consider how the appropriation of military values into the family may negatively affect coping strategies – an area of contention discussed earlier. Additionally, if the family do not support the soldier remaining within the military, their connection to military values and related support is likely limited. Also, anti-military sentiment may be exacerbated when the returning personnel returns injured, leading the family to question whether the deployment was 'worth it'. Another weakness of the study is that Chapin (2011) does not highlight the importance of more mundane family meaning-making techniques such as shared interests, meals, and celebrations – these are all impacted by military demands and disruption.

This work links to a wider project, specifically within a psychological discourse, which aims to bolster the resilience and resiliency of military families and their members. Cramm et al. (2018) conducted a narrative review to understand how resilience has been operationalised, arguing that its various definitions and uses throughout the literature render it a highly complex

and problematic concept. They warn of a risk of perpetuating the model of resiliency (ibid: 634):

> Many military families are, in fact, enjoying a state of resiliency […] we advance that there are risks to the statement "military families are resilient"—risks that transfer blame and shame to them if they are not able to achieve a state of resiliency. Military families are resilient—until they are not.

After all, even the most 'resilient' of persons and families may still falter under systematic injustice and disadvantage (Hamby et al., 2016). Cramm et al. (2018) also warn that emphasising the building of resilience within military families may lead to those who are not considered resilient being stigmatised, especially as military families are so often framed as self-reliant and strong, placing responsibility upon them to overcome difficulties. The concept has become politically problematic and is imbued with social meaning which places negative connotations upon those it is associated with. Therefore, when referring to the concept resilience in this thesis, I mean it as 'the socially constructed traits expected from military families, enabling them to cope', rather than a trait which can be bolstered.

Individual Coping Strategies

The primary aim of this thesis is to understand APs' experiences, so I now move on to explore a series of empirical studies with this focus. I outlined the critique of much of this work at the start of this section. US-focused researchers Dimiceli et al. (2010) argue that there are two broad types of coping employed by APs: (1) problem-focused coping and (2) emotion-focused coping. Problem-focused coping involves doing something to address the stressful situation such as planning, accepting, and seeking informal support. Emotion-focused coping includes attempts to reduce the emotional reaction towards the stressor via strategies such as avoidance,

distancing, and self-blame. The researchers found that during deployment APs' coping strategies tend to focus on managing problems, rather than emotion-oriented coping strategies, suggesting that they work more to alter their stressor rather than endure it. Applying this argument to this thesis, it is indicative that through developing coping strategies and/or seeking help, AP's are operationalising their agency in the response to the negotiation of military-related demands upon theirs and their families' lives.

Personal Coping Strategies

US researchers Davis et al. (2011) commented that personal coping strategies are essential for APs and involve developing a positive attitude, ensuring preparedness, changing anxieties into positive activities, and developing a routine. Pre-deployment, APs' key coping strategies involve preparing for the absence of the SP by coordinating communication opportunities, preparing the family, and facing the possibility that the SP may not return (Lapp et al., 2010). During deployment, key coping strategies involve keeping busy by managing personal, family and household responsibilities, staying connected with the SP, and taking time for themselves (ibid.). APs also avoid watching television to avoid hearing about their SP's deployment which would usually cause additional worry (Marnocha, 2012). Previous literature has also identified that imagining romantic reunions also helps APs cope with the absence (Wood et al., 1995; Merolla, 2010). Researchers are yet to significantly reflect on coping strategies that are employed post-deployment and simply comment that patience is necessary, it is important to make space for one another, and that APs cope best when they do not anticipate that things will be smooth (Marnocha, 2012; Lapp et al., 2010). Therefore, this thesis will pay attention to personal strategies utilised by APs in order to understand how/if these shape everyday experiences and perspectives of the post-deployment phase. It is important to note that although I have chosen to define these as personal strategies, I am not arguing that there are 'good'

personal strategies as this places the responsibility for coping upon the AP (and not coping may be framed as their personal failure), obscuring structural problems (militarism). Rather, personal strategies are instead framed as methods used by APs to negotiate militarised effects post-deployment.

Informal Support Networks

It is well documented in both UK and US-based literature that a key method for support-seeking and coping is to turn to informal sources (Dandeker et al., 2006; Merolla, 2010; Williamson, 2012; Skomorovsky, 2014; Cafferky and Shi, 2014; Bowen et al, 2015). Also, APs tend to prefer to seek support from informal avenues rather than formal mechanisms (Dandeker et al., 2006; Lapp et al., 2010; Aducci et al., 2011; Manigart et al., 2015). Informal networks may provide persons with social support, attachment, trust, and emotional affliction (Fine, 2012). Connecting with others, especially with those in similar situations, has long been documented for leading to positive health and wellbeing outcomes within the civilian sphere (Ellison et al, 2007; Rivera and Soderstrom, 2010). For APs, seeking informal support is beneficial as those who are active in doing so, tend to manage the separation of their SP during deployment more easily (Figley, 1983) and higher levels of informal support predict lower levels of stress, regardless of the number of deployments (Van Winkle and Lipari, 2015). Smith and Christakis (2008) argue that essential features of informal networks include how ties between individuals are made, who they are made up of, and the kinds of relations that are perceived by individuals. Perspectives are impacted by perceived access, availability, and quality, and their ability to navigate between the various nodes of the network available to them – this specificity is yet to be understood within a British military, non-over-seas living context.

US-based research focussing specifically on informal support-seeking within the context of deployment has shown that APs highly value support received from friends and family due to

the provision of advice, being outlets for stress, and enabling the AP to talk about their situation (Merolla, 2010). A more recent study conducted by US researchers Cafferky and Shi (2014) found that APs draw strength from each other, protecting them from feelings of loneliness during deployment, and providing practical support such as mowing the lawn. Meeting other APs was facilitated by attending formal support programmes and groups. Of course, there are also issues of a perceived lack of privacy within the UK AFC, which need to be understood in greater depth (Gribble, 2017; Gray, 2015; Dandeker et al., 2006).

Stress-buffering effect of support networks, whether inside or outside the AFC, are important factors for the general wellbeing of APs. UK researchers Dandeker et al. (2006) found that both during and post-deployment APs sought and received the most support from other military families and work colleagues, even though they were aware of formal support available (UWOs). APs living on-patch favour informal networks to provide a buffer against deployment-related stress and they neither expect nor choose to use the military as their primary support (ibid.). Living in SFA is a popular option for many not only because of the reduced rent but because it enables immersion with and exposure to the AFC. However, this research does not explore why APs prefer to seek informal support, or how informal support networks are developed, maintained, and perceived. Therefore, it treats informal support networks as a 'given' that are equally and unproblematically accessible to all.

Jervis' (2011) account challenges this seemingly unproblematic account of informal support within the military community. By interviewing military partners who lived over-seas, she discovered that there were occasions when partners sought the support of others, due to the distance from previous friends and family, but it was not received – challenging the myth of the supportive military community/the military family. She also describes a time when she, a military partner, was lambasted by her husband's colleague's partner for refusing to arrange

flowers for an upcoming dinner. She was criticised for not supporting her SP and was treated as being disloyal to her husband and country (also discussed by Enloe, 2000). It was within this encounter that she realised there were multiple military partner identities and that hers subverted the norms/expectations and was thus considered a threat, not only to the identity of the upset military partner, but also to the security of the country. Furthermore, she criticises the patch for creating an arena in which those living within were subject to higher levels of military control, after all accommodation is offered to military families in order to maximise operational effectiveness, and bad behaviour could result in homelessness. So, like described by Gray (2015), military partners are drafted into the military whilst simultaneously excluded from full membership/inclusion.

UK researcher Williamson (2012) broke down the various levels of informal support, showing that 67% of her participants would talk to friends, 63% would talk to family members, and 40% would seek support from websites and forums. Yet it does not explore the meanings behind these statistics, limiting interpretability. Addressing this gap, Gribble (2017) was the first to focus on military partners'[10] connections within the AFC, wider social networks, and family members. By focussing on those who lived accompanied, she found that living on-patch helped military partners experience 'belonging'. Yet, relationships with other military partners was complex: partners generally felt supported by those married to SPs of a similar rank to theirs, yet this also had the negative effect of leading to division and suspicion. Ties with other military partners were often considered 'weak' due to short-term relationships developing yet disrupted due to mobility, friendships being based on proximity and convenience, and the existence of cliques. The report also argues that APs value the support provided by the wider family and frustration develops when they feel they are missing out. Her work also explores experiences

[10] Her research cohort included spouses of members of the Royal Navy, Royal Air Force and Army.

of civilian friendships, albeit in limited depth, alluding to cultural differences between the military/civilian communities and the difficulty for civilians to comprehend military-life. This thesis will add to her discussion by reviewing data specifically from the AP community, extending reflections beyond those who live accompanied, focusing on the context of post-deployment, and considering perspectives and experiences alongside whether they choose to access formal support. This thesis will also explore the experiences of seeking support from civilians in greater detail. Furthermore, it will also apply a theoretical framework, as indicated above, which considers help-seeking alongside gender and militarisation.

One study, conducted within the US, goes into greater detail about APs' experiences of seeking support from civilian friends versus military friends. By interviewing APs, Davis et al. (2011) found that they silenced themselves around civilians to protect themselves from the 'pain' of some civilian responses such as forgetting about the deployment, pity, talking about death, or responding with politically charged sentiments (they shouldn't be there anyway). One partner in the study said that this also applied to Doctors who respond to military-related stress by offering Prozac – an anti-depressant - when all they wanted was to be listened to. It would have been useful for Davis et al. (2011) to explore this engagement with civilian FSWs further, but it was outside their research remit. This thesis extends this exploration into a UK context, reviewing not only APs' experiences of seeking support from civilian friends and family, but also from civilian support services, and service offered by the military.

Formal Support

The UK Government outlines its moral obligation to the AFC in the Armed Forces Covenant (MoD, 2011b). It acknowledges both military personnel and the role families play in supporting the Forces. The two key principles are that (1) the AFC face no disadvantage in the provision of public and commercial services, and (2) that special consideration is given, such as to the

injured and bereaved. The Covenant includes Regular personnel, Reservists, veterans, and families, including those of the bereaved. The term family refers to the immediate family and is defined as spouses, civil partners, and children. It is not a legal document and the MoD recognises that it is yet to deliver the ambitions of the Covenant adequately (MoD, 2016a). Enloe (1983) states that support is only offered to the AFC to enable the military to maximise its own effectiveness and retain personnel. Furthermore, Horn (2010: 67) exploring the US military family argues that 'below the surface of the military's family programs is the constant awareness that the military is designed to fight wars, not provide social welfare programs'.

Previous research has identified that the primary function of military-organised formal support is to foster resilience and bolster informal networks (Bowen et al., 2000; Mancini et al., 2005; Hollingsworth, 2011). Hollingsworth (2011) argues that it is the failure of formal services to encourage supportive informal networks within communities that leads to their service use. APs' experiences of informal networks are yet to be fully researched within a UK-context, especially with regards to how formal support 'promotes and mobilises informal networks' (Andres et al., 2015: 326). The experiences of living in a British AFC has so-far been conducted primarily in over-seas locations where it is posited that due to being posted far from informal networks, APs may become more likely to seek formal support and support from the AP community (see for example Hyde, 2015; Jervis, 2011; Dandeker et al., 2006).

In order to recruit/retain service personnel, considering the voluntary nature of military service in Britain, a support package has developed since the 1960s to mitigate the negative impacts of the military lifestyle upon the family (for an outline see Jervis, 2011: 48-53). Within the UK, current formal support available to military families has been developed due to the identification of key areas of disadvantage, when compared to civilian experiences. These have been identified by numerous reports conducted by charities, think-tanks, and some academic

researchers. The key focuses of military-organised support can be split into three categories – practical, health, and relationships.

Practical issues generally stem from the expected mobility of military families, as many APs leave their homes, friends, and families to be close to their SP whilst some move over-seas. This impacts the availability of a general support system and so charities such as Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association (SSAFA) offer help with practical issues. Another impact of mobility is the difficulty for APs getting a job, let alone maintaining a career (CSJ, 2016; Gribble et al., 2019). Therefore, there are specific recruitment agencies such as Recruit for Spouses (since 2012) that work with APs. A government initiative was recently reviewed, finding that spouses felt more confident about job-seeking due to the support received in developing their skills and qualifications (Caddick et al., 2018). Yet supporting a person to gain employment is not the same as supporting them to gain the employment they would have had if they had not been involved with the military. Although the mobile lives of APs provides a barrier to employment/career progression, there are also issues of stigma evident from potential employers: 'military families are seen as transient, employers often overlook them, even when they have good skills, in favour of candidates who are perceived to be more geographically stable' (CSJ, 2016: 5). It is also important to note that mobility also negatively affects children's educational achievement (McCullouch and Hall, 2016). The Government currently offers a Service Pupil Premium[11] to any school attended by service children, enabling them to provide additional pastoral support.

Health issues can be created or exacerbated by the military lifestyle. Little is known about the extent of military partner health and wellbeing but organisations such as The Ripple Pond, Army Families Federation, and the AWS support families by signposting to relevant

[11] £300 per pupil paid directly to schools (MoD, 2018c)

organisations and/or listening. CSJ (2016) posited that spouses may feel strain due to prolonged single parenthood, worrying about their partner, or having to support the mental/physical ill-health of their partner. A US-based study conducted by Asbury and Martin (2012) found that frequent moves and ongoing separation can increase the likelihood of partners' experiences of depression and anxiety. APs' health needs are addressed by the NHS, whilst SPs' health and dental care is treated by the MoD. Currently, mental health services are provided to personnel through the military Department of Community Mental Health. CSJ (2016) has suggested that mental health training is offered to partners of personnel to help them recognise signs of mental health issues (it is unclear who they should be 'looking out for' – themselves, their families, or their SP). Alcohol misuse is argued to be of a greater prevalence within the British military than the general population (Fear et al., 2010) and the MoD is reviewing how it may provide support to military families, primarily around reducing perceived stigma and the concern that help-seeking will impact the SP's career.

Relationship issues are likely to be experienced in the deployment phases either pre-, during, or post-deployment due to the presence/absence of their SP. Again, organisations work with families to mitigate these negative effects and on most military patches there is a Families Community Hub which enables partners to meet, socialise, and share experiences. According to Keeling (2014), military personnel under the age of 30 are almost three time more likely than their civilian counterparts to be separated or divorced, but interestingly they are less likely in the over-30 years bracket. It has been found that military couples marry at an earlier age than civilian couples (ibid.) and this is effectively encouraged by the military organisation as the accommodation policy (at the time interviews were conducted) only allows for married couples to cohabit. This is an example of Segal's (1986) 'greedy institution' concept and of Gray's

(2015) 'structural violence' commentary as the system negatively impacts agency by limiting choice[12].

The Royal British Legion recently conducted a study aiming to identify gaps in current support provision available to the AFC, including personnel (serving and non-serving), their family members, estranged spouses, and bereaved family members (Herrity et al., 2011). By interviewing 150 individuals identified via support organisations' databases, they found that the majority of those interviewed had experienced health, welfare, and social needs – the most common including depression, anxiety, stress, physical limitations, and cognitive pain and impairment. Primary social problems included loneliness, adjustments to civilian life, social isolation, and difficulties with new or existing relationships. Due to the study design, most individuals had sought support from at least one source. However, not all were satisfied with what they had received. The key gaps they identified were (1) lack of proactive support services (often relying on self-referral), (2) difficulty in getting longer-term support, (3) the need for a designated, named contact, (4) lack of a centralised service meaning some felt support differed geographically, and (5) a general lack of recognition of the needs of the SP's family.

Three further UK-based studies have explored APs' perspectives of the possible barriers to them seeking formal support, albeit in the context of seeking support for domestic abuse. In Williamson's (2012: 1384) study, she found that 'the most common response related to participants' views of inadequacies within the military welfare system that were described as lacking in confidentiality, untrained, unprofessional and ineffective'. This finding was not elaborated upon, perhaps indicative of its methodology which involved surveys rather than interviews. In fact, Williamson (ibid: 1377) stated that 'in hindsight, a more qualitative

[12] My findings show that military housing policies (re)enforce stigma around unmarried co-habitation as it denies recognition of these relationships.

approach to data collection might have been appropriate'. Therefore, this thesis collects qualitative data via a series of lengthy interviews to gain depth from AP experiences and perspectives of seeking various avenues of support to understand how they navigate and balance decisions.

Questioning the role of culture and tradition in the military, Higate and Cameron (2004) interviewed UK military partners and found that they considered formal support services interest in their lives unnecessary and outdated, explaining that this is due to the military being a 'paternalistic total institution' – an argument echoed in later research conducted by Jervis (2011). Some felt significant discomfort in being considered a 'dependent' and the level of data the military required of SPs including their marital status. Some partners desired privacy from the AFC (peers, formal support services, and the military) but found it difficult to obtain. Additionally, inclusion/exclusion into military services, such as housing and welfare based on marital status, were criticised by partners for being outdated. Higate and Cameron (ibid.: 214) concluded that:

> We remain unconvinced that the traditional features highlighted in our study are of particular value to overall organizational functioning, or ultimately, to combat effectiveness. Rather, these aspects of lag might be better explained by considering the institution's paternalistic and masculinist culture, elements of which have lingered on through the weight of tradition.

The data was collected as part of a broader study exploring transition from service to civilian life and therefore does not go into detail about the impact of deployment.

Gray's (2015) thesis undertakes a focused analysis into the experiences and perspectives of military partners seeking formal support, specifically focusing on those who have experienced

domestic abuse and have since left their SP. Military partners are expected to present evidence of stoicism and strength, this being an ongoing project for them, in which the consequences for not conforming (to some extent) may result in relationship breakdown. These ideals are performed by military partners, they are learnt and subjected to disciplinary power (see Foucault, 1975), and their perceptions of success can lead to pride, yet perceptions of failure to anxiety. This pressure to stay strong limited APs who were experiencing domestic abuse to seek support as admissions were associated with being unable to cope – APs perceived this to be the antithesis of being 'strong', therefore embedding themselves into self-policing and a 'circulation of shame' (Gray, 2015: 127). Gray (ibid.: 126) asserts that this is not a coincidence but instead a manifestation of the social relations of militarism 'which rely upon the performance of symbolic and practical roles by civilian women married to servicemen'. A key strength of this research is that it contextualises the military welfare system as a product of its culture and social history. It moves away from other forms of research which are positivist, problem-solving, failing to critically engage with military cultures or demands/disruption, and leading to the consequence of naturalising these systems. However, like Higate and Cameron's (2004) study, it does not focus specifically upon the post-deployment phase – a gap this thesis addresses.

Stigma and Help-Seeking

The work exploring help-seeking among the military community often cites stigma associated with seeking help as a barrier, but it does not explore stigma as a concept. Since Goffman's (1963) seminal text on stigma, there now exists an extended portfolio reviewing a variety of stigmatic attributes perhaps most notably mental illness, physical illness, and sexuality (for example Corrigan et al., 2006; Vogel et al., 2007; Cornally and McCarthy, 2011). Generally, stigma has been used to explain phenomena in which individuals, groups, and wider society

attach a notion of disgrace to an activity, practice, or behaviour in order to show how this judgement is socially constructed. If an attribute is marked with stigma, those with whom it is associated may experience feelings of embarrassment or exclusion. For Goffman (1963), stigma comes into being through social relations when an individual's attribute has been subjected to a negative stereotype which calls into question the morality and character of the stigmatised person. Link and Phelan (2001) discuss how stigma exists when people distinguish and label human differences based upon dominant cultural beliefs. Labelled persons are associated with undesirable characteristics and are placed in distinct categories which separate 'normals' from 'others'. The 'others' lack access to social, economic, and political power leading to a loss of status and/or discrimination.

Stigmatised attributes have been grouped into three categories - deformations of the physical being, tribal stigmas such as race or religion, and traits used to infer weakness of character. These may lead to three different types of discredit, including social, physical, and moral. Each type of stigma is associated with a different level and mixture of discredit. Stigma that is attached to the weakness of character often leads to moral discredit which receives, in Goffman's terms, the highest levels of discrimination and intolerance from 'normals' in society. The 'character flaw' is associated with failure within the individual, created through their own choices, for example the stigmatisation of obesity (Roehling, 2005). This is unlike a physical impairment which may be looked upon more sympathetically as it is seen as beyond the individual's control. These experiences vary across different cultures and societies depending on education, awareness, and tolerance. Gutting (2005) argues that Foucault (1978) differentiates between the 'other' and the 'marginalised'. The other is one that is excluded from society whilst the marginalised continues to be part of the system, they may share the same values, speak the same language but occupy a liminal social space between the inside and outside because their identity is defined in terms of values which counter the mainstream.

Additionally, they belong to a group whose welfare is systematically subordinated to the welfare of the 'normals'.

Goffman was a symbolic interactionist, meaning that he argues that reality is constructed via interaction and the use of symbolic reference to define objects. For Goffman (1963), social order does not exist *a priori*. Goffman infers that individuals operate identities, not because they 'have one', but rather because they are expected to *be* someone. Identities are defined by a limited set of characteristics that symbolise a type of 'being' including age, gender, race/ethnicity, class, disability, occupation, and others. If an individual were to reject having an identity, this would interrupt social cohesion. Goffman's inference that individuals *need* an identity alludes to a consideration of how the structure may shape the possibilities of social life, but he is not explicit about this aim (Hannem, 2012).

The Sociological Review Monographs brings Goffman's lack of consideration of how stigma links to wider structural issues to the fore. In the introduction, Tyler and Slater (2018a: 721) state succinctly that 'the conceptual understanding of stigma inherited from Goffman, along with the use of micro-sociological and/or psychological research methods in stigma research, often side-lines questions about where stigma is produced, by whom and for what purposes'. They are clear that this critique has been made before by researchers such as Parker and Aggleton (2003), yet they expand on this by applying their critical perspective in understanding the role stigma plays in the recent 'Heads Together' campaign – a project fronted by members of the British Royal Family aiming to rid stigma that surrounds mental health. By unpicking its situatedness within the cultural and political economy, it shows how stigma functions as a form of power. They argue that campaigns such as this co-opt personal stories leading to the commodification of experiences - what Costa et al. (2012) have termed mental health and wellbeing 'marketplaces' - where the primary aim is to build a 'brand' to maximise funding.

Rarely do campaigns address the broader issues affecting stigmatised individuals. Tyler and Slater (2018a) contextualise mental health issues as produced by failed promises by the establishment about increasing mental health funding, cuts to key frontline services, increasing need due to ongoing austerity politics (which in turn increases chronic stress), and more difficulty in accessing frontline services (counselling). Focussing on encouraging individuals to talk about their mental health experiences obscures alternative realities, specifically relating to the quality of the services available – assuming their current set-up is appropriate limits the effectiveness of the campaign. Additionally, previous work by Jensen and Tyler (2015) argues that the state has utilised stigma to justify welfare cuts – by rendering the individual culpable for poverty.

Therefore, researchers exploring stigma must critique stigma motivation by 'gazing up', looking for who produces stigma and for what purposes, thus denaturalising existing power arrangements (Tyler and Slater, 2018a; Paton, 2018). By doing this, Tyler and Slater (2018a: 727) added to their critique of the 'Heads Together' campaign by showing that it is:

> [B]ankrolled by some of the very corporate and financial organisations who are the beneficiaries of neoliberal economic policies (and the austerity reforms) which are eroding state welfare and social care, and in doing so are exacerbating mental distress amongst the poorest and most vulnerable in society.

It is essential that future work considering the concept of stigma within given social fields and contexts locates it within the political context to illuminate power, moving beyond Goffman's a-political formula (Tyler and Slater, 2018a). Stigma can be considered as more than a perspective that is generated within social relations, but also as a form of governmentality that is intricately linked to structural power. It is with this emergent way of studying that I approach

stigma within the thesis by exploring APs' experiences of it within the context of the military and gendered relations.

Research exploring stigma in the military has identified it as a key barrier to SPs accessing support (Greenberg, 2003; Iverson, 2011; Murphy and Busuttil, 2015). Researchers such as Dunt (2009) link stigma to attributes deemed desirable and enforced within the military context such as toughness and self-sufficiency – leading to limited help-seeking practice as people experiencing mental distress are assumed to be weak and dependent. Although illuminating, much of the work that references stigma experienced by APs does not critically engage specifically with how stigma is produced, by whom, and for what purposes (see Dandeker et al., 2006; Williamson, 2012). Additionally, it does not consider how it impacts military communities' everyday experiences, often presented as a help-seeking barrier that exists within the moment of considering whether to seek support, rather than an experience that impacts the everyday fabric of their lives – governing perspectives, behaviours, and practice. That said, Gray's (2015) analysis alludes to many of these questions but only makes specific reference to stigma twice. What results from this limited conception is that stigma associated with help-seeking is insufficiently considered within the cultural backdrop of the military, ignoring the perpetuation of norms and values within the community through 'stigma strategies' (see Tyler and Slater, 2018a), and understandings of the effectiveness of the support services available is limited. Therefore, possible resolutions focus on changing beliefs rather than changing the structures that shape social relationships (Pescosolido and Martin, 2015; Tyler and Slater, 2018a). This thesis will review stigma as described.

Through the lens of masculinities/gender, military-focussed research has considered stigma and its association with help-seeking. As aforementioned, it has been identified that emotions are not valued, whilst the admission of struggle is seen as an abandonment of self-control,

control being considered central to military-competence (Hoge et al., 2004; Dahn, 2008; Cornish, 2017;). This culture is pervasive and evident in military recruitment campaigns through both overt depictions and in what they obscure. These messages, and by extension the publications made available to Army families around the levels of support they can expect (and can therefore seek), can be equated to propaganda. Shildrick (2018) reviewed the case of Grenfell Tower and found that narratives depicting poverty (incorrectly) are best described as poverty propaganda which serve to stigmatise and label those experiencing poverty. It pathologises poverty, blaming it on the individuals who can only be workshy, lazy, and therefore culpable. These messages are so powerful that even those experiencing poverty are abstracted from their own realities and believe them. This critique indicates an opportunity for 'military media' relating to coping and help-seeking to be reviewed – equating its messages against reality. Advice pamphlets made available to Army families misrepresent the level of support experienced within the community, therefore serving as 'coping propaganda' – this misrepresentation is explored in this thesis by reviewing APs' perspectives of experiences that disrupt the notion that the military provides a supportive space/community.

Returning to the primary purpose of this section, to review stigma within the context of gender, I turn to US researcher Wertsch (1991) who argued that on a psychological level, serving personnel adopt a 'warrior identity' where they adapt their beliefs, behaviours and practices in accordance of their perception of what a warrior would 'be'. They follow rules, cultures and this provides a sense of purpose and meaning. Most interestingly Wertsch (1991) defines the military as a 'Fortress' to exemplify the difference in experience of the military and civilian communities. By doing this, Wertsch (1991) highlights the contradiction that military families grapple every day of their serving lives – they live without democracy in the name/perception that they are defending the values of democracy on the international stage. They have little/no say about deployments, mission strategies, relocations and families are expected to adapt to the

will/demands of the military – a greedy institution (Segal, 1986). Permeating concepts such as 'honour' and 'sacrifice' create problems as they encourage soldiers to deal with their problems individually and, according to Hall (2011), the greater the soldier perceives the importance of honour and loyalty, the higher the chance they may sacrifice relationships with family and friends. Hall (ibid.) argues that the culture of the AFC is distinct from civilian society and that support workers (within a US context) must be aware of this when working with military families.

Coll et al. (2011) argue that there are key virtues that are purported by the military and AFC which differ from civilian society. These influence 'values, traditions, norms, and perceptions that govern how members of the armed forces think, communicate, and interact with one another and with civilians' (Coll et al., ibid.: 489). They argue that each branch of the military fosters its own values; however, there are unifying core values that replicate across many divisions of the military including honour, courage, loyalty, integrity, and commitment. These values serve as a standard in how to regulate daily lives. DeGeorge (1987) has argued that additional values, which are often overlooked, include peacefulness, restraint, and obedience. Coll et al. (2011) have suggested that these values may seem contradictory, but for a military family the difference lies in the motivation and goals. To them, war is an effort for peace, the concept of a just war necessitates restraint, and obedience is represented by the moral obligation to accomplish said legitimate aims. However, this does not mean that they do not question the purposes, and if they deem these as negative this is where disillusionment may occur – leading to a heightened chance of developing mental health issues. What is not considered by this research is how these values and norms impact AP perspectives and experiences specifically.

Rarely does research consider other barriers which may impact an APs' likelihood to seek support from (in)formal avenues. Other possible barriers to accessing formal support, beyond

stigma and concerns surrounding confidentiality, are more practical in nature. Support varies across local authorities, and according to the size of the garrison families are located in/around. Therefore, access varies and understandings of what is available to individuals and how to navigate the possible routes can complicate help-seeking. Additionally, more Army families are moving away from military communities, instead living in non-military accommodation in part to protect non-serving members' careers and education (AFF, 2016). An upcoming change to military housing policy may also lead to even more families living away from base (Gribble, 2017; MoD, 2018e). The distance may well impact the ability to physically approach formal support spaces or attend social events organised in/around the camp. Previous research has identified that APs living away from base already feel excluded, out of the loop, and want to feel more involved with the community (Fossey and Verey, 2013).

Linked to this, Murphy et al. (2016) found that UK APs who are supporting a SP with mental health issues are more likely to report practical access barriers rather than those associated with stigma. The two most common reported barriers were 'not feeling as if their difficulties were a priority' and 'fearing that other people would not understand them'. Others included 'difficulty having time off work', 'childcare issues' and 'being unsure of where to seek help' – in that order. Additionally, those experiencing depression or generalised anxiety were more likely to report a greater number of barriers to help-seeking and were more likely to endorse barriers relating to stigma. A key weakness of this study is that the study involved APs endorsing (or not) a list of 8 pre-set barriers. This limits our ability to understand the social meanings APs associate with the categories and may influence participant understanding of their own experience and self, nor does it consider who they are seeking support from.

Conclusion

The literature so far has done well to identify the unique experience of stigma and its impact on help-seeking practice within serving personnel and has recently started to move beyond to consider the AP perspective (although still incredibly limited within a UK context). However, it has not yet explored how stigma materialises within the community, how it is perpetuated and maintained by both the AP community and their interaction with military-associated formal support services and, more specially, the military institution. Nor has it contextualised it within the 'spectre of deployment', instead focussing on specific issues such as domestic abuse (Harrison, 2006; Gray, 2015, 2016a, 2016c, 2017) or APs who care for SPs experiencing mental health issues (Murphy et al., 2016). Overall, this literature review has shown that previous work too often does not apply critical analysis to military events, instead treating them as a given – this thesis therefore explores experiences through the lenses of gender, and of liminality, whilst troubling the often 'take for granted' nature of deployment. An AFC that is masculine in culture and close-knit creates a difficult barrier to overcome when considering where and how to seek support. Therefore, it is essential that the influence of being involved within the AFC and exposed to masculinised militarised culture is assessed from an AP's perspective, to see how/if this impacts their experiences - and resulting help-seeking practice - around the deployment cycle. Increasing understandings of how militarised culture may impact an individual can help social workers, health professionals, and other supporting professionals to provide the most effective and targeted level of support possible. The next chapter outlines the Methodology of this thesis, including the key research questions which have been identified through this review.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodology of this project including the rationale for choosing to conduct a series of semi-structured, in-depth interviews to answer questions exploring the perspectives and experiences of APs accessing and negotiating various support options when dealing with the return of a SP post combat-related deployment. It engages with key debates surrounding qualitative methodologies, justifying the decision to use semi-structured interviews to produce data, and outlines the research design. Discussion will also cover how access was gained, the details of those who participated, how interviews *happened*, the type of knowledge obtained, ethical considerations, and data analysis processes.

Throughout the chapter, I bring to the fore my identity as an embodied, situated, and subjective researcher who exists within the social and institutional context of the research field. I am an 'Army daughter' and therefore have experienced many of the issues discussed by participants including high mobility, the deployment cycle, and the cultural field of the military. Additionally, in January 2018 my partner joined the Royal Navy and by extension, I became a 'military partner'. Greene (2014: 1) states that 'insider research is that which is conducted within a social group, organization or culture of which the researcher is also a member'. Although my identity merged closer to that of my research cohort over the years spent doing this thesis, I am not a total insider, even if this change in identity made me experience further empathy with the APs. After all, I was not a military partner until the 3rd year of the project, and regardless, have not experienced the same issues as my participants. Instead I am a partial insider (Chavez, 2008). Depending on the specific moment in time of my PhD, the people I spoke with, the intended purpose of communication, and the discussions shared, I moved between being a 'researcher within', a 'researcher with familiarity', and an 'outsider' in relation to the cohort/field (Kirke, 2013). As my experiences inspired this thesis, I see it fit to introduce

myself further, as these drive the research including its design, access, interviewing, and interpretation of data.

Throughout my childhood, as the daughter of an Infantry Officer, I moved every 1-2 years and would often experience one school year in two different schools, at opposite ends of the country. Our family relocated with my father, living in military accommodation, until I reached secondary school age and they decided to buy a house in a small civilian village to ensure consistency of education. Life in our sleepy, chocolate-box town was pleasant and I continue to call it 'the closest thing I have to home'. Looking back, I realise that I felt a constant undercurrent of unease, isolation, and the feeling of being forever misunderstood. This was heightened during and after my father's deployments to Iraq in the mid-2000's.

When speaking about the experience with friends at school, my stories and concerns went misunderstood and I was regularly asked questions like 'will your Dad go to war?', 'what will you do if he doesn't come back?', and 'has your Dad ever killed anyone?'. These questions were the antithesis of the responses I had experienced and had come to expect in my previous life living close to other military families in garrison towns. It made me feel isolated, out of touch with the emotions I felt I was expected to have, and I began to feel guilty for not missing my father as much as I felt I was expected to. To me, it was normal life, but to others it was alien and something to pity, and in some cases, something to judge. I felt disconnected from others, even though my teacher regularly checked in on me to make sure I was 'ok' (gratefully received but not something I was used to and made me feel even more alien). As we lived away from the AFC, we were not able to access other military families and local support services such as the UWO. Our lives turned into a cycle of performance – showing close friends and family that we were unaffected by deployment and that we were coping, resilient, and flourishing. Similar perspectives were discussed by research participants – the idea that one

must present an image to the world that the family is strong. It was in instances like this when I felt a great connection to my research participants, we shared stories, and were able to support each other through the telling of uncomfortable experiences.

When my father returned from Iraq, I expected that the family would go back to 'normal'. The disruption was over, so why would it not? We could resume our old roles and enjoy the presence of our much-valued parent (and for my mother, her husband). However, his return was uncomfortable as we had all changed. He had been away for a long-time due to re-deployments; children had grown up and we had been challenged in his absence. Likewise, he had changed. Reintegration post-combat, to me, is the most complicated aspect of the military lifestyle and our family's adjustment is ongoing, lasting now over ten years. I will describe situations where my shared identity, as a partial insider within the research field, impacted the research process including issues of positionality (insider/outsider), access, interviewing, ethics, and interpretation. Unlike some researchers who have strived to develop distance between themselves and the cohort, I have used shared experiences to produce specific types of knowledges that are co-produced between the researcher and researched. After all, as was discussed by Kirke (2013), embracing one's insider-ness strengthens research by further enabling the researcher and researched to understand one another, identify deviations from researcher expectations in the data, gain access to a difficult-to-access institution, and develop conclusions that are understandable to researcher and researched.

Rationale, Aims and Objectives

Qualitative enquiry is often presented as the critique of quantitative approaches to research, positioning itself as the opposition to some of the processes valued within the natural sciences (Bryman, 2012). However, it is problematic to simply address qualitative research's strengths

with regards to what quantitative research cannot do (ibid.). Instead, its justification of use should be made with reference to the nature of the research project and research questions.

The epistemology and ontology of knowledge is where qualitative enquiry distinguishes itself from more positivistic approaches – what we can know about the social world (what is knowledge) and what is real (what is existence). A qualitative methodology offers a way of approaching the social world, establishing how we know, what we can know, and which methods are most appropriate to produce this knowledge. Some social theorists have disputed the existence of objective knowledge; 'social, institutional and cognitive processes are central to the constitution of scientific understanding' (Irwin, 2001: 75). They refer to the qualitative argument that it is not possible to uncover a 'truth' external to society, instead recognising the interrelatedness of the social with both the construction of knowledge and the perception of being. That is not to say that there is no reality separate to society – but perhaps it is not something we can access as our perception and understanding is imbued with society.

Berger and Luckmann (1967: 17) argue that it is not the role of the sociologist to deal with questions of whether 'reality' and 'knowledge' exist where 'reality' is 'a quality appertaining to phenomena that we recognise as having a being independent of our own volition […] and to define 'knowledge' as the certainty that phenomena are real and they possess specific characteristics'. Rather, this is the role of the philosopher. Instead, a sociologist is not looking for 'reality' but aims to explain phenomena that exists within a society as 'reality' and 'knowledge' that exist within social contexts. Sociology concerns itself with a variety of knowledges (regardless of notions of (in)validity), as socially constituted. The qualitative researcher's role is to explore meaning, rather than measurement (Holloway and Biley, 2011).

This thesis' aims and objectives could not be met by adopting a positivist/quantitative approach as it focuses on experiences and perspectives – where everyday life is treated as social

knowledge – which are formed in part by participants' exposure to military expectations, processes and culture. This thesis explores the following research questions:

What are the perspectives and lived experiences of APs accessing formal support and informal support networks, when dealing with military and non-military related stress, during the reintegration period post combat-related deployment? Specifically, this involves the analysis of the following:

- What are APs' lived experiences post-deployment?
- How do APs manage/negotiate the military lifestyle? How do they access support - formal support (as offered by the military estate and associated charities), informal support (friends, family, neighbours etc.), and personally?
- What are the limitations to APs seeking support? A review of lived experiences and perspectives of access and efficacy.
- How effective are services in supporting APs and their families?

This thesis explores the everyday lives of APs when experiencing the return of their SP post combat-related deployment. Therefore, it is appropriate to produce this knowledge by gathering the perspectives and experiences of APs and those working in military family support roles. Perspectives and experiences are personal accounts of individuals and are dependent on how they, as individuals, interpret the world (discussed shortly). Moses and Knutsen (2007: 11) state that 'rather than uncovering a true account, constructivists seek to capture and understand the meaning of social action for the agent performing it'. By recognising the multiple perspectives within society, this thesis explores how knowledge is 'made' between social actors, creating meaning, and exclusionary/inclusionary boundaries.

For example, the AFC should not be regarded as a fixed category. It is imbued with social meaning as a way of making sense of the world and creating inclusionary/exclusionary boundaries between 'military' and 'civilian'. Families of those serving are regarded as part of the AFC (see Armed Forces Covenant: MoD, 2011b), but they do not serve. Rather, they are included due to their existence in a society that values the family as an institution, assumes shared experience, responsibility and collaboration (caring role, relocation with the SP, support/prioritise the military career). Parents of serving personnel and best friends are not considered in the overall support package to the same extent, relying on the assumption that they play less of a role in supporting serving personnel. This evidences how socially constructed boundaries impact policies, which in turn impact practice. Similarly, by regarding the social as a construct, notions of a military culture (such as valorising masculinity) can be interrogated as a product of meaning-making, rather than something that exists, is natural, and should be maintained.

However, social constructionism should not be pushed to the point that nothing exists, as if that were the case what would the point be in researching the social world? Moses and Knutsen (2007) discuss how scientific realists try to unify the contentious issue of social constructivists' rejection of the real world, by stating that instead we can accept that there is a real world, but humanity cannot see beyond its social lens. I acknowledge that categories such as 'the AFC' are social constructs. However, categories do inform a version of reality for the individual – they are recognised, maintained, negotiated, reinterpreted, and resisted. Berger and Luckmann (1967: 56) state that 'the phenomenological analysis of everyday life, or rather the subjective experience of everyday life, refrains from any causal of genetic hypotheses, as well as from assertions about the ontological status of the phenomena analysed' – enabling the common-sense to be treated as a social knowledge. The collection of perspectives, as products of the experiences of the everyday, show how participants interpret the world around them.

Exploring cultural knowledge helps the researcher understand how participants interpret and negotiate 'reality' (Wynne, 1996). For example, we know that there is welfare and support available to APs, and by exploring exactly what is available we could develop an understanding of the support network APs exist within. However, existence of welfare and support does not transpose into being able to say that partners are 'supported'. By exploring the experiences and perspectives APs have about available support, a better understanding of whether they are adequately supported or not may be developed. Therefore, to capture depth and rich understanding of participants' daily realities, adopting a qualitative methodology is essential.

Quantitative researchers aim to produce research that is valid and reliable. Qualitative researchers have instead adapted languages used to audit good research practice and discern quality to acknowledge what we can know about the social world (Silverman and Marvasti, 2008). Trustworthiness is a concept developed by Lincoln and Guba (1986) to respond to quantitative researchers' critique that qualitative research is not valid, reliable or objective. Trustworthiness instead rejects the notion that the truth is out there to be found, and that truth is rather produced within the research process. The criteria the researchers instead opt to use are: (1) credibility – there are multiple perspectives within social phenomena and therefore a collaborative approach between the researcher and researched should be adopted. This research recognises that there are multiple perspectives within the AP community, and therefore asserts that this research presents a snapshot of the views and experiences. I engaged with those I interviewed to test ideas and interpretations. If I was unclear about an account, I checked with the participant to be sure I have ascertained the correct meaning. Based on research findings, I also developed a series of recommendations for possible improvement to services, that will be presented back to the MoD, AFF, UWOs and the AWS. (2) Transferability – highlight the uniqueness of the social phenomena being explored so other researchers can cross-compare likeness for their purposes. I am clear that this research represents the perspectives of a specific

group – APs and those working in Army-related support. In the sections 'Accessing Research Participants' and 'Participant Details' I outline those who I have interviewed to contextualise my work. (3) Dependability – create an audit trail. To maintain an audit trail, I have kept consent forms, interview transcripts, the development of my coding framework, and a research diary. (4) Confirmability – ensure theoretical persuasions of research have a limited impact on research. Rather than ensuring that my theoretical persuasions have had a limited impact on my work, I instead choose to highlight these as a strength as I am a partial insider, and to suggest that my previous experiences have not impacted the practical processes, interviews, and interpretations would be incorrect. Rather, I consider my status as a partial insider to have eased access, created richer interview data, and enabled a deeper understanding when interpreting information. As part of ensuring dependability and confirmability, I outline reflexive processes throughout this chapter (and thesis) – a feature that is rarely included in military-related research due to its largely positivist outlook (Higate and Cameron, 2006; Ben-Ari, 2014). It is important to include the conditions of a researcher in the context of the research as this reflexive technique allows for the study to contextualise itself within the experiences and understandings of the researcher – making space to present the co-production of knowledge (Benton and Craib, 2001; May and Perry, 2010; Carreiras and Castro, 2012; Jervis, 2016).

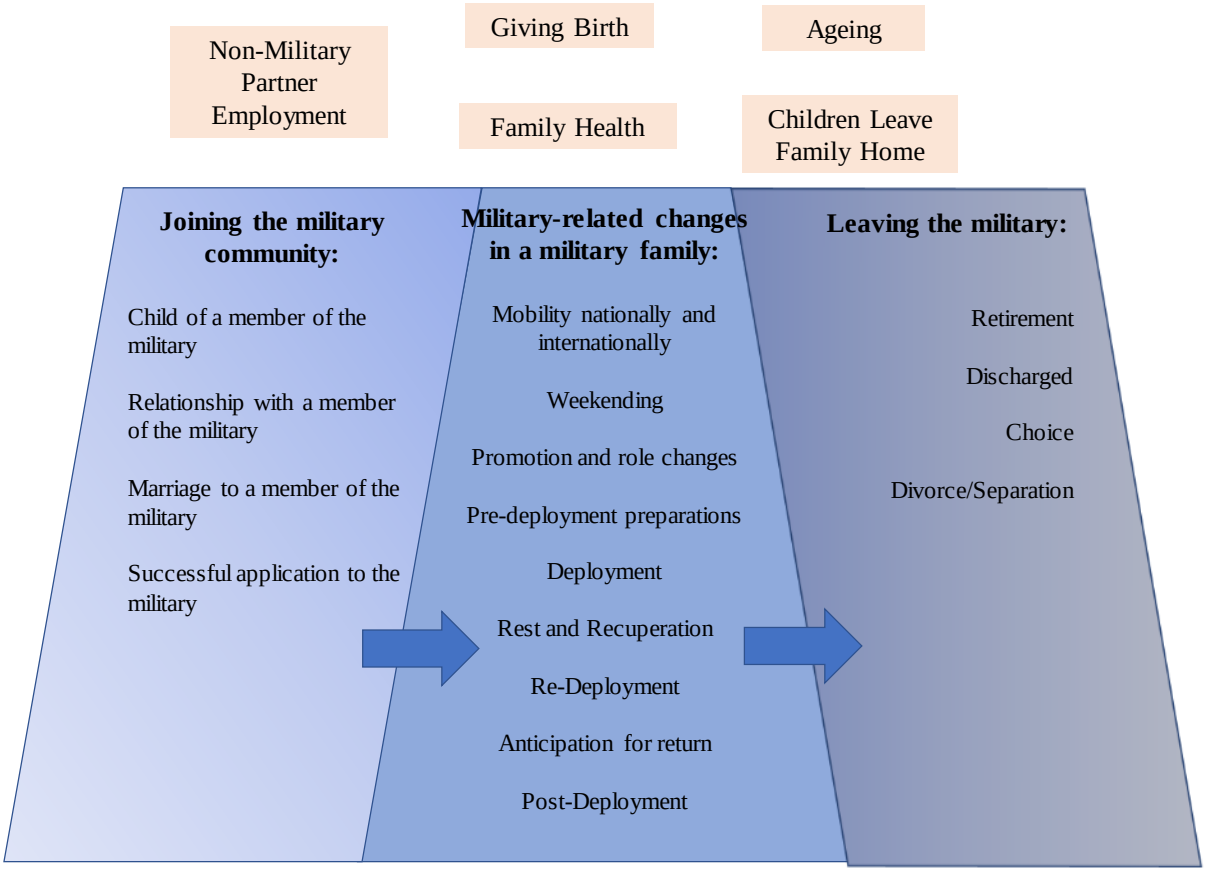
This research adopts an inductive approach, where findings from data collection enable the researcher to locate suitable theories for interpretation (outlined in Chapter 2). Observations have been made by me prior to the thesis due to growing up with and being a member of an Army family, which initially inspired the research context and questions. However, since I have engaged with academic literature in the development of the PhD proposal, when designing and conducting interviews, and whilst interpreting interviews, it must be acknowledged that these developments in understanding will have impacted the research process and interpretations. Therefore, as Bryman (2012) states, there is unlikely to be a research approach

that is wholly inductive – research is so much messier than an outline can synthesise! Additionally, the process of analysis is an iterative one in that data was revisited when corresponding it to theory. Theories produced from this research will not be grand narratives that attempt to explain the social world but will instead be commentaries on a specific community – the AFC, from the perspective of the APs engaged.

This thesis explores how participants are impacted, long-after deployment, due to their identity as an AP, treating the post-deployment phase as a pivotal transitional moment. It interrogates how military-related experiences impact the reintegration process for families, post combat-related deployment, and reflects on how the Army family is continually impacted by deployment as an ongoing process. There is a well-established model known as the ECD. The model shows that each period carries its own set of challenges such as the need for emotional detachment, changes in familial roles and routines, and emotional reactions. My research locates post-deployment at the heart of its enquiry. However, it asks questions that allow the participant to associate experiences with situations and occurrences that exist outside of that fixed period and therefore expands upon the model of deployment.

The military lifestyle is a life of transition and necessitates adaptation (see Figure 2). From the point of joining military society, changing one's identity within military society (e.g. from military daughter to military partner), relocating with the military, the process of preparing for deployment, the hopeful return from deployment, the reality of reintegration post-deployment, and finally, leaving the services and returning to civilian life (or moving to civilian life for the first time). These are only the military-specific transitions that families may face. Other transitions include having children, changing jobs, the health of the family, and many more.

Figure 2: Military transitions



As such, transition is complicated and cannot be simply reduced to a moment in time, an event, or cause and effect. It is instead much more than this, dependent on seemingly unrelated contexts and impacted by perspective – this project's methodology allows for these issues to be captured.

Choosing a Research Method

This thesis captures a snapshot of the perspectives and experiences of APs, when engaging with both formal and informal support networks. Interviews were the ideal research method as they enabled me to '[elicit] rich data on people's views, attitudes and the meanings that underpin their lives and behaviour' (Gray, 2004: 213). To supplement interviews with APs, further interviews were conducted with those who work in support-related roles whose voices

have not yet been heard by previous research in this specific context. Also, to give additional context, I referred to grey literature that is produced by the military and issued to families.

In-depth semi-structured interviews provided detailed data, enabling a greater opportunity to understand the lived experiences and perspectives of the APs interviewed than would have been possible from distributing surveys (Moore, 2014). Additionally, people tend to enjoy talking rather than filling out a survey (Gray, 2004). Focus groups would have also yielded a significant amount of data and it would have been interesting to observe how APs interact with one another whilst sharing personal experiences. However, focus groups involve complicating issues of anonymity, confidentiality, and openness; most notably problematic because the AFC is known to attribute stigma to help-seeking (Bowling et al., 2011; Iverson et al., 2011).

It would have also been tremendously difficult to take an ethnographic approach and extract naturally occurring data from the research setting. It would have meant attending family-organised situations to observe the reintegration, attending welfare meetings and other support-related groups. I considered the possibility of attending support-related sessions directed towards APs. However, this did not seem feasible due to confidentiality issues and gaining consent from partners and the MoD. Of course, obtaining this data would be fascinating, but it is entirely impractical. Nor did it seem useful to conduct an ethnography of the social groups such as 'Coffee Mornings' etc. as partners were unlikely to want to discuss topics relating to my research questions in this setting, not least as the purpose of attending social groups may be to distract themselves from the absence of their SP. As such, I opted to conduct lengthy semi-structured interviews to obtain detailed accounts of individual experiences.

Interview Design

Interviews were semi-structured, enabling the interviewee to operate a level of control over the conversation and build rapport (Moore, 2014; Seidman, 2013) whilst allowing me to keep the conversation within the boundaries of a pre-written (but not fixed) interview guide (Bryman, 2012) (See Appendix A and B.). Rapport is essential to allow the researcher access to another's story (Dickson-Swift et al., 2007). By approaching the field with orientating questions, it enabled fluidity in conversations and allowed for unsuspected topics to be discussed (Miles and Huberman, 1984). This meant that some interviews lasted over an hour, enabling deep understanding of the wider context of their daily lives.

Interview questions were developed around primary research questions, exploring both perspective and experience, encouraging participants to delve deeper into issues to tease out meanings that lie behind statements (Silverman, 2000). I regard each interview as a reflection on the reality experienced by the individual – they are recalling facts, events and personal emotions. This does not mean that one interview is true for the rest of the community, but it is that person's perspective, as each person and context is different. There is no singular, representative point of view that can be uncovered (Narayan, 1993), but rather an issue should be perceived as one that has developed during the interaction between researched and researcher within the process of organising and conducting the interview, the shared life experience, and negotiated meaning. The APs I spoke with existed in different contexts to one another. They had experienced different deployments (for example Iraq, Afghanistan), and some had also experienced several non-combat deployments (including Estonia, Kenya etc.), for different durations, tempos, and performing different roles. Also, some had children, others

did not. Other factors that may impact perspectives include employment status and living on/off-patch etc[13].

Although this thesis focuses specifically upon the temporal event of post-deployment, it recognises that these experiences are not subject only to that specific time and place, but rather experiences are impacted by a manifestation of the participant's past and expectations for their future – as was discussed in the previous chapter. Additionally, the research is exploring their perspective of events that occurred in the past (and anticipated futures) and so perspective, as captured between June 2016 – September 2017, is subject to the experiences that have resulted since and expectations for the future. Thus, the interview design needed to allow for deviations from content that was expected by the researcher.

The content of each interview impacted the questions I asked the next interviewee. As I had ensured that the interviewee had a level of control to direct the conversation in a manner of their choosing, subject matter that I had not yet considered emerged. In one situation a partner cried as she recounted her experiences of discovering her SP had been having an affair, which complicated the reintegration experience post-deployment. I had not yet considered the impacts of beginning a deployment with relationship issues, and how they would manifest and impact APs during the process of return – creating distance between myself and the interviewee. However, my experiences as a partial insider helped me to ask questions in a sensitive way to gain data and not offend. As the process developed, other themes were identified that I had not previously envisaged, of which I encouraged later interviewees to explore at a deeper level. An example of this was the lack of trust partners associated with formal welfare mechanisms.

[13] Some of these differences became clear through data analysis and are discussed in the findings sections of the thesis.

Deployment is a period faced by military families that is fraught with emotion and therefore questions had to be asked in a delicate and considerate manner which rendered some of them rather complex. For example, some APs were still experiencing issues related to their own and their SP's mental health. Additionally, another's family member died in a tragic incident whilst their partner was deployed. Therefore, talking about deployment conjured up memories of which the impacts were still 'live'. Each participant was different and had diverse experiences and therefore it was essential that language was adapted to recognise the personality, expectations, and emotional state of the individual. I was not there to cause harm, but I needed to understand their stories. Essentially, my method allowed me to improvise by varying question order and phrases – allowing my partial insider status to maintain understanding and provide a comfortable environment throughout conversations.

Conducting the Fieldwork

The previous section outlined the rationale for opting for a qualitative approach by interviewing both APs and those who work in military welfare/support related roles and organisations. This section outlines how the research was conducted and discusses interviewing and the co-production of knowledge.

Access

APs are a small population and not easily accessible, thus I approached participants directly (Barratt et al., 2015). Through previous experience, I knew that partners are often members of Facebook groups - seeking advice about welfare, schools, local services, and to build friendships. APs were therefore initially recruited via online support pages which in turn led to 'peer referral' (Walliman, 2006). Accessing participants via online pages was practical as it meant I was interacting with an already engaged community and removed the confidentiality

issues that may arise if I accessed personal connections' social circles. Additionally, it was cost effective and enabled me to reach a large audience of individuals matching the research criteria.

Gaining access to a research population is multi-dimensional. By synthesising literature, Navarro (2013: 85) argues that access is 'more than obtaining permission to walk in through the front door' but also involves being able to develop meaningful, trusting relationships to enable the researcher to obtain the data required to address the research questions. Thus, not only does access refer to formal entry but also a good rapport with potential and actual participants and 'gatekeepers'. APs exist both within and outside of military jurisdiction – they are not formally accountable to the military yet are exposed to the MoD's security-related advice. Gaining the support of the site administrators was essential and so consent was obtained before advertising – this is much easier said than done! At the time, I was straddling a complicated identity as being a part of the community as 'Army daughter' but was yet to be a 'partner'. Many administrators were happy with this identity and added me to their sites, allowing me to advertise my research. However, some would not allow me access as I was not a partner. Additionally, I encountered resistance from some members of the community for not having obtained 'formal approval' from the MoD – exhibiting the culture of security/secrecy (Soeters et al., 2014) and distrust towards a perceived 'other'. I realised that my identity as a member of the AFC was not something I 'owned' but was dependent on how others viewed me – and the fact that I had to utilise gatekeepers enforced a sense of distance between myself and potential participants (O'Connor, 2004). I find it ironic that if I had conducted my research one year later, when I became a military partner, I may have found accessing other partners and issues of gatekeeping much easier to overcome. A site's/person's reasons for not participating are equally as interesting and, for me, this translated into evidence of the military's culture of security and ring-fencing around a specific identity – the military partner

– that they consider a primary part of their identity that cannot be shared or understood by others[14].

Navarro (2013) discussed how once access has been obtained, it does not necessarily mean that it is fixed as the researcher must manage their own abilities in relation to the power relations and dynamics of the various actors involved. I also experienced this when my access to the AP community was threatened by a debate that occurred online. By publicly posting my research on the Facebook pages I was admitted to, I encountered criticism from some Royal Navy and Air Force partners as they felt dismissed and ignored. The criticisms, which were posted as 'comments' on a public Facebook post, led to a stressful evening as the more partners posted expressing concern/upset, the more other people would notice and join the debate. It is essential that participant's concerns are addressed as soon as possible to reduce the likelihood of the online research recruitment seeming illegitimate, unprofessional, or that the researcher is disorganised (Klein et al., 2010).

The debate lasted six hours, and I managed to satisfy many of their points, primarily by stating that I was a member of the Army community and as such this was where my interests and experiences lie. Before this debate, I had not thought much beyond my personal attachment to the Army but during the conversation I learnt that it was incorrect to rely on this boundary as it presents itself as exclusionary. Accordingly, I reflected on my reasons for focussing on the Army and considered how I may incorporate experiences from the other Services. When looking at the welfare programmes available, I discovered that they differ across the three services, as do experiences of deployment and mobility. Therefore, due to time constraints I had to opt for one. On reflection, the criticism helped me to adapt my recruitment materials and justify the boundaries I had created to focus my project - it altered the language I used to

[14] A key finding in this research which is explored later.

justify my focus on the Army. It was interesting to learn that partners from the other Services feel that research is dominated by an Army-focus which is a perspective I hope to explore post-PhD.

Facebook complicates the research process as I was using my personal profile to advertise on military partner support pages. I had to make my profile page private so personal information was not easily available. I also resisted the temptation to review the Facebook profiles of those who had agreed to be interviewed as this *felt* like a breach of their privacy. Regardless, social media, as a recruitment tool, has been beneficial as it enabled access to more APs than any other method allowed. I also displayed posters in welfare hubs and handed out leaflets at relevant events to no avail. However, in the future I will approach social media with more caution, primarily with regards to the language and justifications I use. I will also enter the world of social media with a thicker skin. I had not expected people to be so critical and emotional in the language they used and at times it was difficult not to take these statements personally, after all it was my research that had offended them.

Accessing military support workers to interview was more complicated and it took time to gain their trust. Emails were sent to major stakeholders in military family welfare including the AFF, MoD, AWS, Band of Sisters (within Help for Heroes) and UWOs. Each refused to participate due to time restraints or did not respond. Within the same email refusing to participate, one organisation stated that they were however able to offer me support if I was experiencing a personal issue, as I had mentioned that I was an Army daughter. This made me wonder whether it would be ethically viable to approach them with a manufactured issue to learn about the processes and experiences of engaging with welfare/support – I could be an undercover support-seeker! My insider identity provided an opportunity here, but I was

unwilling to take it as it would really scupper my chances of working with them in the future, require some acting skills I know I do not possess and of course, is ethically dubious.

Feeling concerned, I expanded my search to look at smaller, localised charities. From this, I interviewed members working for Dare to Live and The Ripple Pond Foundation. I felt that these groups were more willing to speak as they wanted to get their voices heard – perhaps there was more time available than in the larger organisations, less bureaucracy, or maybe participating was a good way to increase public awareness about their work. Regardless of the reasons for being keener to contribute, these conversations were useful as they provided me with localised insights and exposed gaps in the overall welfare framework provided by larger nationalised support agencies. Their contributions also expanded my awareness of the research already available, the current agenda and the 'hot topics/issues' that the agencies were working with.

However, I still felt it essential to engage with those in larger organisations. Not least because many of the APs I interviewed only agreed to participate if their data was going to be used for their benefit[15]. Many were concerned that their time would be wasted as data would be hidden away in a report and not used to effect change – hence engagement was necessary so findings may be relayed back to those working in formal support with a list of recommendations. Specifically, I needed to engage the MoD, UWOs and the AWS who I had long been aware of due to growing up in a military family. These individuals were not easy to access, likely due to the atmosphere of secrecy/security (Soeters et al., 2014), meaning that even when I contacted a UWO who was keen to contribute, they pulled out as I had not yet gained formal access/permission from the MoD.

[15] Additionally, once I had conducted interviews with APs, they generally only referenced engagement with UWOs and the AWS.

I needed to contact a person who was interested in the issues I wanted to explore, who trusted my intentions and regarded my angle as beneficial to military interests, to get the access required (Ben-Ari and Levy, 2014). Retrieving contact details for those in the right position was not easy as I had no idea who this person could be, nor did those I had contacted so far. In the early stages of my research I was becoming more aware that if I gained access it was not going to be directly helped by my insider status as an Army daughter. Thankfully my chance came in the first year of my PhD. MP Penny Mordaunt caught my attention when *tweeting* about initiatives encouraging more women into the Army and as the Minister of State for the Armed Forces (2015-July 2016) I thought it worth emailing her – not least because of her interest in gender. I received no response but unbeknownst to me, Penny Mordaunt had forwarded my email to the Assistant Director for Armed Forces Families (MoD) who suggested that I meet with her and the Head of Personal Support (AWS). This was a key moment in which my project gained traction. From this meeting, interest in participating in my research snowballed and I gained access, and was able to interview, various members of the AFF, AWS and UWOs. Each of those interviewed have expressed high interest in meeting to discuss the results of the thesis.

I have always understood the military to hold a culture of high security – locations are not always mapped on Google, my partner's family (his father works on a military base) have a radio in their living room issued by the military in case of emergency, I remember my father checking the car and front door to our home for bombs every time we entered, and families are advised on online security (MoD, 2013). So, I was surprised that I did not have to fill in specific ethics/procedural forms for the MoD, in addition to Lancaster University's ethics process (discussed later). This is unlike the experiences of Gray (2015; 2016b) whose thesis explored domestic abuse in the British Armed Forces – her work started independently but later needed to obtain support and ethical clearance from the military. By doing so, she straddled the

complex terrain between collaboration and disengagement whilst conducting research through a feminist-informed lens – I also experienced this 'in-betweenness' due to the need to gain the support of the institution to get 'access', whilst maintaining my critical lens as a researcher. On the one hand, I needed to 'sell my research idea' to obtain interest and support in participating from the military institution, yet I did not feel like the work was collaborative and maintained a level of distance as was not asked to sign/submit ethics forms to the MoD. Therefore, my work was not directly orientated around 'military priorities, needs and world-views' (Gray, 2016b: 72) – they had no say in my overall research questions, interview guides, or have asked to approve my thesis/conclusions before submission. However, their involvement has influenced parts of the research process. Namely, as stated during a discussion with a member of the MoD, data from this interview cannot be quoted within the thesis.

Participant Details

This thesis is a product of a series of semi-structured interviews with 26 APs and 26 of those who work in Army family welfare/support organisations (1 further person responded to questions via email). See Table 2 for an overview of interviewees and Tables 3 and 4 for further details. Additionally, Table 5 provides an overview of work conducted by welfare organisations who participated in this thesis.

Table 2: Interviewee overview

Army Partners	Army Support Workers
Interviewed 26, majority wives (however most had been in a relationship to their SP prior to marriage so could reflect on both experiences). In a relationship to SPs from a range of ranks and roles within the Army, all having experienced at least one deployment to either Iraq or Afghanistan. Majority have children of varying ages. Some are also the child of a serving person. A range of employment statuses including Head teacher, Physiotherapist, and Housewife.	Interviewed 26, some of whom are also APs and/or a child to a SP. Four UWOs. Three from the AFF. Twelve from the AWS. One from Dare to Live. One from Homestart. One from the MoD. One from Relate. One from The Ripple Pond. One from the Royal British Legion. One from Directorate Children's Education.

Table 3: Participants: Army partners[16]

Pseudonym	Status	Gender	Relationship Status	Children	Deployments	Army Partner's Job	Serving Partner's Role	Living on-patch
Abby	Partner	F	Married	4	4	Hospitality	Infantry	Yes
Adrienne	Partner	F	Married	2	3	-	-	No
Anna	Partner	F	Married 20 years	4	Numerous[17]	Part-time: Funerals	Infantry	Did not disclose[18]
Bethany	Partner	F	Married 6 years	5[19]	Numerous	Childcare	Infantry	Yes
Bronwen	Partner	F	Not married	No	1	Student - Midwifery	-	No[20]
Catherine	Partner	F	Married	1	2	Opticians	Recovery Mechanic	No
Claire	Partner	F	Married 2 years	1	Numerous	Unemployed	Infantry	Yes

[16] Some sections are incomplete due to data not provided.
[17] Participants sometimes struggled to recall how many combat-related deployments has been experienced. They sometimes conflated these with other forms of separation caused by tours, exercises and training courses.
[18] Did not disclose but lives on/close to a patch.
[19] Two children biologically hers, three children biologically her SP's. None live with her.
[20] Not cohabiting with SP.

Pseudonym	Status	Gender	Relationship Status	Children	Deployments	Army Partner's Job	Serving Partner's Role	Living on-patch
Eleanor	Partner	F	Married	1	Numerous	Physiotherapist - Ex Serving Person	Army Air Corps	Yes
Holly	Partner	F	Married 3 years	1[21]	1	Assistant Headteacher	Infantry	No
Isobel	Partner	F	Married	4	Numerous	Army Families Federation - Ex Serving Person	-	Yes
Jennifer	Partner	F	Married 4 years	2	Numerous	Home Business	Infantry	Yes
Karianne	Partner	F	Married	At least 1	1	Unemployed	Infantry	Yes
Lisa	Partner	F	Married	4	Numerous	Student	Engineer	Yes
Maria	Partner	F	Married 3 years	2	1	Unemployed	Infantry	Yes
Lucy	Partner	F	Married 7 yrs	2	5	Military Housing	Infantry	Yes
Lydia	Partner	F	Married 9 years	2	7	Unemployed	Infantry	Yes
Lynn	Partner	F	Married 4 years	1	1 – current	Unemployed	Infantry	Yes
Molly	Partner	F	Married	At least 1	3	Dental Nurse	-	Yes
Natasha	Partner	F	Married 5 years	5	Numerous	Legal Advisor	-	Yes

[21] Not biologically hers.

Pseudonym	Status	Gender	Relationship Status	Children	Deployments	Army Partner's Job	Serving Partner's Role	Living on-patch
Patricia	Partner	F	Married 11 years	2	Numerous	Works on-patch	-	-
Rachael	Partner	F	Married	3	3	Teacher	-	Yes
Ruby	Partner and works in Welfare/Support	F	Married	At least 1	1	Army Families Federation	-	Yes
Simone	Partner and works in Welfare/Support	F	Married	-	-	Royal British Legion	-	-
Tonya	Partner	F	Married 4 years	1	2	Trained nurse - not working	Infantry	Yes
Tracy	Partner	F	Married 8 years	None	5+	Musician	-	Yes
Valerie	Partner	F	Married 5 years	2	4	Home Business	Not front line	No

Table 4: Army family support workers - Role/organisation

Pseudonym	Organisation	Role
Alex	Army	UWO
Henry	Army	UWO
Jamie-Lee	Army	UWO
Peter	Army	UWO
George	AWS	Community Support Development
Bob	AWS	Community Support Development
Matthew	AWS	Community Support Development
Nick	AWS	Personal Support
Bethan	AWS	Personal Support
Monica	AWS	Personal Support
Freya	AWS	Welfare Support Officer
Jessica	AWS	Cannot Disclose.[22]
James	AWS	Cannot Disclose.
Nicola	AWS	Cannot Disclose.
Elle	AWS	Cannot Disclose.
Carolyn	AWS	Cannot Disclose.
Lex	Homestart	Cannot Disclose.
Rose[23]	Homestart	Cannot Disclose.
Cheryl	Army Families Federation	Cannot Disclose.
Isobel	Army Families Federation	Cannot Disclose.
Ruby	Army Families Federation	Cannot Disclose.
Jenny	MoD	Cannot Disclose.
Joanne	Relate	Cannot Disclose.
Kate	Ripple Pond	Cannot Disclose.
Simone	Royal British Legion	Cannot Disclose.
Suzanne	Directorate Children and Young People	Cannot Disclose.
Bella	Dare to Live	Cannot Disclose.

[22] Cannot disclose the participant's role as they may become identifiable.
[23] Was not interviewed but provided perspectives via email.

Table 5: Overview of interviewee affiliation

This table outlines the sources of formal support that are available to APs, focusing upon organisations who were interviewed as part of this research. This overview is informed by publicly available information and interviews conducted with those working within formal support services. The formal support system involves a complex relationship between multiple agencies that are organised by the state, the military, and the wider charity sector. The AWS's Support Onion outlines the welfare framework (Appendix C).

Organisation / Role Title:	Who:	Role:
UWO (military)	Usually a Captain of the British Army, seen as a gateway into being commissioned as an Officer. There are no interviews for this role, usually placements. Limited training.	The UWO and workers, first-line support, are the most popular avenue for the APs interviewed at the beginning of their help-seeking journey. Each battalion/regiment has a UWO who sometimes has an assistant and administrative support depending on the size of the unit. Their office(s) are based in/around the camp and are generally close to SFA, and sometimes behind the wire. The office displays leaflets and posters advertising support options such as Relate (for relationship problems), alcoholics anonymous (for alcohol problems), debt advisors (for financial issues). Additionally, there are advertisements for the social groups and activities that are available in/around the camp. There are five key areas that the UWO and their team address. Firstly, they aim to aid social integration by helping families to settle into new areas. This can be achieved by supporting the development of on-patch activities such as Coffee Mornings and Christmas Parties. Secondly, they provide a confidential 'helping service', providing APs avenues to have a 'chat' and ask questions about military related issues. Thirdly, they liaise with other welfare agencies to signpost individuals to the correct avenue of support, primarily referring to the AWS. UWOs are expected to maintain confidentiality, unless they have received permission to speak with other agencies or if safeguarding issues arise. Fourthly, they support families during periods of separation. Separation refers to separation from familiar locations, families or origin, spouses, partners and

		children. Finally, they provide information about social/information-provision events. There are three voices that the UWO must acknowledge in the delivery of its services – the soldiers, families, and CoC. It is up to the AP to access the UWO for support and unless there is a safeguarding issue, the UWO has no power to impose a support plan upon the partner and family. It is practice that if a case cannot be resolved within 48 hours it is referred - generally to the AWS. UWOs are often recruited from within the Army and work within welfare for approximately two years. Many of the UWOs are serving Captains, and their team are junior-ranking personnel. However, the Army now hires UWOs from the civilian sector to address high turnover and to create more stability within the patch. Their training lasts approximately two weeks. The AWS facilitates the delivery of a five-day training course which is followed by a similar four-day period of confirmation training after six months in post. The aim is to 'provide appropriate knowledge, skills and signposting awareness to enable UWOs to deliver effective first line welfare provision' (Army, 2016: 26). Completion enables the UWO to hold the post for five years.
UWO (civilian)	Recruited from the civilian sector (not common).	Same as above.
AWS (Personal Support)	The Army's professional welfare provider.	Personal Support workers, who are both military and civilian, offer a counselling service yet they are not trained counsellors. Rather, their basic training lasts approximately nine months. Issues they tend to address are more complex than those managed by the UWO and may include practical, emotional, and relationship problems. Referrals tend to increase during times of deployment and issues specific to the cycle of deployment tend to revolve around relationship problems, isolation and a lack of independence. Like with the UWO, engagement is voluntary and therefore its impact is limited to those who want help and have reached out.
AWS (Community Support)	Same as above.	Community Support workers aim to support the integration of individuals into the patch community, addressing the high mobility experienced by Army families whose support networks are constantly being made and unmade. Support initiatives developed by Community Support facilitate the development and sustainment of AP informal networks. Activities are regularly run on camp such as 'Mum's and Babies' groups, 'Mum's and tots', and choirs. Some extend membership to the civilian community to break down social divisions between the military and civilian communities living within

		a local area. Activities are also made available to Army children such as various sports and trips. Additionally, events are regularly run on camp to mark key periods within the year such as a 'Family Day' in the summer, Christmas Balls, and Halloween. Community Support supports non-formal education opportunities providing learning and development activities to children and families, again working to foster resilience and resourcefulness within the community. Community Support workers are difficult to recruit as they are expected to have a degree in Community related studies and must be recruited from the Civil Service.
AWS (HIVE Information Service)	Same as above.	A second avenue for first line support is the HIVE Information Service which is one of the four pillars of support that are available to Army partners via the AWS. The HIVE Information Service is a hub, based on camp, that a partner may go to and receive up-to-date and relevant information and they also act as a referral service. They can help families with relocation issues, local unit and civilian facilities, places of interest, schools, further education, housing, healthcare facilities, employment, and suggest training opportunities. The HIVE Information Service issues families information about deployment, if accessed, and can help families to keep up to date with local events, help them to maintain communication with absent personnel by assisting with the online ArmyNET and e-bluey account. The aim of the HIVE Information Service is to address the lack of awareness that partners may have about military processes, services or wider questions they may have. Not only this but the HIVE Information Service acts as an information service for FSWs such as the UWO.
AWS (Joint Service Housing Advice Officer)	Same as above.	A dedicated source for all housing issues.
AWS (Social Worker)	Same as above.	A civilian social worker by training but without statutory responsibility. The original purpose of the social workers working within the AWS was to manage the severely wounded returning from Afghanistan – their role has expanded to cover wider issues of mental health and other long-term illness. The function of social workers that work within the AWS is to offer social work expertise to issues that are not addressed by the Local Authority – they are not there to replace the Local Authority. So, as the Army needs combat-ready forces, it works to remove the concerns of individuals about their family by lowering the threshold of support that is

		otherwise met by civilian agencies. Issues that social workers may engage with include safeguarding, relationship problems, communication skills, domestic abuse. Much of the social worker's role is to ensure that other support providers are aware of and adhere to legislation, such as the Personal Recovery Officers. Additionally, social workers will provide advice to the CoC. Another key role of the Army social worker, working within the AWS, is to advocate for soldiers and their families and to coordinate support by getting the right agencies involved.
Army Families Federation	Advisory service and lobby for change.	The AFF is the independent voice of Army families. They work to highlight the issues facing Army families and then work with other agencies to improve the situation and services available – they also act as a signposting service. They regularly collect evidence from families about their concerns and publish these each month, culminating in an annual review on their website. There are five specialist areas the AFF works with – Education and Childcare, Health and Additional Needs, Employment and Training and Allowances and Money. The aim is to measure the impact of military and non-military related policy on Army families to suggest possible changes if it unfairly disadvantages them. Sometimes an amendment can create more unintended consequences down the line, so one of their key priorities is to anticipate these unforeseen issues. Concerns are often based around housing, issues of relocation such as education and healthcare, and more situation-based concerns such as how to complete a postal vote for over-seas families. Some concerns are much more subjective than others and so the AFF works to share concerns such as 'my child struggles when moving schools' with researchers, encouraging them to quantify the problem, thus enabling the AFF to make a case for change or further research. They operate on a local level with regional coordinators extending their outreach by attending unit-organised coffee mornings, thus ensuring that all parts of the country are represented in research and have access to support. The research the AFF conducts is collected as snapshot studies through online questionnaires or through general social interaction and taking note of common themes being brought forward by families.
Relate	Relationship charity with a contract with the Ministry of Defence.	Provides free relationship counselling when referred to via the AWS or UWO.

Homestart	Family support charity with a contract with the Ministry of Defence.	Supports APs struggling with isolation by attending community organised groups with partners, and provides advice and support relating to childcare. It is the only service that provides confidential in-the-home support for six months or longer. Partners can also be referred via a Children's Centre or a Health Visitor so those not wanting to engage with the AWS have alternative opportunities.
Dare to Live	A regional charity supporting personnel towards future employment post-transition.	Dare to Live offer a rather different arrangement in supporting troops and their families. They utilise a validated and evidence-based equine facilitated human development and learning process. This involves a mixture of classroom-based activity and exercises with horses. Additionally, they host family days where military couples may experience a casual, informal day out with the horses!
The Ripple Pond	Charity.	The Ripple Pond offers regular group meetings, allowing individuals to express their feelings in a safe environment. They are run locally and include the any family member of a military member who feels they need support. Additionally, they offer support via the telephone, text, email or Facebook.
Directorate Children and Young People	A part of the MoD focusing on all issues relating to children of military personnel.	'Strategic direction and policy. Provision of high-quality education in MOD schools and settings. Safeguarding children and young people. Supporting the Armed Forces Covenant. Direct support and advice to service families with advice on a wide range of education matters. Educational psychology and social work services' (Gov.uk, n.d.).

Interviews

Most of the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed to a level of intelligent verbatim[24], including the notes I took during interviews. Some participants preferred not to be audio-recorded and thus I relied on extensive notetaking on the themes and perspectives offered.

Due to the culture of security within the AFC – especially when it comes to online safety (MoD, 2013) - I offered APs the choice to meet face-to-face, Skype, or speak via the telephone. Of those that I interviewed face-to-face, I met them in coffee shops in/around the area they lived. One was interviewed in her office as she could not leave the phone unattended!

Generally, APs were hesitant to meet face-to-face but less due to security concerns and more due to a lack of time. I wonder whether this was because they trusted me as I was always sure to introduce myself as an Army daughter. Participants squeezed me into their hectic schedules, and I interviewed individuals whilst they cooked the evening meal for their family, during the commute from work, and whilst their baby took its afternoon nap. I preferred to conduct face-to-face interviews as it was easier to build rapport. However, conducting telephone interviews was beneficial as they allowed me additional insight into APs' everyday lives. Many researchers have considered how voice occurs throughout the interview process and Mazzei (2009) argues that full voice may never be captured because voice does not occur simply in the interview. Rather voice is always happening for example, in silence, in practice, and in resistance. Participants being unable to meet face-to-face can be regarded as the operationalising of their voice and through this I was able to gain greater context of their lives. By hearing their children in the background of a phone call making demands, I gained an additional insight into their roles. By hearing the car engine whilst we spoke via the speaker on

[24] Where 'ur', 'um' etc. are omitted.

the commute back from work, I witnessed the level of traffic that was dealt with on an almost daily basis.

Many of the interviews with military support workers were conducted within their welfare offices/spaces. I travelled the length and breadth of England from the ministerial offices of the MoD to offices 'behind the wire'. One of the main challenges of this was remembering to carry my ID with me, ready for the security checks. I distinctly remember getting lost on one of the barracks post-interview without my ID (as I had handed it into the guard at the entrance) with a laptop full of data on the military, and there was no one around to ask for directions except young children. I felt very exposed, even though I was used to living on-patch, and I could not help but wonder how uncomfortable this would be for someone less exposed to the military. Foucault's panopticism comes to mind, as I felt I was being watched without being sure I was. I found myself attempting to manage my walk and facial expression to look innocent, to show I was doing nothing untoward. It is tricky to blend in when wandering around a housing estate, smartly dressed, with a huge laptop bag. I felt like an outsider.

The value of interviewing within welfare offices/spaces was that I could sit where an AP would when seeking support, enabling insight into what it would look and possibly feel like for them. Additionally, I could see the posters the Army had chosen to display and collect leaflets available to APs. Most importantly though, as a non-driver, I was given first-hand experience of how difficult it is to access the services based in/around garrison towns or barracks. There are no direct train lines and thus one must rely on buses and taxis, after a lengthy train journey, to a location vaguely nearby, never mind finding the office. During these trips, I imagined what it must feel like catching buses from the local town to the garrison/barracks in the attempt to seek advice or support. I only had to worry about was getting my body and laptop there, let alone having to think about childcare and the problem I was seeking to resolve! The mere

practicalities of attending interviews generated data and insights that I never expected to have when developing the original research design[25].

In two instances, I was invited to the garrison town to witness the social groups hosted and facilitated by formal welfare programmes. I attended a 'mothers and babies' group and then a 'mothers and toddlers' group in the afternoon. Each were hosted in the leisure centre in the garrison town and were available to both military and civilian parents. This was monumentally useful as I could see how both military and civilian mothers[26] were brought together. Looking back, this would have been a fantastic opportunity to move the research into a more observational sphere. However, I had not prepared for that (theoretically or ethically), so used the opportunity to advertise my work and recruit interviewees. It would not have been appropriate for me to treat this as observation in my fieldwork as I did not obtain consent from my participants, but I will reflect on this experience as tacit knowledge.

In another instance, I travelled to interview a UWO. He had other ideas! He had in fact invited me onto the barracks to interview nine APs. When I arrived at the location, which was a Church, I realised I had entered another socially organised group – a group of mothers[27] and their children. I was at a coffee afternoon! I was then invited into someone's office in the Church (I never worked out whose it was) and interviewed the nine APs separately, one after another. Some left their children with the other wives outside of the room, but others brought them in. Despite the feigned control, all children in attendance dipped in and out of the room during the interviews carrying various noisy items that you were expected to play with whilst the interview continued (awkward). It was an opportunity to witness the friendship groups that the APs had developed, sit in an area they regularly meet, and soak up the atmosphere of the

[25] Difficulties experienced accessing support status were regularly discussed by APs during interviews.
[26] All who attended that day were female.
[27] All who attended that day were female.

afternoon. This group of APs were incredibly collaborative, helping the UWO to facilitate the afternoon. I finished the day shattered both emotionally and physically, but laden with excellent data.

For me, this offers a clear example of how a researcher's expectations can be shattered. I had travelled for approximately eight hours over two days and entered the field expecting to speak to one UWO about the formal processes of his role, and to be finished within two hours. Instead, I was thrown into a busy hub of social activity, interviewing APs who reflected on deeply emotional experiences, playing with children, and I did not leave for approximately six hours. Thankfully I had a fully charged voice-recorder, but I do wish I had eaten a larger breakfast – I have learnt to carry cereal bars on me at all times when in the field. Also, I had brought one consent form and thus consent was obtained verbally on the voice-recorder – a method I had used for the previously conducted Skype interviews. On reflection, I would try to avoid this intensive method of interviewing in the future as I find it better to interview one per day and spend at least two days absorbing what was said. That said, it felt very productive and I simply had to spend more time reflecting later.

I also interviewed two UWOs together in a pub, withstanding the alcohol of course. Perhaps this enabled them to be more at ease, away from the working environment, but the disruption from the surrounding noise proved problematic when transcribing the audio-recording. It was also a shame not being able to see their offices. But given that this was their preference and they were located far from public transport; it was convenient which cannot be underemphasised when the journey had already taken me over five hours.

From the interviews I conducted with FSWs, I collected the following publications that are made available to Army families during the deployment cycle. I have used these to guide later interviews with APs and contextualise findings.

- Two Deployment guides – for families [DVD] (*Deployment – A Families Guide*, 2011; *Homecoming – A Families Guide*, 2011)
- One Deployment guide – for families [Pamphlet] (MoD, 2011a)
- One Deployment guide – for children [Hard Copy Booklet] (MoD, 2009; 2014)
- AWS Mission Statement [Online] (Army, n.d.)
- AWS Policy [Soft Copy sent by UWO] (Army, 2016)

Co-Production of Knowledge

Data and therefore knowledge obtained through the interviews are co-produced. Interviews augment experience rather than reflect it as they are artificial (Beer, 1997) and rest upon the negotiated meaning between the researcher and researched (Finlay, 2002). My shared experiences were beneficial, but it is essential that I reflect on my situatedness within this research and the approaches I have adopted to manage the impact that I, as researcher, will have had upon the process. Social scientists widely agreed that reflexivity is an important process within any research project (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003; Carreiras and Alexandre, 2013). Reflexivity involves an in-depth reflection on how the researcher's situatedness has impacted the research outcomes. It rests on the epistemological premise that knowledge is made rather than found (Mauthner et al., 1998) – a key facet of qualitative methodologies. Mauthner and Doucet (2003) argue that analysis is not neutral, rather that it reflects and is imbued with theoretical, epistemological, and ontological assumptions which include conceptions of the subject and subjectivities and understandings of how knowledge is constructed and produced. Mauthner and Doucet (ibid.: 419) argue that by 'locating ourselves socially, emotionally and intellectually [it] allows us to retain some grasp over the blurred boundary between the respondent's narrative and our interpretation'. Finlay (2002) argues that for qualitative research to carry integrity and trustworthiness, it is essential that the researcher

tries to capture the connections between the subject and object throughout the research process, to understand how the subject and object influence and constitute one another. After all, researcher behaviour influences participants and therefore findings are co-constituted between the researcher, researched, and their relationship.

Interviews with those working in support roles differed in style from those conducted with APs. Caddick (2018) broadly outlined three perspectives and approaches that military-related researchers tend to adopt when undertaking research. Firstly, the cheerleader, who generally supports the military ethos – focused on 'bolstering military power and/or effectiveness. Secondly, the critic, who regards the military as 'bad' due to its association with violence. Finally, the diplomat, who focuses on working with the military to achieve change. My roles prior to and during interviews reflected the angle which I thought would maintain the rapport needed to encourage individuals to speak with me/maintain rapport during interviews. For example, when approaching some FSWs, it was essential that I presented myself as either a cheerleader or diplomat to foster a sense of trust – I laughed at jokes I did not agree with and nodded to encourage further explanations. For some interviews with FSWs, becoming the critic was more compatible with their perspectives. Additionally, interviews with APs moved between diplomat, critic, and cheerleader, sometimes within the same conversation. This was dependent on the topic being discussed. For example, it would not have been beneficial to be the critic whilst APs were exploring experiences of stigma from the civilian community with regards to their military-associated identity. Alternatively, when they discussed the challenges faced during and post-deployment, adopting the identity of the critic was more suitable. Therefore, I moved between perspectives/identities according to need and performed in a way that reflected the interviewee's outlook to maintain rapport. On the one hand I expect that my identity as a member of the community made this variation 'easier', yet it likely influenced

interviewee responses. To mitigate this, I encouraged individuals to explore perspectives in-depth when I found that my approach changed in response to what they were saying.

I have been able to build rapport quickly with APs and those who work in welfare (many of whom are daughters, sons, and partners of military personnel), which certainly helped when speaking about emotionally challenging issues. To encourage openness, I would offer some of my stories (where deemed relevant) to develop trust (Letherby, 2003). Feminist researchers Cooper and Rogers (2015: 7) argue that 'sociology is a living, organic discipline and the crossover between our experiences and those of our participants adds depth, rather than dilutes our position'. Many researchers argue that to explore and understand why and how things happen one must empathise by listening and telling stories (Ryan-Flood, 2010). Interviews are therefore a relational product of both the interviewee and the interviewer.

It is important to explore the concept of empathy a little deeper here, as it is an often taken-for-granted feature/strength of many qualitative studies. In fact, the concept of empathy is almost synonymous with ideas of understanding, and *verstehen* literally translates into deep understanding, reinforced by empathy (Irwin, 2001). Developing *verstehen* is a way in which some qualitative researchers attempt to overcome the expectation that findings should be 'valid', in line with quantitative thinking. That is, that findings represent a truth that exists in the real world and can be captured and presented in a way that is 'correct'. By arguing that they empathise with participants, researchers may assume this means that the interpretation they make is correct, because by claiming empathy, one claims implicit and absolute understanding.

The result of claiming absolute understanding is that research produces sameness and disregards difference between the researcher and researched. Lather (2009) argues that if a researcher feels they are experiencing empathy, they must be cautious not to appropriate another's stories, corresponding them to their own internal framework, and highlighting this

sameness as fact. By outlining Ellsworth's (1997) work, Lather (2009: 19-23) states that 'reading for some empathic union of two selves in a mirroring relationship is NOT helpful in unfixing categories'. She does not provide a solution to this but suggests that work that does not seek to 'appropriate the tragedies of others into consumption' should '[defer] in its presentation of truth-telling toward responsibility within indeterminacy'. Essentially, to aim for truth-telling will only be for the ease of presentation and is not in fact possible, after all research is an incredibly messy process (for further discussion see Law, 2004). Instead, as researchers we should act responsibly by ensuring that findings are trustworthy. Finlay (2002) stated that to increase the trustworthiness and integrity of research, the researcher should reflect on the space between the subject and object in interviews to consider the connections made that co-constitute meaning. Empathy is one of the connections between the subject and object. It is the lived experience that is negotiated between the researcher and the researched, creating a meaning that is co-constituted between both the researcher and the researched.

On this basis, empathy can lend itself to developing a deeper understanding, as it overcomes sensitivities that may be faced during an interview such as lack of understanding, negotiating emotion and using the correct language. Empathy is an experience that is shaped by social and cultural factors and is performed on the surface and deeper levels (Hochschild, 2003). My identity as a partial insider is a strength to the research as I am familiar with many of my interviewees' experiences. Stories and ideas rarely surprise me or make me uncomfortable, enabling me to keep a level-mind when interviewing and keep on track. All APs interviewed were female, as am I, and this likely impacted the sorts of stories shared and understandings developed during interviews – where experiences discussed related to profoundly gendered topics (domestic, emotional, and childcare labour). Additionally, I share the military culture that many military families are exposed to, I know the language, the rhetoric and how to speak sensitively about issues that may be close to the heart. I know how to speak to a person about

war, death, PTSD, substance abuse, and other military-specific issues without causing offence or being perceived as totally unknowing.

Jervis (2016: 170) reflected on her experiences, as a Navy wife, when conducting interviews with other military spouses about their emotional experiences of relocation. She commented that:

> [O]ccasionally during my research I experienced perplexing emotions such as sadness or anxiety. After reflecting on those apparently inexplicable feelings, however, I realized that they were not mine alone; they also mirrored certain aspects of respondents' experiences that had not been verbalised.

Her ability to empathise and understand her research population as an insider meant that she found herself colluding in some of the common characteristics of the AFC including stoicism towards discussions about 'pain'. Upon reading this reflection, I realise that I too would exhibit military norms during interviews which will have likely impacted data collection. For example, both myself and APs would discuss otherwise upsetting and uncomfortable experiences through our exposure to the military through jokes, sarcasm, and mocking ourselves. This evidences a shared perspective between me and the AP cohort which likely enabled us to develop and maintain communication strengthened with notions of trust, rapport and unity. Reflexivity has enabled me to identify this dynamic which would have otherwise gone unlooked – providing an additional lens in which to consider militarised cultures, norms and expectations within the AP community.

As part of my reflexive process, I have continually interrogated my own identity. My identity, as defined by the status of the insider/outsider, is fluid and Trowler (2011) argues that these concepts exist on the same continuum. On the one hand, I identify closely with my participants,

however, I was not a partner when conducting the interviews and there were instances where clashes occurred. For example, as shown in the story earlier, when I communicated with an online partner support group, of which I was eventually removed due to me not being a military partner. I expect that the structures and stories shared during interviews would differ if I had been a military partner at the time of data collection. Additionally, I do not always agree with the opinions shared and being part of the AFC is not my entire identity, it is part of it. The same applies for those I interviewed; they have their own life stories, some of them are employed outside of the military, some have additional caring responsibilities – identities are complex and multi-layered. Additionally, attempts should not be made to bridge diversity when the researcher is an insider, but rather participant accounts that differ to the researcher's perspective must still be treated as a personal truth, and difference considered a strength to be considered (Shah, 2004; Tinker and Armstrong, 2008). No one can ever be a total insider, especially when they are the researcher, instead it is more appropriate to consider myself a partial insider (Chavez, 2008) and recognise myself as a researcher who is able to use my identity to help me gain access, manage interviews, and interpret data in specific ways. However, it does not mean that I can claim absolute understanding as within interviews knowledges are negotiated.

As far as possible, I present the participants' voices, whilst recognising that I can never capture them in their entirety. As far as possible, I review contextual situations to accord these to experiences and to locate the responses within their own text. When conducting interviews, I followed Chavez's (2008) recommendation and told the participant that although I am part of the community, I would prefer to speak about the issue as if it were the first time. I have reiterated this each time a participant says, 'you know what I mean' or 'you know all of this'. It often led to laughter but the participant would then describe their point in greater depth,

which sometimes gave me a perspective I had not previously considered – locating where I could have attributed a different meaning.

Additionally, I regularly asked myself how my experiences compared with the data to ensure that my interpretations were driven more by what the participant contributes than myself reading too deeply into an issue they merely hinted at. This is an ongoing pursuit, as Chavez (2008) has stated that there is no way to determine how aligned a researcher may be with their participants' views and values and as such, there is no formal way to place oneself on the insider/outsider continuum.

I also keep a diary, outlining what I am doing and thinking, an approach advocated by many researchers including Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Van Heughten (2014). In this I consider the practicalities of the work I had completed, my emotions, and how these thoughts impacted my research and what I aimed to do in light of this. I also wrote about what I had done non-academically that day, what happened in the news, and what I hoped to achieve in the following weeks. It is a record of my interpretations of my day-to-day, presenting a record of the personal context that I operate within. There was nothing more telling of my relationship with my research topic than when I stopped using it. In the middle of my second year (2017) I was in a stationary shop buying some more pens, when I noticed a diary that I was tempted to buy. It was upon seeing this diary that I remembered that I already had one and thus should not buy it. When I returned home, I almost turned the house upside down looking for it, showing how long it had been since I had last seen it, let alone written in it. Upon finding it I saw that my last entry was written on the 8th July 2016, two days after the Chilcot (2016) Report[28] was published, and on that page I sounded angry, emotional, and frustrated. Suddenly the emotions I had felt on that day came rushing back to me. It was then that I realised I had been transposing

[28] An inquiry into UK Government's policy decisions relating to the Iraq War spanning 2001-2009.

this negativity onto my research topic and this was why I had been struggling to manage it emotionally and had been reading much more negativity in the interviews I had been conducting. It had impacted me so significantly that I had not realised I had not written in it for almost 12 months – it was completely unconscious. If I had not come across this, I am not sure whether I would have ever realised that I had started to review my data and research through a lens formed by a perceived lack of justice, personal hurt, and anger. Reading the entry was cathartic, self-actualising, and I was able to pull myself away from some extreme emotions.

Data Analysis

Coffey and Atkinson (1996) argue that analysis is a pervasive activity throughout the life of the research project. For this project, analysis was conducted at varying levels of intensity and focus over the project's life course, as well as my own – acknowledging the specific outputs required at different stages.

I have long been interested in the questions that this thesis covers through my personal engagement with the field and related issues. My research is innately tied up with numerous personal endeavours surrounding military family experiences and coping strategies and these reflections have informed the research context. Prior to starting the PhD, I was engaged in the process of informally analysing issues this thesis addresses. These questions were formalised when developing my original research proposal that was submitted to Lancaster University, as the institution that would host the research to be conducted, and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) to obtain funding. It was formalised by engaging with available literature, the identification of themes and key research gaps, signalling the beginning of a more focussed analysis – linking the literature to my insider knowledge and experiences of being part of and engaging with the AFC.

Over the months October–December 2015 I spoke to various stakeholders including APs, regional coordinators of the AFF, the MoD, and members of smaller charities working with military issues such as The Ripple Pond Foundation and Dare to Live. The aim of these conversations was to test that my research questions were appropriate. Additionally, the conversations enabled me to scope some of the possible feelings and attitudes surrounding the issues I was hoping to explore – the transcripts are used in this thesis. This activity filled me with confidence and prepared me for data collection. It marks the point in which my analysis went beyond my own personal experiences and the current literature, towards incorporating the voices of others involved. From this, I developed my semi-structured interview schedule. I also expanded on my research questions to acknowledge the points made in these conversations whilst keeping the schedule open for participants to incorporate other ideas.

I decided to stop conducting formal interviews for data collection at the end of August 2017 to allow time to analyse and write-up the thesis. Up until this point I had been putting the interview transcripts into NVivo[29] and had been identifying possible codes as I went. So began my formal process of analysis – where vague entries in my research diary emerged such as 'analyse your data'. I threw myself into it, unsure of what codes would emerge. Every line of every transcript was reviewed and passages were ascribed to codes according to themes which linked to the research questions. It was an iterative process, as I weaved through my data back-and-forth, regularly reviewing my framework as I coded to ensure best fit (Arksey and Knight, 2009). Srivastava and Hopwood (2009) argue that the role of iteration is part of the reflective process that is inherent and necessary in qualitative analysis – increasing its truthfulness, integrity, and trustworthiness. Srivastava and Hopwood (2009) offer a method in which to inject the reflexive process into analysis, overcoming the inherent problem of claiming objectivity. By asking

[29] Data analysis programme that allows you to code sections within a transcript.

questions: (1) What is the data telling me (theoretical, subjective, ontological, epistemological and field understanding), (2) What is it I want to know (according to research questions), and (3) What is the dialectical relationship between what the data are telling me and what I want to know? I used this framework to interrogate my own interpretation of the data and to ensure that codes best-matched the purpose of the project and the data obtained.

My findings are driven by the data, rather than data being corresponded to theory. As such, codes were developed from the data, rather than the data being prescribed to pre-set codes (Charmaz, 2000). As previously described, coding is not a temporally defined stage in the research, but rather an ongoing process lasting from the beginning to the end of the project (Bryman, 2012). Once codes were 'finalised' I identified overall themes/categories that were then organised into groups and corresponded to specific data chapters – (1) AP's experiences of managing the deployment phases personally, (2) their experiences of seeking support from friends and family, and (3) their experiences of seeking support from formal avenues. This analysis allowed me to access understanding and meaning from the AP's reflections of a real-life setting, incorporating perspective, motivation, and emotion. The data was then compared to previous research to reflect upon similarity/difference with previous findings.

Much of the research on stigma has an individualistic focus and thus tends to exist within micro level theory. This limits understandings of the pervasive and systemic exclusion from society that stigmatised individuals may face (Oliver, 1992). Fine and Asch (1988) have argued that this individualised focus has led to researchers inadvertently seeing the stigma as produced within the stigmatised individual, as opposed to something that is imposed upon an individual through interaction with others, as Goffman originally argued. Hence, this research analyses data acknowledging that individuals exist within the context of the military as an institution

and cultural field to understand if/how militarised processes are (re)produced and maintained via perspectives of those exposed to it.

Ethics in Practice

This research was approved by the Lancaster University Ethics Board in June 2016, confirming that research objectives and materials (marketing and interview schedules) were unlikely to cause harm to participants. My experiences of negotiating ethical paradigms has been complex, primarily because the military is a small community, especially with regards to the support services. During interviews, some participants asked whether their colleagues had participated; in these situations I stated this could not be disclosed. This was met with amusement, perhaps because they were used to having information withheld in the field of the military.

Another problem I encountered is that participants were interested in what my family experienced. Self-disclosure during interviews may distract from the focus. However, researchers – particularly relating to feminist methodologies - have argued that research should benefit all those involved and therefore it is important to encourage a reciprocity and enable space for similar questions to be asked of the researcher (Oakley, 1981; Letherby, 2003). From interviewing other researchers, Dickson-Swift et al. (2007) found that others prefer to self-disclose as it reduces hierarchy and enhances rapport. However, many were aware of how much they felt it appropriate to disclose. I opted to use self-disclosure to reduce power imbalances and build rapport to encourage conversations. I ensured that self-disclosure acknowledged my family's privacy and was explicit about my role within the community and my research intentions. Because of this, I found that throughout interviews I switched roles between interviewer, Army daughter, and a friend (often all at the same time) to co-produce knowledge.

I referred earlier to the fact that the military is a small community and at no point did this become more pertinent than in one of my interviews with a UWO. Within the first ten minutes he had asked me why I was interested in the subject of military family welfare, and I explained that I was an Army daughter who had experienced deployment and was interested in capturing the experiences of others. This led him to ask which unit my father was in and we very quickly realised that he had been led by my father in Northern Ireland and my parents had been to his wedding recently. I knew I had recognised his name, but it had not clicked! That changed the dynamic of the interview and we spoke much more as friends, rather than in a professional sense. I had even heard stories about his wife who had also previously worked with my father and apparently had always found it amusing that he drank Earl Grey tea – a joke regularly referred to within my immediate family, triggering the association between masculinities and the military. Of course, the first thing we did upon realising this was to send my father an email via the military system saying something along the lines of 'you will never guess who is interviewing me' and we joked about sending a picture of us too. It became one of the more useful interviews I conducted. Due to the personal connection, I could ask questions that I had avoided with others clearing up confusion in process and procedure within formal welfare. He opened up quickly as the trust between us had increased and passed on many documents about UWO training. Awkwardly however, he would refer to other individuals, albeit nothing personal, but I had heard of them too and in these situations, I felt it more appropriate to pretend I did not know them.

To ensure that my work adhered to the broad guidelines and expectations of ethical practice I adopted numerous strategies. Prior to interviews, participants were informed of the project, given a project overview sheet, confirmed that they understood, and signed consent documents. Where interviews were conducted via the telephone, participants gave their verbal consent. Identities were anonymised to encourage participation (Bryman, 2012) and ensure that

standards set by the British Sociological Association (2002) were met. All participants were given pseudonyms and locations have been removed. Ideally, I would locate my thesis in the areas it was conducted as each location operates slightly differently in terms of availability of services and context such as an upcoming deployment, proximity to a city etc. However, as support related roles are limited I have chosen to omit all locators.

Another key ethical problem experienced in conducting this research related to my role as researcher working with the military. As discussed earlier I have straddled various roles/decisions with regards to my relationship with the military - as an institution and social process/practice – to ensure access and build/maintain rapport. For example, I moved between performances of the cheerleader, critic, and diplomat (Caddick, 2018); I maintained distance whilst ensuring collaboration from the institution and I managed my own perspectives and experiences when conducting interviews to reduce the likelihood of conversations replicating my own views, whilst also using experiences to build trust. However, one pertinent question remains – it has been suggested that military research which legitimises and normalises practices and engages with policy may provide the military opportunity to better itself on its own terms (Enloe, 1983; Baker et al., 2016; Basham and Bulmer, 2017). Perhaps upon providing policy related recommendations, the military may use this knowledge in ways unanticipated by the researcher themselves. I acknowledge this, and it is a perspective I have encountered personally when describing my research both socially and within the discipline I sit (Sociology). However, I believe that whilst the military exists (and there is no sensible reason to suggest that it will not exist in the future), those in emotional/familial relationships with SPs will continue to be affected in different ways to those who are not directly associated. It is important to understand not only the (intended or unintended) consequences of militarisation and the effects that the military as a programme has upon APs, but also to work towards developing/changing policies to alleviate identifiable negative effects.

Now that I have outlined the methodology, I will present the key findings from the thematic analysis of interviews with APs and FSWs. The next chapter will discuss how APs framed their experiences of reintegration (and general deployment) and show how they develop strategies to cope with the stressors caused by their military-associated lives.

Chapter 4: Liminality, the Spectre of Deployment, and Personal Coping Strategies

> Well I think everyone comes back expecting everything to be the same but what you don't realise is that things haven't been the same for a long time. It's not the date of deployment, it's the date that you hear that they are going to deploy that everything changes and that could be a year before where you start to anticipate what life is going to be like on your own. By the time they go you actually want them to be gone because you need it to happen because the moment they go you […] can start thinking about them coming back [Cheryl, AFF].

The focus of this thesis is to explore APs' lived experiences of the reintegration period when their SP returns from combat-related deployment and the associated coping strategies they employ when managing this. This chapter presents the data obtained from interviews with both APs and FSWs, showing that the reintegration process presents numerous challenges which APs experience, manage, and navigate. Most interestingly, the interviews have shown that APs do not experience reintegration as an isolated event. Rather, their experiences and perspectives are influenced by previous deployment periods (pre-deployment, deployment) and expectations for the future – as articulated in the quote above. Therefore, rather than experiencing an ECD (Pincus et al., 2001), APs live with the 'spectre of deployment' as family-based decisions, relationships, experiences, and perspectives are haunted by the prospect of absence and the imprints deployment(s) have upon each family member. In fact, when asked how many deployments they had experienced, few APs could remember, indicating the regularity and normality of the tumultuous absence/presence of their SP. Furthermore, absence/change is compounded by non-combat absences such as training/exercises or only returning home at the weekend due to distance between home and work (Gribble and Fear, 2019). Certainly, absence

caused by combat duties impacts APs differently to non-combat due to the potential for mental/physical health impacts, the threat to life, the influence of news media, and political narratives.

This chapter explores APs' experiences post-deployment focusing on how they manage and negotiate transition imposed by the demands and disruptions caused to family life by the military. By introducing the concept of the spectre of deployment, I question the utility of the often used ECD. Instead I present the key themes that have arisen from the thematic analysis of the data. These themes relate to three periods – pre-deployment, deployment, and post-deployment. On initial reading it may seem as though I am reproducing the ECD but that is not the purpose here. My data does not reject the utility of the research that has presented experiences according to a cycle, instead it adds to previous conceptions by showing that experiences are much more complex and fluid than the ECD allows for. As I work through each theme to show the complexity of how APs perceive and manage demands during each phase, I assert that each phase influences reintegration experiences. Experiences are not cyclical but instead deployment increases APs' exposure to military objectives/interests, leading to perspectives and experiences merging and flowing between each stage of the deployment process in overlapping, non-linear, and constitutive ways.

This chapter shows how military-related demands of SPs directly impact APs' lived experiences, specifically relating to their roles within the home(front) which directly impacts their identity, voice, and agency. The imposition of military demands genders APs' roles – Chapters 5 and 6 also allude to this gendering, which is discussed in detail in the Chapter 7. APs manage disruption and chaos to foster a sense of stability within the home and between family members, adopting primary domestic, child, and caregiving responsibilities. However,

'normal' is never achieved as they are forever haunted by the next unknown (and in my experience, last-minute, ever-changing) military-imposed transition.

My data has shown that APs are haunted by the spectre of deployment, meaning they live within the boundaries of liminality (discussed in Chapter 2) – where stability is disrupted by forces beyond their control (military), stability is difficult to obtain and identities, roles, and practice are in flux. By dealing with the ambiguous presence and absence of their SP (Boss, 2007; Faber, 2008; Hyde, 2015), APs live liminal lives in which the roles of household members and relationships are fluid and susceptible to change, reacting and preparing for military-imposed disruption (deployment)[30]. APs' experiences of liminality are not captured within a moment or week, but instead marks their entire military-associated lives in which social hierarchies within their households are regularly altered, family traditions are disrupted, and their futures uncertain.

Another aim of this research is to review the coping strategies APs employ when managing military lives which are marked by disruption, transition, and limited autonomy. I have identified personal coping strategies as the primary strategy used by APs. APs focus on managing their liminal lives by 'meaning-making' – they keep busy to give the unknown periods a sense of purpose, they fill the social spaces left by the SP to give impressions of stability to children, and they fill emotional spaces by maintaining communication avenues between family members.

APs' experiences are distinct from absences that occur within civilian society – the absence of their SP is marked by an awareness of the risk to physical and mental health, the need to manage children's concerns, and the expectation of the SP's eventual and hoped for homecoming. They

[30] Non-military transitions may also include ageing, changes of employment, marriage, and giving birth although that is not the focus of this research.

are in a state of flux, making changes to the practical running of their daily lives, managing emotions, whilst being aware that changes will not be forever, and that eventually transitions will occur once more. APs wait for the hopeful return of their SP, relying on strategies/rituals to keep them busy, manipulating experiences of time to make deployment 'go faster' (for research on time manipulation see Flaherty, 2003). During this phase, their lifestyles are temporary as they focus on their families' survival (both physical and emotional) – attempting to influence and support family member's experiences of deployment.

Pre-Deployment

The pre-deployment experience was much less discussed by APs and FSWs compared to deployment and post-deployment. APs enter into a state of anticipation – waiting for their SP to deploy, whilst managing longer training exercises and many said that they look forward to the 'start date' so that they can begin counting down for the return. Additionally, FSWs' focus tends to turn to developing a social calendar to support families in the SP's absence. Both families and the FSWs therefore begin to develop practices that anticipate the separation of the SP from families, and develop/bolster possible mechanisms for coping with the unknown during deployment. APs are in a liminal state as they begin to prepare to separate from their SP and start to imagine what life will be like once they leave - social identities and family norms begin to change.

APs prepare and bolster their coping strategies whilst managing their emotions – often for the sake of the SP and the children. When asked what the most difficult aspect of the military lifestyle was, Patricia [AP] said that it was the first few days after the SP leaves and likened the emotions she felt to mourning. She said that when 'dropping him off' the children are usually with her which means that there is an added pressure to support their emotional responses, whilst managing her own. Her grief is private, and she experiences responsibility to support her

family. There is an element of denial in the way APs talk about their 'saying goodbye' as many approached the task in a way that made the temporality of the absence clear. For example, Lydia [AP] never says "*goodbye*", instead preferring "*see you later"*. She explained that the purpose of not saying "*goodbye*" was to protect the children because "*if they see how you cope, it makes it a lot easier for them"*. The euphemism of equating saying goodbye to their SP going on deployment to him going to work in a civilian context (without danger) is a coping strategy not only provided by mother to children, but for herself. Previous research conducted by Huebner et al. (2007) found that older children also feel a sense of duty to look after the at-home parent and support them by babysitting younger siblings, taking up additional household responsibilities, and providing emotional support to the AP. Family members work to fill the emotional void left by the SP and new/different family relations and hierarchies begin to develop. These findings are consistent with previous work exploring ambiguous presence (Boss, 2007; Faber et al., 2008) as families begin to prepare for the absence of their partner, removing them from the primary family network which is defined by their roles and responsibilities to bolster their coping strategies and give them the space to focus on training and preparation. Their preparation strategies change according to their level of experience.

A pre-deployment briefing is generally arranged by the military, inviting APs to attend. The purpose is to inform them of what to expect, what their SP is doing, financial benefits, and events and activities to be hosted by the support services during the deployment. Many of the APs described pre-deployment briefings they had attended. For them, the most useful information includes contact numbers for the various support services they may need during the deployment phase, and details about the events organised during that cycle. Additional information about the deployment may include its location and purpose. However, the briefings do not enable APs to discuss/question the morality or purpose of the deployment. Rather, it informs APs about what the military considers they 'need to know' - it is not an open, reciprocal

dialogue. The military tells APs what is going to happen and one UWO called the initiative 'Op. Inform Home' – the language of this form of support has been militarised. The influence of formal support operationalises APs, militarising them, showing how (feminised) families are subsumed into the greedy institution.

On the one hand APs are invited into the military sphere, but their voices are diminished and limited – maintaining the authority/claim/power the military has over Army families' lives. Many of the APs alluded to this abstraction but also resisted its 'pull'. For example, Anna [AP] discussed how the briefing did not offer enough perspectives and felt repetitive: "*I didn't go to any of them […] I've heard it all a thousand times before […] I wonder can they [formal support] really relate to all of them [APs]*". In her previous experiences of deployment, she would have appreciated hearing from a "*seasoned wife*" who could advise her on how to cope, tell her story, but not suggest that her experience is the same. Cheryl [AFF] said that although the Army are good at hosting pre-deployment briefings, they tend to get *"some poor chap who is not qualified to talk to you about the emotional cycle which is usually unbearable to listen to"*. It is important to stress that she felt the briefings were "*good"* but does highlight, like Anna, that APs would benefit from it being delivered by another experienced AP who was able to speak at different levels (experiences of the first, second, third etc. deployment). After all, APs are not all in the same position and in need of the same advice, because their experiences and perspectives of deployment are not the same as others. This evidences the need to move beyond the ECD as it over-categorises and over-simplifies otherwise multiple experiences.

APs also discussed practical difficulties in attending pre-deployment briefings. This was due to employment, childcare duties and living away from patch. Others were not aware of a pre-deployment briefing being held with some saying that the only contact they received was via email, which Molly [AP] referred to critically as "*some little emails"*. FSWs often discussed

the difficulty in contacting APs who did not live on-patch, or whose SP had not given them the details to make contact (see Chapter 6).

Deployment

The SP deploying is a transition that APs endure/manage, constantly adapting to changes, whilst continuing to treat the period as temporary. Even if an AP spends most of the year separated from their SP due to deployment, they do not consider this 'normal'. It is during this phase that APs are most exposed to the military-imposed expectations on their practice and ultimately their ability to cope. During the deployment the military has almost total control over the SP and APs manage the impact demands have upon the home(front). Their identities/roles during deployment are not 'fixed' but are dependent on the context – the deployment – and many APs never realise 'total domestic control'. Instead it is a pursuit towards managing emotionally and practically – they are always reaching out for improvement. Deployment marks the continuation of a series of processes of change and adaptation that only end when it is interrupted by the eventual (and hopeful) return of the SP which then presents another period of changes.

<u>Domestic/Childcare Tasks: Responsibility</u>

Military demands force APs to live in more traditional, patriarchal households as they assume total control of the domestic sphere, whilst their SP operates in the public sphere. In fact, gender roles become especially important in maintaining the family during deployment. APs engage in gendered activities such as controlling household administration and finances, practical tasks, and other chores within the home. Further gendering of APs lives is evidenced by the impact that deployment has upon their ability to maintain a career/job due to SP absence, especially if childcare is difficult to source. APs expect disruption and therefore tend to occupy more

responsibility within the household to reduce fluctuation and transition during deployment – evidence of them living under the spectre of deployment and managing their liminal lives.

However, many of the APs who were interviewed considered their roles during deployment as evidence of their empowerment compared to traditionally female roles. For example, Ruby [AFF, AP] said that APs are far more self-sufficient and tend to be the natural leader in the household and Patricia [AP] said that "*I made a few mistakes but I did manage to plumb the washing machine in […] I just think it makes you a little bit stronger*". Catherine [AP] associated her management of domestic tasks as a reflection of her coping – she adopted her SP's household roles such as changing fuses, DIY, and dealing with the MOT. By doing so, she felt that she was living in a household that was not governed by gendered roles and norms. Therefore, strength and coping are conflated with the ability to do 'his' jobs. Yet really, these roles remain profoundly gendered as they are based within the home and do not occur through her own agency, but rather in response to the non-negotiable demands of a masculine authority (the military). In fact, it is her labour which enables the military to operate. Her labour enables the SP to increase his focus on the deployment and therefore maintain operational effectiveness.

During deployment many of the APs assume a single parent identity as they become the sole-carer for children – they make all decisions and manage/support children's reactions to the SP's absence (sleepless nights, upset, anger, confusion). This is made easier by seeking support from informal networks for emotional and practical support (see Chapter 5). APs described their techniques in explaining the deployment to their children, primarily to help them cope with the transition. For example, Tonya [AP] told her daughter that he was absent because he had to earn money to buy her something new – associating his absence with need and making it seem like he was doing this to treat her, again euphemising absence:

> If you ask where's Daddy? Oh he's in Canada, he's got to make money, I need new shoes, if she sees a plane she's like oh look that's my Daddy […] And when she was younger and obviously she was used to him always being away, […] he had four weeks off, after two weeks she started packing his Army bag with toys and food and send him away.

The story telling involved in explaining her father's absence, and the association with him being on a plane, maintains his emotional space in the family unit. Through the telling of stories, APs keep SPs present in their children's imagination. However, children renegotiate his absence/presence on their own terms too, especially when they grow-up and become more exposed to civilian communities:

> My older child […] she really misses him, she's a bit of a Daddy's girl, which makes it harder for me to deal with […] she knows Daddy's doing a job and she just knows that Daddy's in the Army and he has to go away to work, but she does say well why can't Daddy just have a normal job like Grandad does or like Uncle does? [Lydia, AP].

Service children consider themselves as 'other' to civilians due to the negative perception received from wider society – they consider civilian lifestyles as normal (RNRMCF, 2009). Negative perspectives experienced by children include a feeling that they are 'second-class citizens' due to stigma attached to their identity assuming bad behaviour, authoritative parenting and high mobility (ibid.). Service children are keenly aware of the different lifestyles they have in comparison to civilian children and are also highly aware of the role of their serving parent (CC, 2018). Inferring from my data, this is likely developed through the regular discussions that APs have with their children when explaining their father's absence.

Managing Relationships: Maintaining Emotional Space

The level of communication experienced by APs and their SP during deployment can impact their experiences of the reintegration process – previous research has found that better communication opportunities during deployment can increase perceived relationship quality and less 'stress reactions' (Dandeker et al.; 2006; Houston et al., 2013). Albeit, miscommunication can cause a perceived gulf in understanding between APs and SPs, especially post-deployment (Hinojosa et al., 2013; Carter and Renshaw, 2015; Long, 2015). In the interviews, generally, APs felt that the more communication they were able to have, the easier it was to reintegrate as they were able to see how the other had changed and SPs could experience children growing up. The greater the level of communication, the less APs worried about the health/wellbeing of their SP, and it limited their reliance on news media. Additionally, if communication was infrequent, APs said they were less likely to be open about problems to minimise potential stress caused to their SP. Communication opens emotional space within the home for the SP whilst physically absent – reinforcing the temporary nature of deployment.

Communication using the latest technologies blurs the lines between the home and the front, producing nuanced and complex notions of closeness/intimacy and distance/isolation between the geographically separate spaces (Adey et al., 2016). Communication methods during deployment are various and include forces aerogrammes (blueys), standard letters may also be sent where photographs or news articles can be attached, emails, phone calls, texts, care packages and webcam-based technologies. Each of these methods of communication are limited and rely on availability of infrastructure/access and associated perceived quality as per medium (Long, 2015). On the one hand they can absorb APs into theatre (real time communication and experiences of communication-blackouts), whilst on the other, they can exclude them from their

SP by making the distance seemingly more pronounced (through lack of contact and inability to make real-time contact).

Previous experiences of communication during deployment impacted APs' perspectives of communication during later deployments, showing how time and experience overlap. For example, more frequent communication, when compared to previous deployments, meant that communication-blackouts had a greater impact upon them:

> There were a lot of fatalities on that tour and a lot of serious injuries, so we didn't have a lot of communication […] The next time he went away was a complete change and they had Wi-Fi in their tents and Skype, the signal was pretty crap but you could Facetime and certainly instant message even if the video was a bit poor. And that was completely different, so instead of going ten days at a time wondering if I'm going to get a phone call, sobbing when you get in 'cos you realise you've missed a call and things like that, to actually every day sending a message. […] So they're not as out of your life, they're much more a part of it, and I think that makes a difference with integrating back in as well, they're still a part of it [Isobel, AFF, AP].

This echoes the findings of US researchers Faber et al. (2008) who state that family members work to keep the boundary caused by absence open, maintaining communication flows as far as possible. In recounting the experience of communication with their SP, APs tended to reflect on times when communication was not desirable. The impact on their lifestyle was often discussed as APs felt if they did not keep busy, they would end up sitting at home all day waiting for the phone call – APs cannot call SPs – and thus developed techniques to give their lives a sense of purpose and control (outlined shortly). At the same time, APs discussed the need to be flexible when managing communication with absent partners - avoiding arguments and limiting

upsetting reactions when lines were disrupted. Additionally, opportunities to communicate are influenced by the structural capability in theatre. Furthermore, communication-blackouts occur when a camp is under fire or there has been a loss of life or injury that the camp is dealing with before making it public – the silence absorbs the AP into the warzone, leaving them to imagine what has happened and suspends them in the unknown – forcing further liminality upon them.

APs were much more likely to talk about the benefits of facilitating communication with the children rather than in sustaining their relationship. The primary focus of AP mothers was to include the SP in as much of the growing up of their children as possible by sharing photographs, using webcam-based technologies, and wall charts. This helped children to recognise their absent parent on his return, but it did not overcome all reticence as the actual physical presence of the SP and changing routines/rules could not be mitigated through increased communication during deployment. Thus, as far as APs try to keep the emotional space open, roles and family hierarchies inevitably change upon his return (discussed shortly).

Increasingly, there are more forms of communication being offered to Army families to support children throughout the process. For example, the provision of information and activity packs which children can fill in for the absent parent, including height charts, updates on their favourite animal, and personal messages (MoD, 2009; MoD, 2014) (see Figure 3). The main purpose of this pack is to involve the SP in the child's growing up – notice the militarised nature of these images used, drawing the family into consuming military images/messages, blurring the space between theatre and home. Further, these images and messages attempt to normalise 'militaryness' for both children and parents engaging with it, evidencing a form of coping propaganda, understating the distance and upset that can be caused by parental separation. It is evidence of the AP, children, childhood, memories, and growth being militarised. Additionally, the process of engaging with this package obscures the labour of the AP who will likely

facilitate the completion of such activities for the purpose of supporting both her children and SP by maintaining the emotional space within the home presently, and in the future, upon his return.

Figure 3: Hello from home booklet[31]

[31] Images from MoD (2009;2014).

Coping Strategies

There were three key coping strategies used by APs during deployment: (1) to keep busy by throwing oneself into household, childcare, social, and employment responsibilities; (2) to remember to treat oneself and negotiate expectations; and (3) seek support from either formal or informal support avenues (see Chapters 5 and 6). The overall coping strategy was summarised by Patricia [AP]: "*it's not forever, it does pass, if you make the most of the time and you keep yourself busy then it does pass quickly*". Generally, APs put more emphasis on finding mechanisms for coping by themselves and then if things became too difficult, to turn to family and friends, and then potentially seek support from formal avenues.

All APs said that having children to focus upon makes the deployment experience much easier to manage as it keeps them busy, enables them to meet other mothers, and gives them a source to derive strength. When asked how she experienced deployment Jennifer [AP] said:

> Before I had the children I used to work so I just had my civilian friends and I'd go out and enjoy myself, but now being an Army wife and with my children, it just keeps my mind occupied, it's the evenings that get to us, 'cos once the kids are in bed, that's when you reflect actually yeah I could do with some cuddles.

Similarly, Anna [AP] said that at times during deployment she has her "*bad times where I cry and I can't cope and [think] why me"*. I then asked her how she managed these moments and she said that it was her children "*because I have to be strong"*. As mentioned earlier, developing skills around the household which are associated with strength, is a theme in many of the reflections on transition.

Children also distract APs from the stressors of deployment. Molly [AP] said she distracted herself and children by "*keeping busy, moving around, not sitting on the end waiting for*

telephone calls […] whereas other people would be sat there, and I know my friend went through this stage of he didn't phone and I was like well you know it happens". This echoes earlier findings arguing that APs becoming captive to the telephone limits coping (Lapp et al., 2010). The inability of APs to call their SP directly impacts their ability to adapt their experience of 'time-speed', thus negatively impacting their coping strategy. Other methods that made time 'go faster' was attending events organised by formal support (see Chapters 5 and 6) and employment:

> I mean there are so many wives that don't work for whatever reason, and I think that must mean that the days would stretch on and on and on. I've always worked, so I was working full time and obviously now I work part time, I don't really have time to be like moping about it or thinking oh my god how am I going to cope? [Catherine, AP].

There is a tension here, it has been evidenced that not all APs are able to work due to issues of high mobility and childcare requirements which are more pronounced during deployment. Key benefits of working are not only the distraction it creates but also the independence it can give an AP. They are able to meet other people outside of the AFC, expand their informal network, and as Anna [AP] stated "*I can go shopping, I mean I can do what I want anyway but I think every woman should have their own money"*. However, employment, attending events, and focusing on children do not serve to distract APs from lonely points:

> It's the feeling of loneliness is horrible, like even now if I go to coffee mornings in the day time, at night time it's probably the worst time of day because you put your little one to bed, you go downstairs and it's quiet and it's silent. And I said to my husband there's this clock in our living room and I hate it because all you can hear

> is the clock ticking and that's quite sad that that's the only noise you kind of have in the house is this clock, and it's yeah, it's horrible [Lynn, AP].

Isolation and loneliness are impossible to overcome due to the end of spending time with others in the evening. It is in these times/moments that the absent space of their SP becomes difficult to fill. After all, the evening is a time where families tend to come together, within their home, and the absence of the SP is difficult for APs to ignore. The sadness experienced within these moments - by noticing the missing sounds and experiences - is evidence of an AP maintaining the emotional space of their absent partner.

Many of the APs said that deployments are easier managed if they look after themselves by participating in 'indulgence-oriented' activities such as watching television, doing exercise, eating what you want, and early nights: "*no one's going to judge me for going to bed at seven o'clock and having a bowl of cereal for dinner*" [Catherine, AP]. These activities are all performed within the home (the private sphere), often in the evenings that are the most isolating for APs, away from the public gaze. This suggests that APs try to hide their indulgence-activities. During deployment, APs shift their focus from individual to family leisure time to cope and care for their children (Werner and Shannon, 2013). By taking time to themselves, APs discuss relaxing, and their activities mentioned above allude to self-care rather than 'release'. Their breaks from responsibility involve reducing domestic labour in tasks that only affect themselves (not cooking a meal for their dinner) or building up strength by getting an early night, in anticipation of the work they do the following day. Their time to themselves is not escapism, they continue to live for others and are bound to their militarised roles and responsibilities. Furthermore, these forms of taking a break and indulgence are profoundly gendered and are orientated towards supporting families and SPs, performing unpaid labour, which the military relies upon to maintain operational effectiveness.

Post-Deployment: Reintegration

The return of the SP is greatly anticipated by APs. It highlights transition where it is expected that the management of isolation/loneliness will end, and childcare/domestic responsibilities will be shared. Anxieties develop around the unknown relating to the health/wellbeing of the SP (will he have changed?), the relinquishment of independence and control (have I changed?), and the reestablishment of other family members relationships (will the children recognise him?). Again, the AP separates herself from practices and behaviours that were developed/developing throughout the deployment phase and seek news ways of reincorporating the family to their 'new normal' – as each member of the family has changed.

Reintegration is temporary due to the likelihood of other deployment announcements, and in response APs resist total reintegration (especially those who have experienced multiple deployments). The increasing experience/exposure to military processes such as deployment impacts APs' responses as they are less likely to relinquish as much control to the SP upon his return - crystallising the effects of deployment within the home. Additionally, the SP is ambiguously present (Faber et al., 2008) as they are physically there but the demands of the military, as a greedy institution (Segal, 1986), means that his body/mind is linked to past and future deployments. Additionally, they carry the traces of deployment(s) experienced and anticipated. Therefore, families continue to live with the spectre of deployment.

<u>Rest and Recuperation</u>

Before reviewing experiences of reintegration, it is worth noting that some families will have seen one another during deployment during rest and recuperation (R&R). UK personnel are entitled to R&R which 'usually lasts between 10 and 14 days and occurs once during a 6-month tour of duty. R&R slots become available between the first 6 weeks and the last 6 weeks of an

operational tour' (Parsloe et al., 2014: 616). R&R is a period when the soldier may return home and spend time with his/her family. However, it is difficult to predict when it will take place and for how long.

The APs I interviewed generally enjoyed this period, but it was not experienced without difficulty – travel had to be factored into the limited time, and there was pressure to have 'the best time'. Simone [AP] said that she was "*not a fan of them*" as the effort in preparing for and managing deployment, especially with children, was undone and having to re-establish routines after his return to deployment was difficult. Additionally, she said that her SP would still be in "*battlemind*" – his language was inappropriate, he was not "*housetrained"*, and would leave her to do most of the housework. This is experienced by many post-deployment but given that the SP will leave again, routines are not worth disrupting, leaving APs continuing to be the head of the domestic sphere. Her routine is disturbed, only to go back to being a single parent a few days later.

Some families chose not to take R&R as it was considered more disruptive than beneficial. Ruby [AFF, AP] said that after R&R the tour is mentally more difficult but at least then you can begin the 'real' count down. Previous research conducted by Dandeker et al. (2006) found that R&R was a mixed blessing for families as 80% of their cohort said it was a good experience due to it effectively performing as a 'catch-up' that was more intimate than a phone call. However, the disruption to established routines and a limited ability to choose when R&R occurred caused troubles. Additionally, it seemed to make his absence post R&R more pronounced.

Preparation for Homecoming

There are three stages to the homecoming process – preparation, the return home, and the resulting 'honeymoon' period. Many of the APs interviewed talked about their experiences preparing for the return of their SP, each placing a high level of importance on this process. Activities involve "*the ritual of cleaning*" [Ruby, AFF, AP], filling the fridge, and mowing the lawn. Some referred to these rituals as part of a coping mechanism, making time go faster in the lead-up to the return, whilst others suggested that the primary aim was to make it nice for his return, so they did not have to think about anything beyond their relationship – diminishing the mundane.

Ultimately, returning to a clean and well-stocked house makes it appear that the family has run seamlessly in his absence – hiding the actual reality of a busy household being run by one person. The effects of this are complex and evidence of APs' embroilment with various power relations relating to the military and gender. On the one hand, presenting a well-stocked/clean house is a performance and resonates with the work of Goffman (1956) and his commentary about social presentations front/backstage. APs' labour during deployment is conducted backstage, as they present an alternative image of seamlessness to the SP on his return – their labour is gendered as activities are tied to the private sphere. Additionally, the presentation of the home, which attempts to obscure the traces of military/deployment/absence, artificially separates the very real blurred boundaries between the home and military spheres. This performance could also be considered an act of resistance to the military, as it evidences AP's 'taking control' and 'drawing a line after the deployment'. Alternatively, it could evidence the greediness and domination of the military as it is AP's gendered domestic labour which aims to reduce the worry and stress of the returning SP, thus it serves to support their reintegration

post-combat – supporting military aims and overall combat effectiveness. Therefore, through the mundane there is evidence of militarisation of the home and members within.

Tracy [AP] described her experience of cleaning as being "*in a panic about how clean the house is"* – suggesting she is trying to meet an expectation that is either difficult to achieve or she is unsure of the threshold of the acceptable. Faber et al. (2008: 228) say that just before return, 'reservists became more psychologically present within the family, as family members began to envision how their reservist would fit back within the new evolved family system'. This can be used to interpret the rituals described above – as APs work towards creating psychological space for their returning SP by imagining what their needs, requirements, and expectations may be upon returning – turning these into physical realities. Their roles and practices within the home change even before his return.

Some APs are given the opportunity to attend a post-deployment briefing ahead of or after the return of their SP. Nick [AWS] said that these involve updates about what the SPs have experienced and potential reactions to expect on return. Additionally, information about the sorts of welfare and support available to APs managing SP reactions are given – for example mental distress, heavy-drinking, and nightmares. These briefings are not standardised, and some units do not offer them at all (see Chapter 6). The APs felt that post-deployment briefs were useful, but more information could be provided, especially for those with less experience. More experienced APs warn that transition is not easy, nor is receiving information about who to seek for support, as can be seen in the excerpt below:

> If you're a new wife and this hasn't happened to you before, don't be surprised if you feel a bit detached, don't be surprised if they get a bit stroppy about not knowing where anything is in the house, don't be surprised about all sorts of things, and then signposting, what to do if you find that you're struggling with it, both of

> you or either of you. So, who to go to […] telephone numbers and contact details and stuff like that. That would be massively helpful, that never happens in my experience [Natasha, AP].

Another AP said it would be useful to hear about how to "*get your relationship back on track"* [Tracy, AP] and manage the experience of being without one another for months to being together all the time. Effectively, providing a warning that the honeymoon will come to an end, and how to manage those challenges.

Many of the APs interviewed had never been invited to a post-deployment briefing, or had been invited to some but not every time after a deployment – practice was inconsistent. Not having this contact led to some APs feeling out of the loop. Additionally, if they are held, some APs face problems of not being able to attend due to clashes with working hours, childcare, and transport issues. Post-deployment briefings are poorly attended when compared to the pre-deployment briefing because families are more interested in spending time with each other – perhaps post-deployment briefings would be more successful if held before the return of the SP.

Throughout deployment, one of the key questions that APs yearned for an answer to but would not often receive was a return home date. Many said that the process of the SP returning was particularly fraught with problems. Return home dates would change, impacting expectations at home and the preparations that had been made to celebrate the return. It was important for all APs that they had a return home date that was fixed, that they could work towards as a family – it helped them to cope and could be looked forward to rather than associated with anticipation. A return home date that changed teased APs and Simone [AP] likened it to dangling a carrot in front of her. It is worth noting that this was a perspective more often mentioned by younger APs, whilst older APs with more deployments under their belts tended to see the variability as

just another part of the military lifestyle that they had to manage. Molly [AP] accepted that dates often changed; however, she felt that she was often the last to know and that the military could do more to keep her in the loop. Jennifer [AP] said that because of the variability she does not even begin to acknowledge proposed return dates. Others said they relied on their SP to know, but they had expected that formal communication would be provided, especially when close contact had been maintained with welfare workers such as the UWO. Anticipating the return-home is marked by liminality.

Ruby [AFF, AP] added that even if the return date is fixed and does not change, this does not mean that their SP will arrive at home on that date. For her, one minute her SP is in theatre and then "*stuck at decompression*" and this fills her with resentment, but she does understand that the process is designed to help and support her SP. In recounting her latest experience of the reintegration process, she introduced the perspective that even when the service personnel touch down on "*home-soil*" there is still a journey to be made to the front door. Her SP landed in Brize Norton and many of the other military families were able to travel and meet there with their welcome home banners and children, yet she was unable to as her family were posted in Northern Ireland. Not only did this lead to a delay of unification but she could not bring the welcome home paraphernalia to the airport local to her in Northern Ireland as presenting association with the British Army is not something one should be doing in that location. It shows through the complicated perspectives of home/theatre, and the spaces in-between, further liminality is experienced due to the situatedness of the home, family, and SP.

Furthermore, the return from deployment does not mean an end of the absence of the SP. They may be re-deployed at a moment's notice to a combat-zone, training opportunity, or as Simone [AP] recounted, to respond to a national emergency such as the flooding in 2015[32]: "*ooo it's*

[32] Storm Desmond, December 2015.

raining, may be off again!". This shows how reintegration is temporary and textured with the spectre of deployment, marked by liminality.

The Return: Working Towards the New Normal

All the APs I interviewed looked forward to the return of their SP. However, each said that the initial excitement and happiness experienced when they step through the front door does not take long to wear off, as families face the daily household realities – cooking, cleaning, childcare. Families work towards negotiating a 'new normal', acknowledging that the deployment cycle changed persons and the family dynamic through the negotiation of domestic labour and the re-establishment of relationships within the spectre of another deployment.

Domestic/Childcare Tasks: Re-establishment

After the initial homecoming one of the first things that Army families face is the reorganisation of domestic tasks. However, it is not a simple case of the household tasks being shared 50:50 once both are back in the home. For many, primary household responsibilities remain with the AP to minimise disruption when the SP is deployed again – showing how they continue to be impacted by deployments and live in a state of preparation/anticipation. Catherine [AP] said that "*he's quite happy to let me do stuff 'cos he's like you're a lot more organised than I am. So, I just leave him to do heavy stuff, or things that I can't do*". There is a tension for APs in creating space for the returning SP which is perhaps explained as practices which are developed to protect themselves from future deployments. Some struggle to relinquish domestic responsibility and Patricia [AP] talked about keeping routines the same to reduce her reliance upon him, limiting the impact of a future deployment:

> I always try to keep my routine the same, so like even when he's here I don't necessarily rely on him, so you know I work the hours that I work so that I can pick

the kids up regardless of if he's here or not.

However, there is only so much an AP can do to protect themselves from the tumultuous presence/absence of their SP. The physical space that is taken up can irritate APs, primarily revolving around increased domestic chores – "*I'll be getting used to back living with him, you know and remembering to cook his tea as well and do his washing*" [Claire, AP]. Many also referred to the presence of his military boots by the front door causing some to trip over or no longer being able to make it look neat – deployment haunting the home. Previous research has commented that dust from Afghanistan, falling from an aircraft pilot's flight suit hanging in the hallway amongst children's raincoats and wellington boots, presents 'an invasion of the domestic sphere' (Jenkings et al., 2016: 469). It symbolises the lack of control APs have in controlling the boundaries between the home and the military.

Other APs were keen to divide tasks once more, for example Karianne [AP] resented the additional work created and talked about how she encourages him to adopt more household tasks:

> Role negotiation is hard 'cos he's just coming in and dumps his stuff, and that needs washing, the washing machine's there, I'm not your mother, I'm your wife, […] that bag doesn't go there, it's still a work in progress, I'm not going to lie, that's still hard, it's just he presumes that I've been waiting for him to come home and wash everything.

Other household tasks involve childcare responsibilities. Most of the APs with children said that they would work towards sharing these responsibilities with their returned SP as part of facilitating their overall family unit relationship building. Part of this process involves

managing changing rules and boundaries with children, which can sometimes irritate APs who have developed specific routines:

> It's hard 'cos for example, they go can I have an ice lolly, I say no, and he goes yeah go have whatever you want. I was like no you've got to back me up […] I run a much stricter house when he's not there, so I go stop trying to take fun, like bath, shower, bed [Karianne, AP].

She felt that her SP would undermine her "*he'll be like oh well we'll do this now, no it's seven o'clock, bed time, but I haven't seen them, tough love, it's bed time. I'm sorry I'm not disrupting the routine*". I asked whether he understood why she wanted to stick to her established routine and initially she felt he did not. For her, irritation develops due to the pressure she experiences to support each family member: "*I support him when he's having bad times at work, when he has been off with mental health issues before. I just generally try to keep the household running whether he's there or not*". Her story shows that the military relies upon families to support SPs and thus their practices are militarised.

SPs struggle with the possibility that their family has managed well without them. The APs reported that SPs must adjust to changes made within the household such as items being moved elsewhere, new bedsheets etc. There were numerous stories of returned SPs trying to put mundane household objects back to the space they occupied pre-deployment:

> It's like a dog, he pees on his territory, so he will go around that that vase [interviewee picks up and moves glass] is moved over there because that's where it was when he left [Cheryl, AFF].

This may be an attempt to disguise the amount of time passed or a strategy to (re)create the familial role for him to fill. Natasha's [AP] response adds to this understanding. She said that

over the course of a deployment she can become really "*overly controlling*" and that by the time her husband returns she can be hesitant about handing these responsibilities back. "*He just walks in and goes oh everything's fine that's great, so you've managed fine, everything's alright, I'll just get back in. And it just drives me mad*" – she wants her efforts acknowledged. Additionally, like in Cheryl's experiences, he moves items around the house:

> I put all the pictures up, I put all the stuff back in the kitchen, in the cupboards, he came home two months later and said why is the kitchen arranged like this and started putting things in different cupboards, which of course triggered a massive row […] from his point of view he just wanted to feel that he had some input in his family home [Natasha, AP].

Managing Relationships: Bringing the Family Back Together

The experiences of post-deployment are various. FSWs state that divorce rates spike[33] but of course, many families do adjust back to a 'new-normal'. Part of re-establishing relationships with one another involves recognition that each member has changed during the absence. APs are very cautiously aware of how their SP may have been impacted especially if they were involved in combat. This leads to additional difficultly in renegotiating relationships because the spectre of deployment does not disappear when the SP sets foot through the door. Indeed, APs and SPs begin to engage with imaginaries of what has occurred in theatre and within the home and negotiate within themselves, and between one another, what these imaginaries mean for going forward – they are in yet another phase of liminality.

Many APs described personal methods for identifying possible mental issues within their SP and discussed their SP's possible exposure to traumatising events. Ruby [AFF, AP] said that

[33] I was told this data was not available.

one of the key things she looks for is whether he is short tempered with the children – she has not stopped looking for the two years since his return from his most recent deployment. She encourages her SP to speak with the UWO on his return "*just in case*". Some of the APs described changes experienced and associated these with the behaviours expected during deployment. For example, Adrienne [AP] said that the most notable difference is his inability to sleep throughout the night upon return because he has been trained to 'be alert' – she refers to this as "*horrendous*". Karianne [AP] recounted a specific event:

> After deployment he was changed. I mean before, it was dead funny, we could have a laugh and mess about, it's gone back to that but it takes time and what we were talking about the other day, the first time he came back to the UK we went to Manchester and it was just me and [him] and we walked across the road and we heard a car backfire, he spun around to check I was walking and trying to find cover, because he was still in that mentality, so then you couldn't really laugh and joke, 'cos he had me arm and was spinning me round like that and he was like I can't help it, I needed cover, and I was like it was a car, and it took him a while to get out of that mentality that a bang is automatically someone shooting, or a bomb, it's a car.

Others talked about their SP being more agitated. Catherine [AP] said that "*he's normally very cranky when he comes home, because he's spent however long, not a lot of sleep, sometimes not a lot of proper food, proper facilities, so to start off with he can be quite horrible*". She managed this by leaving him alone/giving space (domestically and emotionally) until he readjusts – this is normally a week for him to go back to 'normal'. In the meantime, she empties his bags and washes his kit.

Rather than suggesting that her SP had changed post-deployment, or was suffering, Simone [AP] talked about the huge mental leap SPs make when they return, which can only be resolved after time. She offers the example of being in a "*hard environment, testosterone, beyond a normal life"* and then coming back and sitting with a family, watching CBeebies[34] on the television – the culture shock is significant. No matter how blurred they become, there are still stark differences between the home and military spheres which lead to varying perspectives surrounding appropriate and inappropriate behaviours and practice.

Another difficulty in renegotiating relationships discussed by APs relates to the perceived status of the relationship prior to his absence. The return can make APs aware that there are relationship problems which were 'swept under the carpet' during the deployment phase:

> I think you can have that kind of illusion in your mind and you can have lovely telephone conversations [..] whilst they're away […] and then they come back and it's that realisation […] those problems before are still going to be there [Isobel, AP, AFF].

Also, Natasha [AP] said:

> If you remove yourself from your family and from your partner for a long time, it means that all of the bridge building and the relationship building that can go on in that time, or inversely all of the destruction that you could reap during that time is put on hold. So, I reckon that, my theory is that if you have a relationship with somebody in the forces who is deployed regularly […] your relationship slows down, because everything goes on hold for that time […]. And if you have a strong marriage and your husband is deployed, it's on hold in a good place. But if

[34] A popular children's TV channel.

> something's gone wrong […] I think that's why so many people suffer relationship breakdown whilst they're away because the person left at home is left with something that's not quite worked, and it builds and builds and builds.

The empty space left by the SP can therefore lead APs to build upon the emotional void – either by focussing on negative/positive aspects or by creating new experiences based upon practice during absence. It seems that for some, the time passed during deployment is separated from pre-deployment/presence, whilst for others it can exacerbate the experiences faced pre-deployment/presence.

Others said that their adoption of increased responsibility during his absence had helped them to cope and relinquishing this control upon his return was thus complicated. For example, Claire [AP] said: "*I know I wouldn't ever split up with him, but I know I can survive now without my husband*". APs had grown more independent in order to 'survive' (a word often used by APs to describe the impacts of deployment), and although they developed strategies to maintain space for him within the family unit, it was difficult for them to pass responsibilities over upon return. This coping strategy developed, although useful for deployment, is less conducive to them sharing a relationship as they perceived that it 'should' be – the sharing of household tasks. Research conducted within the US found that military partners live between their own self-development needs and the ideological priorities of the military, where they find themselves handing over responsibilities which they are more than capable of owning, in order to maintain the 'happy military family' and accommodate their SP's wishes (Norris, 2001).

Many of the FSWs discussed the negative impact a deployment may have upon a relationship and most of them said that there was an influx of referrals looking for relationship support. UWO Peter said that one of the key difficulties he has witnessed in the Army families he has come across is that they must manage and overcome the unknown. Deployments can be lengthy,

and families are not able to be in constant contact and there is therefore a lot to catch up on and this can lead to distrust. New friends may have been made that the SP did not know before, new routines, perhaps more independence in the AP who may now want to go out with her friends more when compared to before:

> What you'll find is when it's a long deployment they don't necessarily look forward to when they come back, they think they do and then when they come back, because for that nine month period they create their own life, and they have their own routine, and they watch whatever they want at seven o'clock on a Wednesday night and that sort of thing, and it's hard for them to adjust, just as much as it is for the service person coming back to live back with the family. 'Cos, they haven't been living there for nine months, it is a separation [Jamie-Lee, UWO].

The unknown and regular change/upheaval and adjustment further evidence APs' liminal lives. However, the absence may also strengthen relationships: "*what we do see is a spike of divorce and pregnancies"* [Peter, UWO]. Some of the APs said that deployments helped them to value and appreciate one another when he was present: "*It was like being back in a honeymoon phase, like freshly in love […] 'cos when I see him we don't have time to fight, we don't have time to moan*" [Tonya, AP]. Claire [AP] echoed this but felt that the time feeling 'in love' only lasts a week. Once the honeymoon period is over "*you do have your bickers and your little jibes at each other saying oh you know why can't you do this or do that*". She normalises the process and suggests it is what all APs go through. Similarly, Abby [AP] said that:

> He is the one person that I will talk to about anything, so having him home is just like my right arm coming back to be honest. Admittedly after like three, four, five weeks of leave it's like I think you need to go back to work now.

To manage this exasperation that develops after the honeymoon period most of the APs said that they would give each other space, and the return to work after post-op tour leave, would usually alleviate most of the issues that had developed due to overexposure. Other methods for reconnecting include removing themselves from the AFC for a while. APs said they would try to go away for a weekend, with or without the children, or go on trips.

Some of APs discussed affairs and the perceived distinct nature of these within the military relationship and community. Isobel [AFF, AP] said that relationships forming at home in the absence of the SP was "*very common*", likewise, affairs occurring on deployment were common as individuals spend so much time together and there is "*nothing to do on deployment, I'm sure it's exactly the same in real life, except people don't necessarily know about it as much. So, there's an awful lot of that and people accept it*". Again, military experiences are separated from civilian ones, which are referred to as 'real life'. I asked her whether the community would react differently about the SP or AP having an affair and she said:

> There is quite a lot of judgement from the people around. It's actually it's something that's frowned upon, but particularly if it happens back home. You know how when a paedophile ends up in jail they can be kind of very shunned by other prisoners because it's a particularly heinous crime, actually I think that does happen, that if you are a soldier and you've not gone and you end up with a wife of someone who's left behind.

This anecdote is particularly interesting as it links stigma to loyalty and duty which shows that relationships are militarised. Another AP's SP had an affair which she explained as a product of him looking for an outlet/escape from the affects he was managing as a result of returning from deployment. Therefore, she understands her relationship difficulties as a consequence of military-influences. This framing helped her to understand her SP (and move forward), giving

her the opportunity to forgive behaviour that would have otherwise damaged the relationship, and thus relinquish him from responsibility. Framing behaviour as beyond the control of the SP, and as a result of deployment, has appeared in AP's descriptions of experiencing domestic abuse (see Gray, 2015). The problem here is that is relinquishing SPs of responsibility due to the conflation of specific behaviours as an outcome of war, negatively effects AP's agency.

For many APs, readjusting family life does not just involve reconnecting themselves with the returning SP, but there are children involved too. I found that all APs with children played a part in managing and facilitating the redevelopment of relationships between the SP and children, regardless of age. During deployment the AP was the primary child carer and children become used to her rules, routines, only answering her. Abby [AP] said the key challenge is "*when he comes back it's trying to put that extra body back into the family, which is obviously not easy*" – again repeating the theme of making space.

Many of the APs said that their children struggle with this adjustment when their father returns. Children become confused about new rules and routines which is exacerbated if they experienced difficulties during the deployment. For example, Ruby [AP] said her younger son had a fixation on death during deployment, and Adrienne [AP] said that her children were currently having issues at school which she expected would be problematic for the reintegration as the SP will be returning to a negative situation.

Adrienne [AP] said that the impact of the returning SP is huge on the children and they "*are emotional creatures and not good at coping*". Her children struggle with a new person telling them what to do and encroaching on freedoms that they used to have. Additionally, there is territorial renegotiation – children would sleep in her bed during the deployment but that is no longer possible when the SP returns, causing frustration and confusion. This links to comments made earlier about territory and space. Research conducted with children has shown that the

additional responsibilities they adopt during deployment are difficult to relinquish upon their father's return, because their identities within the home had changed, and going back to how they were before is associated with regression and youth (Huebner et al., 2007).

I regularly heard stories about how younger children would struggle to recognise their father when he returned. Isobel [AFF, AP] was especially surprised by this as her daughter had regularly spoken with her father on Skype, had sent him messages, but out of this context she did not know who he was. This limited her ability to trust him initially: "*there was a bit of you're not my Daddy, are you sure you're my Daddy kind of thing. Which he found really hard actually*". This is quite the antithesis of some media representations (and civilian expectations) of the homecoming which are often presented as happy and uncomplicated (Funnyplox, 2017). In fact, when describing my research to people I have been struck by the number of times people have asked whether I am looking at phenomena like 'those dog videos when the solider comes back' – of which upon looking at YouTube there are a surprising number of them (The Dodo, 2017). Where are the stories of children taking on more chores, picking up younger siblings from school, arguing with parents during the re-establishment of routines?

Joanne [Relate] said that the issue of children not recognising the returning SP was not uncommon. They are often aware of 'Daddy' and will have seen him in pictures and heard their mother speaking about him, and young children begin to accept his presence as a concept, but the reality is not always recognisable. She said that it is hard for military families to parent together due to the constant comings and goings of the SP, and the worry that his next absence may be permanent – APs and families reintegrate aware of the possibility of future absence.

It is important to say that the initial reunion is not wholly negative. Lynn [AP] said that the return is one of the best aspects of Army life:

> It's great, the best bit for me is seeing his face when he walks through the door and he picks James up and he's James comes down the stairs every morning, we've got photos all the way down the stairs and every single morning he'll go down and he'll point out and he'll be like Daddy, Daddy, Daddy on the way down the stairs and it will be nice for him to actually be able to run up to him and know that it's his Daddy there […] Yeah he's never recognised him as such before, on times before it's like oh that person's back, but now he's old enough to understand that it's Daddy and he's an important person and it will be nice to see him come back for that.

The SP also struggles with the distance both physically and within the relationship they have (or do not have) with children. Natasha [AP] said that in her case, her husband can over-parent, trying to put a stamp on their upbringing, making up for all the telling off he has not done over the last six months. She offered an example that in response to a child eating with their mouth open, rather than saying "*mouth closed please*" he will give a "*lecture*". She is also aware of some under-parenting, linking to her statement above that they feel they cannot tell them off because "*I don't really know how to behave around them*".

APs develop initiatives to try and overcome the dearth that can develop between returning SPs and children. Natasha [AP] said that she actively encourages them to spend time together after she has reconnected with him. However, time can be limited, especially when they return from a three-month exercise rather than a six+ month deployment (less time off is available). Additionally, it is important for APs not to "*drop him in the deep end and send him off with the kids on his own*" and instead Natasha [AP] aims to do family things as a group, with her.

A key problem is that the SP needs to adjust from his role in theatre to his role as a family member. Adrienne [AP] said that this process was one of the key issues they face as her SP is used to giving orders, but when he returns, he cannot do that with her as it would be

inappropriate. Additionally, if he gave orders in the same manner as he does to his soldiers as his children, they would likely question him, which he is not used to.

Additionally, APs also struggle with relinquishing control and accepting that another has come into the household and is asserting different authorities. Molly [AP] said that this dynamic leads to the whole family "*walking on egg shells*" as no one knows what the rules and boundaries are as they become negotiated between each member. Children may become confused and worried if they started being told off for things they were previously allowed to do, and this could lead to her SP over-compensating by either becoming more authoritative or by making additional allowances for children that she previously would not have. For example, many APs talked about how their SP would disrupt the bedtime routine to extend time spent with them and feel it was fine because "*I've not seen them for ages*" or buying sweets when the AP had said no. This results in children receiving, mixed messages and Molly [AP] said that this forced her into a position of being "*bad cop*" to establish some semblance of routine, trying to maintain and protect the systems she had in place during the deployment. This period of confusion and transition lasts varying times for each family ranging, from one week to months.

Conclusion

FSWs are aware of issues Army families face post-deployment. There are number of different ways that APs attempt to manage and cope with the stresses and experiences post-deployment. Referring to APs as 'coping' during this period is not ideal – instead APs focus on managing the adjusting relationships within the household. Negative experiences are regarded as a given within this period and instead of being something that they 'cope with', they are something to overcome in seeking the 'new normal'. Issues are considered temporary, and the APs I interviewed considered their struggles as part of the uphill trajectory – aiming for a better future which is impacted by 'time' and 'hope'. Faber et al. (2008) found that to cope with boundary

ambiguity APs would seek information, attend family support groups, and talk to others. However, my research found that internal strategies are more often employed such as giving the returned SP space, accepting negativity, allowing each other time to adjust, accepting that there is going to be an adjustment process, and 'domesticating'/'demilitarising' their SP. APs seek support from family (and sometimes friends) to look after children, therefore allowing her and the SP time together.

This chapter shows that APs' experiences of the ECD are not chronological nor linear but rather, their military lives are liminal, and can be broken down into overlapping, intersecting, and fluid periods of liminality where new customs and practices evolve. Kralik (2002) questions the linear trajectory that is evident in Turner's (1967) model of liminality and instead argues that those living with chronic illness manage transition as an ongoing process in multiple directions. Throughout APs military lives they regularly experience transition which leads to social relations within the household being revised or temporarily dissolved, disruption of family traditions, and uncertainty about what the future holds. To highlight this point, APs regularly adapt their roles according to the stage of deployment, and this impacts routines within the household which are experienced by all members (child slept in mother's bed during deployment but now has to sleep in their own when their father returns). Transition, defined as inner reorientation (Bridges, 2004) is multi-directional, some days APs feel they are on the right track, managing the deployment cycle well, and other days they struggle. Experiences and emotional reactions to phases of deployment are better understood as a response to the ongoing accumulation of experiences relating to transition, adjustment, and adaptation and it is this that impacts their practices and coping strategies – rather than by relying on the chronological model of the ECD.

APs lives are liminal in terms of time, that is, military deployments render it difficult to be 'present in the present' as APs anticipate and develop strategies to manage imagined futures (both positive and negative). Adam (2010: 361-362) stated that:

> Contemporary daily life […] is conducted in the temporal domain of open and fluid pasts and futures, mindful of the lived past and projectively oriented towards the 'not yet'. […] Without giving much thought to the matter, we alternate perspectives between anticipated future presents and enacted present futures.

As such, individuals relate and develop meanings/behaviours/practices through perspectives about pasts and futures. Luckman (1983) suggested that categories of space and time are articulated through institutions. My research has shown that APs negotiate these macro influences (the military) - whose processes define specific 'time-periods' such as pre-deployment, deployment, and post-deployment – by interpreting their pasts and imagined futures to change behaviour to reach an imagined future (if positive) or change an imagined future (if negative). The rhythms of time, seemingly ordered by the ECD, are experienced by APs according to the demands it makes of family life, but also understood by their interpretations of their pasts and futures which are susceptible to change. Considering the ECD according to time, in its linear quantitative format, oversimplifies experiences and perspectives, and this chapter has shown that additional meaning can be captured by considering qualitative time moving it beyond linear chronological understandings (Hassard, 1990).

Being unsure of the future is exacerbated by the lack of control APs have over the direction of their family. By 'future' I refer to Urry's (2016) *What is the Future?* in which it is argued that the future exists in the multiple and is up for contestation – it means different things to different people at different times. Specifically, it is conceived of as 'ahead' but is also 'felt' in the present in that perspectives and experiences in the present are impacted by individual and

institutional conceptions of the future. From the data, it is evident that the militaries' greediness not only impacts cultures and lived experiences within the home, but also how APs experience and interpret time. The military has been termed a 'greedy institution' as it requires loyalty, time, and commitment of the serving person which can result in separation, risk of injury (physical and mental), and mobility (Segal, 1986). APs cannot choose when their SP goes on deployment, when/where they relocate, and have limited choices about where their family live, their employment opportunities, and their children's education. De Angelis and Segal (2015) argue that the family is expected to adapt to the military, yet the military does not have to adapt to the family. The militaries' greediness is exacerbated during deployment and not only does it require SP loyalty but AP support too (Juvan and Vuga, 2015) and therefore APs not only manage and adapt to the physical and emotional demands it makes of her SP but also the physical and emotional demands of her too. Periods of transition that are enforced by the military such as the deployment cycle and postings which an AP can negotiate but can never 'control'. They are subsumed into the lifestyle of constant change and transition and spend most of their military lives wondering what the future holds for them – how they will cope during deployment, who they will make friends with in their next relocation, the wellbeing of their returning SP, the emotional reaction of the children etc.

APs live a life of reaction with limited ability to plan – they face constant transition and live in a constant state of reconstructing their identities through the performance of practices, that are constrained by the social field they exist within – the military, where certain identities are positioned as socially acceptable (Atherton, 2009). The military is therefore a cultural space in which practices are performed corresponding to its norms and values – this is evident in the coping strategies APs employ when managing deployment and transition. Their primary aim is to bolster own their personal coping strategies and strength, to manage the stress and experience on their own.

For APs, liminality presents in-between spaces where identities, roles and practices rarely become stabilised as regular disruption enforces constant change (Thomassen, 2009). They live under the constant spectre of deployment where they exist in a state of 'what is' and 'what if' (Herman and Yarwood, 2014) as they move between each phase of the military related transition. They wait to experience 'normal', but this never comes – they exist between the negotiation of the self and the social structure which is governed by military norms and values – often occupying military spaces which (re)create many of these social behaviours, practices, and perspectives. There is no evidence that during reintegration they let go of their deployment experiences – they bank their memories and their coping strategies to be utilised again –a tool kit that remains on the table.

The next chapter explores the lived experiences and perspectives of APs seeking support from their informal network to endure the spectre of deployment. By doing so it will bring performance identities to the fore, showing how the 'successful AP' identity is pursued and APs act as a disciplinary force for (re)producing this image through 'stigma strategies' (see Tyler and Slater, 2018a). What drives these perspectives and resulting role expectations is the impact of engaging with the military, as a cultural field, and structural force. By exploring informal support, we can also identify elements of resistance amongst APs.

Chapter 5: Seeking Informal Support

The previous chapter showed how APs utilise personal coping strategies to manage the various stages of deployment. For example, they develop strategies such as keeping busy and live lives of reaction, constantly adapting to the changing roles and social hierarchies within the family due to the presence/absence of the SP. It showed that APs live with the 'spectre of deployment' as familial roles, expectations, identities, and hierarchies are inextricable from experiences and perspectives relating to previous, current, and future deployments as they move through and between different deployments. This chapter presents their perspectives and lived experiences of seeking support from informal sources, defined as support offered voluntarily by friends, family, neighbours, colleagues for example. These sources of support are used in tandem with personal strategies.

This chapter extends current research by not treating informal support as a homogenous group that each AP has equal access to, as is so often the case in previous research (see Dandeker et al., 2006). It critically engages with how APs assess the value of seeking support from family and friends. These features were not pre-set in the interview schedule, allowing APs to discuss the areas of support that came to mind, and that for them were the most significant.

That said, one highly useful report which considers UK military spouses experiences of social connections split by family and friends was published in 2017 by Gribble. This piece applies a health/well-being theoretical framework in order to understand data obtained from 19 telephone interviews with military spouses whose partner is in the Army and Royal Air Force. Many of the experiences outlined in this report are evident in my thesis' data and this chapter. Yet this work extends Gribble's by focussing specifically upon APs, incorporating voices from formal support, and focusing the interpretation of data upon how APs' gendered labour - which

becomes evident through help-seeking - (re)produces and legitimises war. Enloe (2000) has argued that APs' preference to seek support from other military partners bolsters operational effectiveness as it draws in and maintains their loyalty to military aims and objectives (Enloe, 2000).

This chapter shows that the primary sources of informal support for APs are their mother and other APs. Fathers and other family members were not mentioned by APs, unless their fathers had served in the military, in which case they were valued for enabling APs an understanding of living within a military context prior to their relationship with their SP. Seeking support from other APs was regarded as more beneficial than 'civilian' friendships, especially when managing issues caused by deployment, due to a perspective of shared understanding. However, these relationships were not without their limitations as some APs reported divisions within the AP community due to judgement and stigma being applied to APs who were perceived to not be coping. Additionally, many discussed some APs 'carrying the rank' of their SP. Some also reported experiencing isolation from the AFC due to not having children, living in non-military locations, and living on bases with different services (Navy or Royal Air Force). What is evident from APs' contributions is that there is no homogenous AP identity or experience, but rather they are multiple. Deviation from the notion of the 'ideal AP' is met with derision from the community where judgement and stigma are applied to practices that are regarded to not be supporting the SP or the military.

The concept of liminality may be applied to understand APs' experiences of their military-associated lives. The previous chapter showed that APs live liminal lives due to their constant adaptation to the deployment cycle – they are in an in-between state, adjusting to previous changes, and anticipating future changes caused by deployment. They have little control over this and instead 'manage' and limit the disruption caused by military demands. This chapter

also shows how APs' experiences of engaging with informal networks are impacted by liminality. They live between 'military' and 'civilian' spheres and are at the same time both and neither. This is particularly evident in the responses of those living 'off-patch' and Gray (2015; 2016a) has argued that the military housing policy, where housing is offered on proviso of being married to an SP, on the one hand absorbs and excludes them from full inclusion. APs access support from civilians (and are civilian) yet experience exclusion and are in turn alienated due to misunderstanding during interaction. Not only do they feel alienated from civilian friendships, but they can feel alienated from the AFC for aforementioned reasons. Therefore, APs live lives of overlapping liminality caused by their association with the military.

If stress cannot be managed by the AP themselves, many opt to seek support from their informal network. Often their first move to seek both practical and emotional support from their mother. This is the case for families living on and families living off-patch, although for those living 'far' away from their wider family, support is provided either virtually (phone and webcam-based communication) or via sporadic visits either to or from the wider family. Support from the family was considered limited if they were not military-associated too, and APs who were military children cited this as a strength because they believed they understood military expectations, contexts, and were therefore better able to manage the lifestyle than those who were 'new' to it. Additionally, being able to speak to a mother who was also married to someone in the military was valued as APs perceived shared experiences and a common understanding, making their advice and support more effective.

Linked to perspectives of common understanding, APs also highly valued the relationships they had with other APs. This was especially pronounced for those living further away from their wider family network, experiencing high levels of mobility, and during the deployment cycle. Most of these relationships were established by living amongst other military families

on-patch or by attending events organised in/around the patch, highlighting the keystone role formal support has in establishing and maintaining AP support networks. The strength of these relationships was often highlighted by contrasts made to civilian friends and connections. APs often felt misunderstood or were met with ambivalence when trying to seek support from civilian friendships which led some feeling alienated and isolated from civilian society.

However, not all APs felt they were easily able to access the AFC. Reasons are various and include living off-patch, clashes with working hours, childcare issues, and 'shy' personalities. Additionally, some felt that the social events organised by formal support led to them feeling isolated – events often revolved around children so those without felt uncomfortable, or alcohol orientated activities for the evening which not all APs felt comfortable with. For these reasons they were more likely to engage with civilian friendships to seek support but perceived an inadequacy of some of the advice received.

Additionally, being involved with the AFC was not without its issues. APs were concerned that the close-knit community facilitated gossip and therefore alluded to the surveillance they experienced by living on-patch as many felt a secret could not be kept. This was problematic as many identified practices that would be stigmatised which limited their willingness to seek help from the AP community for fear of being considered as not coping. APs' practice is a performance in relation to the military – trying to present an image of managing military related stress in a seamless way to be considered as supportive of their SP. Upset is allowed and APs will support one another, but if upset is continuous then it is considered as negative and a fault of the AP. APs exist within a specific institutional context, defined by their exposure to the military lifestyle, norms and values. It is within these everyday experiences and reflections that we can see them express the pressure to be loyal to the military due to the preference in keeping

challenges private through managing issues themselves or reaching out to family and other APs.

Seeking-Support: Family

Firstly, the perspectives around seeking support from the wider family network are presented as this was the most cited avenue. For most of the APs interviewed, the wider family was the first source of support sought around the deployment stages, specifically for practical and emotional issues. Of course, the quality of support received is dependent on the relationship between the AP and the wider family, as Lynn [AP] states:

> I am very lucky to have family that I've got, I could end up with family who don't really talk at all and you're sort of locked away and that's it, you're forgotten about.

The practical support APs asked of their wider family networks primarily revolved around childcare which was especially useful for employed APs or if there was an emergency. Having access to childcare in the form of a wider family network was highly useful whilst the SP was on deployment because, as discussed in the previous chapter, the nature of deployment demands that APs adopt total childcare responsibilities. For example, Isobel's [AFF, AP] mother visited for five weeks prior to her SPs return from deployment to support her with domestic tasks as Isobel was experiencing health issues. However, this was disrupted when her SP returned and adopted total household responsibilities. She felt that he was not able to complete household tasks to the standard she or her mother would and expressed irritation when recounting stories about white clothing becoming pink and unclean glasses. Being hesitant about relinquishing control post-deployment is a key theme. This can be interpreted as a mechanism APs employ to cope with their liminal lives, enforced by military demands – a

form of control and expression of their agency.

Other APs said that support from the wider-family was highly valued post-deployment, as parents would take care of their children, giving the AP and SP time and space to 'reintegrate'. Some APs interviewed said that their SP would visit his wider family post-deployment. This was considered beneficial as not only did it allow SPs to rebuild relationships with their wider-families, it would give APs time to 'collect themselves'. Tracy [AP] said that she would use the time to think about how her returned husband had changed since deployment and the affect it was having upon the relationships within their immediate-family. Interestingly, she referred to herself finding her SP's absence post-deployment "*useful*" as "*mad*". She regards her approach of enjoying the support provided by her wider-family post-deployment as unique, in comparison to her perception of other APs who avoid further absence. Other APs discussed the strain experienced when wider-family expected to see SPs post-deployment. This is because visits can disrupt the re-stabilising of family routines, placing pressure on the AP to cook a dinner, throw a party, tidy the house, and prepare the children for visitors.

The emotional support families provided APs included looking after children to allow the AP their own time, separate from familial demands and expectations. Additionally, many of the APs discussed how they would seek advice and comfort, primarily from mothers, around the deployment cycle. For example, Bethany [AP] identified deployment as a lonely period in which stress is heightened especially if communication with the SP is limited, and therefore having family living 'close' helped her to manage:

> For other people that don't drive or even if they do and their family's four, five hours away you just can't pop there, so yeah, so I definitely say that I get through deployment with family. Not so much welfare and [other] military partners.

Relying on wider family for support was easier when living locally. APs who lived far from their wider family always referred to this as a limitation in their overall support framework. Due to distance, Anna [AP] only sees her mother approximately three times a year and her father never visits as he is ill. The visits she finds "*too much*" as having her mother over to stay means she has to "*worry*" about someone else. Therefore, she tends to rely on friends. Other APs said that when family lived far away, they were less likely to seek practical support but would seek emotional support by utilising communication technologies.

A key theme that arose related to the wider family's association with the military – if members were (or had been) in the military this association was highly valuable in terms of support. If an AP's father had been in the military, the support they received from their mother (who had also been an AP) was considered beneficial due to shared experiences. Being able to access wider family enabled APs to break the day-to-day routine and allow them a mental break from their experiences as being associated with the military - physically leaving the patch and travelling to a 'civilian place', a place which many were familiar with as they grew up in that location, to see wider family was a cathartic process. For example, Jennifer [AP] said that going home to see wider family during the deployment cycles was supportive as:

> My Mum's got quite a big understanding 'cos my Dad was in the Navy for 18 years before he got medically discharged, so she's my biggest support. It's like if I ring my mum and I go do you want [child], she goes what's the matter? I was like well this, this and this happened, and she'll go right save some money and then come down […] so I'm going to go home and my best friend's holding a surprise party for her fiancé. So, Mum's like from Saturday afternoon you go off, we'll have the kids, you go off and have you time. Get drunk, and don't come home 'til the Sunday.

> I was like ok. But she's been through it all so she knows how hard it is when the husbands are away.

In this excerpt Jennifer discusses the value in leaving the patch as it enabled her to take a break from the usual routines she expects during deployment – domestic/childcare responsibilities. By seeking support from her mother, who she feels knows when something is wrong because of their shared experience, she is able to take a break from her 'military-life' and engage with 'civilian' friends, freeing herself from the imposition of military-demands (deployment responsibilities and expectations). She has suspended expectations by physically moving away from the military gaze on-patch.

She also said that her upbringing, as a military child, helps her to understand her children's issues when they are missing their father during deployment. She recounted a conversation she had with her child, saying that she also used to miss her father when he was away, attempting to normalise absence. As discussed in Chapter 4, military children can feel 'other' to the wider community as they tend to consider civilian lifestyles as 'normal'. Through interactions and exposure to civilian lifestyles, military children consider deployment, absent parents, and regular relocations as abnormal. Therefore, existing within a wider military family network can be a protective factor for the whole of the families' coping strategies.

When speaking about receiving both practical and emotional support, participants only referenced their mother as the support-provider. Alternatively, fathers and other male family members were referenced as supportive if they served in the military, and their support was received indirectly as the providers of an environment that prepared them for their later role/identity as a military partner. The experience of being a military child and then an AP prepared them for military-related stress and provided them with an opportunity to receive 'understanding advice'.

> Grandad used to be on leave and they'd [the military] ring him and he'd have to go within two weeks […] So me grandma has instilled it into me mum and me to be strong independent women, like you don't actually need a man, he's never there […] and it's one of the best lessons I ever learnt [Karianne, AP].

One AP whose father had been in the military said that she had to encourage behaviours in her SP's wider family as she believed that they were not doing enough to support him.

> My family get it which is useful, his family don't so that's the difference, half way through his last tour I had to speak to his family and say could one of you send him a letter because he's feeling a bit lonely [Isobel, AFF, AP].

Part of her role was therefore to police the practice of other family members and by doing so transmitted military knowledges and role expectations. She did not have to do this with her parents who had previous experience in the military.

Some of the APs who were not born into military said that this limited the likelihood of them accessing parents for emotional support. For example, Natasha said that '*I don't come from a military background family, so there would be absolutely no point in me moaning at my family about it because they wouldn't understand*'. Additionally, Lydia [AP] said:

> I chat to my mum and sister, but they don't get it because they've never been in this world really. But I just pretty much sort it out in me own head, I know what's expected and what I need to get done.

It is interesting to see Lydia refer to herself as knowing what is expected of her and this sentiment links to the issues discussed in Chapter 6 about the role and expectations of the AP. Through these excerpts it is evident that APs draw lines around what it means to be a member

of the AFC – on the one hand drawing members of their family into this category and on the other pushing them outside.

However, they also consider their roles outside of the AFC as some felt that their association with the military made it difficult to provide support back to their wider family. Specifically, they talked about how high mobility meant they were likely to live far from family and having small children negatively impacted their ability to travel and therefore perform roles and responsibilities that they felt were owed due to being part of a family unit. Military life made it difficult for APs to provide caring roles to the wider family such as for elderly parents – further evidencing the greediness of the military as an institution (Segal, 1988). Claire [AP] said that she felt guilty as her parents had adopted her sister's children – through extreme and emotional circumstances - and military-related demands such as relocations, over-seas postings, and managing a household throughout the deployment cycle meant that she was not able to support them as she would like: "*now that I'm down here, I can't help them out and me mum's turning 60, the youngest is eight, so I feel horrible and so guilty on my mum and dad […] I can't help them out*". Gribble (2017) also found that APs would become stressed and worried if they were unable to perform 'kinship roles' such as missing funerals and the limited relationships wider family were able to share with children. APs create various boundaries within the wider family network in order to manage their military-associated lives.

Community Development

In acknowledgement of the frequent relocations of military families and the distance this creates between APs and their informal network due to the regular breaking of ties, FSWs encourage and facilitate the development of informal networks on-patch. In each of the interviews APs discussed the value they ascribe to friendships with other APs which most had

met through living near to/on-patch or attending events which are often organised by UWOs and the AWS. Army welfare policy directly states that:

> Community support is the support provided to individuals, groups and families throughout the AFC, and specifically over-seas, to MoD employed civilians and their entitled families [this includes] community centres, clubs including retail, catering, leisure, educational, recreational and sporting activities/facilities, childcare and youth activities (Army, 2016: 7).

George, a Community Support Worker within the AWS, stated that the primary aim of developing and maintaining support networks amongst the AP community is to maintain operational effectiveness as SPs "*need to be happy knowing the people at home are well looked after, well taken care of [...] so they can be happy doing their job*". He supports APs transitioning from civilian to military life, responds to issues that may arise within camp, and the deployment cycle. He aims to ensure "*people are out of the house, not staring at four magnolia walls*" – families cannot decorate SFA - by organising coffee mornings and trips. This is an example of how APs are absorbed into the military institution, deliberately through policy, from the point in which they enter to 'military space' – welfare regards AP support as essential to maintain the wellbeing and thus operational effectiveness of personnel.

Another aim of Community Development (AWS) is to provide a variety of events to support families, targeted at keeping children entertained. Bob (AWS) discussed the disadvantages Army children face due to the demands the military places upon the family and the issues surrounding high mobility such as changing schools (repeating or missing aspects of the curriculum), moving home and changing their informal support network (contact is often kept via social media). Additionally, he works with parents to help them communicate with children about the issues they may be experiencing. Therefore, he believes that there is a significant

move away from the "*deal with it on your own*" culture to supporting and empowering communities. However, Matthew (AWS) perceives a clash between the culture of the military and community work – where the military is more likely to exhibit authoritarian practices whilst community work aims to empower individuals and communities. This leads to some FSWs being more/less appropriate for their roles – a perspective that is often discussed by APs (see Chapter 6).

Many of the FSWs felt that running social events increases APs' support networks, helping them to cope with military and family-related issues. This was especially important for younger mothers who were not living close to wider family networks because of the military-posting. Additionally, more social events occur during deployment because FSWs consider it the most problematic phase of the military lifestyle. However, practice varies according to the personality of the UWO and interest of the camp and thus some camps are known for being more integrated than others (see Chapter 6). Social events enable FSWs to check-in with APs. They quell rumours about deployments which may spread through the community, exacerbated by news-media. Additionally, it is hoped that regular exposure in non-professional settings means APs are more likely/comfortable seeking support.

However, a common issue facing FSWs is the stigma associated with help-seeking – especially as it involves asking for support from their SP's employer (see Chapter 6). Charities that are contracted by the MoD also support APs in reducing isolation and developing their participation with the rest of the community. Members of these organisations may attend Coffee Mornings organised by the AWS. However, often they are not trusted by the APs who assume they are trying to 'catch them out' rather than to showcase their services. A Community

Support Worker[35] said that this was a reaction all FSWs had to manage and it was a case of getting APs used to seeing them at events and to increase trust.

UWOs often encourage the AP community to design and facilitate social events. Basham and Catignani (2018: 160) argue that '[r]ecognizing emotional labor as labor is key, therefore, to challenging the gendered scripts that both normalize and conceal women's emotional work' rather than reproducing gendered norms by assuming their labour is simply the product of love/intimacy – it also includes time and energy. The fact that APs are encouraged to participate in emotional labour by formal military mechanisms, to support one another, to support their SP, and by extension operational effectiveness shows another way in which the military relies upon female, gendered labour to operate. For example, Natasha [AP] is a member of her local 'wives' committee' and helps formal support to develop a social calendar for the Army families in the locality. She said that in her area, the APs are highly involved in unit life as they had recently returned from a posting in Germany in which they were isolated from wider family support. Thus, they developed strong ties amongst themselves. Now they are back in the UK one of the key issues they face is in keeping people together who are now living in various camps across the county. Furthermore, some do not drive so isolation is a growing concern. To tackle this the committee organises carpools and hosts events in the evening so those who work can attend. She concludes by saying that "*I think an active wives' committee has been the saviour of the cohesion that we've got still at the moment"*. Yet this would not have been possible without the support and funding from formal welfare. However, Peter [UWO], working in a different location, tried to set up a wives' committee but there was little interest from the wives either in organising or providing feedback – showing practice varies in different locations. Regardless of whether the APs choose to engage, this approach evidences the

[35] I did not interview her but did speak with her during the research. She has not been included officially in this research and I have not given her a pseudonym.

greediness of the military institution – that unpaid, unemployed members of the civilian community are absorbed into the mitigating the negative effects of the military upon the family.

Some APs felt that the facilitation of support groups, conducted by formal support avenues was sufficient and were generally appreciative of the opportunity to meet other APs (due to a recent posting). Jennifer [AP] said that there were many ways in which APs could engage by looking at the online welfare page, reading newsletters, and being a member of social networking groups. To her, it is up to the APs whether they choose to come or not – formal support does enough to advertise. However, some APs such as Catherine struggle with the formality of events, stating that she does not have the confidence to enter a room where there is a group of new people who all know each other and "*be like hi*".

Many of the APs said that informal networks do more to support one another than the formal welfare offering. However, there was a sense that the wives' community was much more engaged historically. For Simone [AP], the change has been occurring since the 1950s when the responsibility for family welfare was often assumed by the CO's wife. However now, more wives work, and people are less inclined to organise social events. Additionally, she perceives a changing ethos within the AFC where the rank structure governs social relations to a lesser extent – it is no longer expected that CO's wives will pay any interest in camp relations. However, Jervis' (2011) experiences counter this as she was personally lambasted by another military wife for not arranging flowers for an upcoming formal dinner. Simone [AP] also states that the move of more families off-patch means the unified culture of the AFC is changing. Pressures to be the ideal AP and perform militarised roles are various and subject to flux and negotiation.

Previous research has also suggested that partners are becoming less involved in creating and maintaining networks of support for each other, their serviceman, and the military (Jervis,

2011). More Army families are choosing to live privately in civilian areas to protect the non-serving partner's career and sustain children's education (AFF, 2016). The annual Tri-Service Continuous Attitudes Survey has shown a gradual decrease in the proportion of Army families living in SFA during the working week, instead choosing to live in private accommodation (see Table 6).

Table 6: Percentage of Army families living in SFA during the working week[36]

Year	Percentage
2010	76%
2011	75%
2012	69%
2013	73%
2014	70%
2015	71%
2016	69%
2017	68%
2018	67%

The physical dispersal will impact the support networks families are exposed to in their everyday lives, which coupled with the mental move away from the military, may lead to more families becoming isolated. Partners who live away from military camps feel estranged from the AFC, that they had lost part of their identity, and feel excluded from social and information networks (Fossey and Verey, 2013; Gribble, 2017). It is therefore incorrect to assume that if families move away from camp, that they are rejecting the AFC and lifestyle – their needs must be acknowledged.

[36] Data retrieved from MoD (2015b; 2016b; 2017; 2018d)

Moving off-patch is likely to increase exponentially due to the MoD's upcoming Future Accommodation Model (FAM), altering the design of subsidised Army family accommodation by providing allowances for families to live in a house of their choosing. Living off-patch will mean that more will be distanced from formal welfare offerings and informal support networks with other military families. It is essential that military partner experiences of the various support mechanisms are fully understood both on/off-patch, so the formal welfare programme may adapt to protect what is highly valued and overcome some of the limitations in its offerings – this will be explored shortly.

Seeking-Support: Friends

Those interviewed valued relationships and the emotional support received from other APs due to a perspective that they shared a deep understanding and therefore less explanation was necessary. Generally, a higher value was placed upon relationships with other military-associated individuals when compared to civilians. This echoes previous research that has found that association, affiliation, and affection are more likely to occur between individuals of similar attributes, especially when attributes are considered rare (Mehra et al., 1998). The community of APs provided each other with practical and emotional support to manage the various stages of deployment. Frequent exposure and connectivity within the community led to many APs referring to their military-friends as their "*military family*" – familial language was commonly used.

During deployment was the point in which relationships with other APs were most valued as they could depend on one another, share advice, and offer practical support such as childcare. Some of the participants living on-patch talked about sharing household duties with other APs on-patch whilst their partners were deployed. They would cook, clean, and share childcare tasks including cooking meals, walking to school, and going to the local park. Additionally,

they would share evenings together to stave off loneliness and feelings of being a single parent (wine and television was often mentioned). Such comradeship and community living were never mentioned by those who lived off-patch, and instead it was the demands of employment that helped to distract them from worries during deployment. However, this was not effective in the evenings, once children had been put to bed and they felt lonely (see Chapter 4).

Catherine [AP] had settled within a civilian location for an extended period, and she felt this enabled her civilian friends to develop their understandings which led to more valuable relationships.

> They have got better […] if their partner's going away they're like oh I feel like I miss him […] they do limit themselves around me 'cos they're like no it's nothing compared to what you have to go through.

Some APs accessed support networks which blended both military and non-military individuals. For example, Patricia [AP] was a member of a netball team which she joined when she moved to that post to meet others and "*get out the house without the kids*" in the evenings. She considers the members of that team her "*closest circle of friends*". She manages to attend during her SP's deployment and uses the group to vent saying that "*even when they're away, you moan that they're away, but when they're back you moan they're back*". Even in her mixed group she still identifies the value that her friends associated with the military have over those who do not have that experience.

Civilian friends were valued for providing an escape from the military where APs could engage in what they would sometimes refer to as a 'normal life' – again suggesting a perceived exceptionality in their experiences, drawing lines between their civilian/military identities. Using this avenue would offer an alternative perspective that was less military-focussed, and

advice may be more likely to acknowledge the relationship/family as separate to the military – an argument made by those interviewed from Relate. Jennifer [AP] said that sometimes she prefers to "*rant and rave with my civvy friends*" as talking to another AP whose partner is also deployed can send them on a downhill spiral too. Molly [AP] also valued speaking with her civilian friends as:

> It's nice to vent to other Army wives that understand but actually sometimes it's nice to talk to somebody who's not in that situation and they can sometimes have a bit more patience 'cos they're not sitting there going rolling their eyes.

This is an example of how APs negotiate, resist, and mitigate the influence the military has upon their lives. Yet, many of the APs contrasted their experiences with civilians to highlight the strength, utility, and preference for friends with experience of the military lifestyle:

> I think it's quite good 'cos in the Army we're all in the same boat so we're all in the same situations while when you have a civvy friend they say you've chosen that life, you know he's got to go away [Tonya, AP].

That is not to say that the APs did not have and enjoy their relationships with civilians, many of whom they had maintained contact with from life prior to the military or in employment (echoing research: Davis, 2011; Williamson, 2012; Gribble, 2017). However, there is a perceived lack of understanding which can cause upset. Many other APs described specific civilian responses to their situation leading to them feeling isolated and at worst, alienated. APs are often met with sentiments like "*well you know what you were marrying into*". Also, there were times when civilians would try to bridge the gap in understanding by comparing their experiences of their partner being away for conferences. This only served to alienate APs more as there was a disregard of the significance of deployment, not just in time elapsed, but risk to

life, and political context. Many of their reflections were recounted emotionally and feeling ranged from tolerance to overt frustration and annoyance. Tracy [AP] said that this lack of understanding means will not to talk about her experiences to civilians, silencing her:

> ‘Cos I think lots of civvy friends don’t really understand what you’re going through, ‘cos like I said before, it’s you know what you’ve got yourself into, if you wouldn’t have wanted that you wouldn’t marry a soldier, it’s like yeah but you’ve got the right to miss someone, even though you know he’s going away, it’s like you fall in love with the person not with his job.
>
> Civilians have absolutely no concept in what we go through from a day to day basis, they just don’t know, the ignorance is overwhelming to be honest [Lisa, AP].

Another issue that was regularly considered by the APs was whether they felt accepted by the civilian community. Eleanor [AP] who lives on-patch, stated that she attends civilian community gatherings such as swimming clubs so that she can integrate with the wider community. Generally, she felt accepted, although she felt that some civilians attached a stigma to APs of being unruly. Sometimes she felt the AFC were scape-goated when negative events occurred in the community such as a smashed shop window or drunken behaviour.

What is clear from these stories is that APs distinguish themselves and their lives from ‘civilians’, creating a boundary/division between themselves and wider society which at times become more fixed than others. This division is evidence of how APs are subsumed into the greedy military institution (Segal, 1986). However, they do not exist separately to civilians and of course are civilians themselves. Instead their identities are blurred between the ‘military’ and the ‘civilian’ and they negotiate these avenues for support by altering and adapting their expectations of response/support.

Isolation and Accessibility

Generally, those that lived on-patch highly valued the ease of meeting other APs and accessing formal support services. Most of the APs I interviewed had children and this helped them to meet other APs as many of the activities organised on-patch orientated around children such as 'Mothers and Babies Groups' and 'Coffee Mornings'. Bethany [AP] who was not a mother highlighted her experience through employment with children as a strength:

> Well luckily I work with children, and that has been my godsend because I've been able to go into clubs, I go to a lot of baby groups and toddler groups and things, so having those children you could kind of say I've used them to get myself friends as such, without them and without attending groups like that […] in fact, I'm probably one of the only ones within my circle that don't have children.

Having children enables access to the wider AP community which is in part created through the design of events on-patch - there is a real gap in support provision for families without children or whose children had grown and left the home. Tracy [AP] told a story about attending an event which did not sound child-orientated but upon arrival realised all other attendees had brought their toddlers: "*I went to something very early on and never went back because basically everyone had a toddler apart from me, it was awful*". She said she was at a stage in her life where she wanted to focus on her career and because of this felt outside of the AFC which is generally set up for families with children. The difficulties in seeking support (whether informal or formal) when managing employment is a recurring theme. The formal support system fails to consider those without children – naturalising the Army family as male SP, female AP, and young children.

Other APs reported feeling isolated or lonely whilst living on-patch for numerous reasons, regardless of their physical proximity to services and other Army families. For some, the isolation they experienced was pathologized and they criticised themselves for being 'too shy' and 'not outgoing'. Others faced practical barriers such as being unable to attend social events due to work commitments. Of course, not all APs live on 'Army patches' with their Unit, leading to experiences of isolation. For example, Molly [AP] said that in her last posting she knew no one because her neighbours were Navy families who had different experiences, limiting the ability to develop shared understanding. Her perceived isolation was exacerbated by the highly integrated experience in her previous over-seas posting which she considered a much closer community. Lynn [AP] felt incredibly isolated from the wider AP community because of her SP's regiment:

> I was part of one regiment, or my husband was part of one regiment, and I went to a coffee morning that was kind of more based to a different regiment and I was very unwelcome there. I had my little boy there and we sat in a corner by ourselves, we spoke to nobody until they came, they did eventually come and speak to me, I kind of put myself out there hi and sat there at the table and there was no interaction with me whatsoever and I thought I really didn't feel like I was a part of the group, it was quite clicky […] It's sad really because we're all one family really, all in the same situation.

To manage this, she turned to formal support (Homestart) where a member attended the events with her so that she was not sat on her own. APs' experiences of division based upon Unit, Service, or rank of their SP negatively impacts their informal support. Furthermore, her excerpt above highlights the way in which APs adopt their SP's militarised identity – militarising them.

Of the cohort I interviewed some lived off-patch, whilst others had experienced living off-patch previously. Their reasons for doing so were various including wanting to maintain stability in the APs career and children's education, living closer to the wider family/support network and because they wanted to own a property. However, just because they lived away, they still wanted to be connected to the AFC and each reported feeling isolated. Previous work by the AFF (2016) and Fossey and Verey (2013) has shown that formal support services struggle to access those that live off-patch, and this is a key theme in this research (see Chapter 6). The SP must declare his families' home address to the welfare services, and if this does not occur, families will not receive the issued communications about contact details or upcoming events. The APs interviewed who were living or had lived off-patch felt that information does not always reach them and were most concerned about missing advice about deployments, upcoming events and activities that are available in and around the camp. The lack of communication meant APs felt isolated and excluded from the AFC and they struggled to develop support networks with other APs due to lack of exposure and attendance at trips and other social events:

> [Formal support] seem to organise things like day trips out or events […] obviously these welfare people live near the camp or wherever, and that's where the families live, and they seem to approach them that way, or they're advertising things on camp, or they're on Facebook groups which are closed and private for that specific camp, and obviously we don't get to access them because we don't know about them, […] you just kind of get left out of all of that, so you don't really know about anything [Bronwen, AP].

For those living off-patch, access to both social events and welfare was an issue. Many bases are in remote locations and therefore there is a need to either drive or depend on train and bus

services. Large camps such as Catterick and Tidworth are not accessible via the train. Participants reported being put off from attending social events due to difficulties in transport and having to find childcare. Some APs stated that they depended on friends driving them, otherwise they doubt that they would attend coffee mornings and other groups.

Other APs who were employed stated that most events are hosted during the daytime and welfare services are often only open during standard working hours, clashing with their working hours. Social networking sites were a method that APs use to overcome this barrier. However, limitations were identified such as the lack of anonymity:

> Because we don't live on a [patch] estate, and because I work, I have no access to welfare units. The welfare unit opens form nine 'til four, the only access I have is the Facebook page [Holly, AP].

Given the stigma associated with help-seeking (discussed in-depth in Chapter 6) public presentations of support-seeking are not generally accepted within the community.

The ability to access an informal support network is significantly affected by the expected and often regular mobility of Army families. Proximity to others improves the effectiveness of a support network – the closer a group is to other individuals, the more likely they are to develop closer connections (Bidart and Lavenu, 2005). That said, due to expansive options of communication media such as social networking sites and web-cam-based technologies, individuals can still seek practical and moral support from long-distance relationships (Fine, 2012). Some APs talked about how their previous experiences had enabled them to build up 'best practice' strategies in managing and developing their support networks. To manage the high mobility of military life, some APs maintain contact with previous friends via social media. Additionally, new contacts can be made by using social media. For example, Claire

[AP] met many of her friends by posting on local military Facebook pages **"***saying I've not long moved down here, you know I've got a three-year-old daughter, is there anyone who wants to meet up?"*

Others manage the high mobility by actively avoiding relying on people – perhaps an act of resistance to militarised expectations given that it is encouraged by FSWs. Lydia [AP] said that in her first posting she made "*really good friends*" but it was "*heart-breaking*" when these ties were broken by her or them moving away. Because of this, she protects herself by making sure that she does not "*latch onto anybody*" – she attends Coffee Mornings, talks to everybody but will not develop best-friendships. This method also helps to protect her children who will often become close to her friends' children which leads to additional upset when relocation occurs. APs experience 'grief' and 'loss' when breaking social ties due to mobility (Gribble, 2017).

Others make sure that they also build networks with civilians who are generally less mobile because: "*military friends come and go so quickly, you know people are getting transferred, promoted, when you've built that great friendship up and then you lose it, it can almost put you off trying to form another friendship*" [Anna, AP]. Anna's previous experience has built up her ability to negotiate the terms of her military lifestyle:

> I've been the young wife, I've been the naïve wife, I've been the lonely wife, so I knew what I had to do, 'cos I knew we'd probably be here for quite a while, so I went out with an Army wife, met some people and built my network that way.

Maria [AP] was the 'lonely wife' in her previous posting because she assumed other wives would knock on her door and invite her out, which did not happen, and so in her current one she puts in extra effort to go out, meet people and be sociable. She has learnt that support networks within the AFC help her to cope with military related stress. However, this was not a

smooth process for her due to her expressing that she is innately shy and reserved. Being a part of the AFC has pushed her beyond her comfort zone where she can no longer rely on family and friends she made in school. Later in her interview she started to describe "*other wives*" who said:

> They wouldn't go to coffee mornings again because of the way like you go to a coffee morning and nobody would talk to you, you know like the ones that have been there for ages. But I think you've just got to find the right people and there's people like that everywhere, so you just have to make the right friends I think.

This is interesting as her language suggests that she has separated herself from her previous identity as the 'lonely wife' – translated as the unsuccessful wife - and become the sociable/successful wife. Claire [AP] also talked about her self-management and the performance she would make to fit in with the community to limit catching the loneliness bug:

> When I first met my husband I was shy, you know I didn't like talking to people but I've had to sort of in a way make myself a social person who will go out, you know if I'm stood at the bus stop I'll go talk to someone. But I think I've had to make myself be like that 'cos otherwise you know I'd be stuck in the house [Claire, AP].

Jervis' (2011) study outlines the experiences of loss for military partners relocating over-seas, mainly exploring their experiences of employment issues due to regular relocations. She argues that due to the gendered, militarised expectations of military partner's behaviour they tend to minimise the impact that relocation has upon their wellbeing, so rather than mourning losses they tolerate them. Minimising upsetting experiences caused by mobility is certainly evident in the excerpts above, as APs focus more on describing strategies to overcome their experiences

of loss and the negative impact this may have upon their wellbeing – being the resilient, stoic, and self-reliant AP. Of course, it is also evidence of them negotiating and reinterpreting the demands the military has of them in term of mobility, as they continually adapt and seek a sense of belonging and identity through their engagement with others.

Natasha said that moving to a new location at the same time as your SP goes on deployment is problematic as new connections must be established in his absence – the period in which childcare and household responsibilities increase and available time decreases: "*that's the worst time*". Furthermore, not having an informal support network makes these tasks more difficult as it was discussed earlier, friendships with other APs are highly valued for both practical and emotional support: "*you can't even just ring your mate up and say oh gosh I can't pick the kids up, could you bring them home for me after school*".

Exclusion and Stigma Strategies

A key theme recurring in this chapter is the notion that experiences may be shared and understood by other APs – especially if their SP is in the same unit/regiment. McPherson et al. (2001) argued that homophily reduces the likelihood of misunderstanding and enforces notions of shared experiences, meaning and understandings. However, there are various tensions limiting the cohesiveness of the partner community and thus the efficacy of seeking support from other APs. My data makes evident tensions within the community – breaking down the notion that experiences are 'shared'. This finding therefore supports previous research stating that AP identities are multiple and that they should not be treated as a homogenous group (Hyde, 2015; Gray, 2017). Many APs referenced perceived divisions based upon their SP's rank – an interesting finding given the perception that the military has outgrown hierarchies applying to APs (mentioned earlier):

> There was one or two wives who wouldn't talk to you 'cos you weren't as high a rank as their husband, they wouldn't talk to you in the school yard and things and you didn't get invited to barbeques and things if you were a junior rank, which I thought was absolutely pathetic [Rachael, AP].

APs perceived that others assumed the rank of their SP, leading to hierarchies within the community where it was felt Officers' partners judged and excluded those associated with junior-ranking personnel. This perspective was not discussed by Officers' partners who instead described their role in the community as the advice/support-provider. These reflections clearly indicate a power dynamic within the community – for those who adopt these roles.

One AP said that her identity blurred these boundaries as she was a senior manager of an education-related organisation, yet her husband was not an Officer. She irritably described military dinners where her employment status was met with surprise and confusion from his colleagues and their partners alike. Her job blurred the boundaries of gender and class stereotypes – where a female partner is assumed to earn less than her male partner, and a soldier's role is conflated with classed assumptions, which are assumed to transfer onto their partner.

For many, it appears that the rank of the SP alters expectations and, in some cases, practice of APs – further evidencing APs' absorption into the military, as a 'greedy institution' (Segal, 1986). In her ethnographic study of APs living over-seas, Hyde (2015) identified rank as a 'military technology of power', which was co-opted by APs and deployed in a way that identified certain APs as 'pariahs' based on socially constructed roles and expectations. However, this thesis also finds that some APs felt that there were no divisions based on rank, and that this assumption was outdated. This likely evidences APs negotiating and resisting the 'greedy military institution'. That said, all APs were able to describe scenarios that they had

witnessed caused by divisions between APs according to rank – including social interactions and formal policy (where SFA is accorded to rank). My data therefore deviates from Gribble's (2017: 25) argument that 'the regimental and rank structure of the military and social activities arranged for spouses were important ways of building social connections for spouses'. Instead, whilst it affords APs an opportunity to enter established groups based upon the rank of their SP, it simultaneously sows disharmony through (re)creating rank-based divisions.

Another tension within the AP community involves the perception that living on-patch makes secrecy difficult. The Army community is often described as close-knit due to them living together in the same locations, encouraging the development of informal networks amongst APs. However, many APs described situations where living on-patch limited secrecy and facilitated gossip:

> I think it's all just gossipy, bitchy and there's a set group of people that go to the coffee mornings, there's a set group of people that go to choir, and although it's made to look like everyone's welcome that's not actually the case [Valerie, AP].

This sentiment is evident in many AP's stories. Here, Valerie directly criticises the notion that APs can be considered a homogenous collective, with shared interests. Instead, she regards the AP community as a collection of smaller groups which serve to exclude others. This was perpetuated by the high mobility that Army families face where they frequently experience the breaking up and remaking of their informal support networks. Many APs felt that the close-knit nature of the community meant that they were unable to keep a secret: "*if you live in a big barracks, people are much less aware what's going on with each other's lives. Pluses and minuses to it, the goldfish bowl is a bit frustrating*" [Isobel, AFF, AP]. Karianne [AP] likened the experience of living on-patch to the school playground where rumours and gossip are rife. If one person is having an affair it will spread around the camp only to be replaced by the next

scandal. She said that if she had known what it was like she would not have chosen to live on-patch. However, she also did not feel comfortable moving off-patch as many of her connections and friendships with people she knew outside of the military had weakened. This was primarily due to the lack of understanding she faced during deployment: "*people who I've known for 20 odd years that I was trying to ring, and they were going well look at what you've got married into"*. The more APs 'join' the AFC, the more they may begin to feel detached from their civilian lives – they are in an in-between space.

Many of the APs discussed how stigma is attached to help-seeking, even when seeking it from other APs, and there is evidence that worries of being judged textures APs military-associated lives. A perceived lack of secrecy is problematic as the wider AFC stigmatises those considered not coping and help-seeking. Interviewees presented and perpetuated the stigmatisation of help-seeking by referring to those who sought 'too much' support as a 'welfare case' – negative judgement was accentuated if an AP was considered 'too dependent' and was not supporting their SP and his career, especially if their situation was not perceived to be the worst-case on-patch (see Chapter 6). APs are absorbed into militarised cultures and expectations and consider it their responsibility to ensure their SP is 'operationally effective'.

Goffman (1963) argues that stigma occurs through social relations when an individual's attribute has been subjected to a negative stereotype that calls into question the morality and character of the stigmatised person. This thesis has identified a continuum of AP identities which range from the 'successful/good' to 'unsuccessful/bad' AP depending on their performance of coping where help-seeking is associated with a 'lacking' in their character/morality.

What is pertinent here is that APs feel exposed by living on-patch. By living on-patch they are subject to the military gaze that on the one hand includes them due to the proximity to other

APs and the informal support facilitated by formal support services. Yet living on-patch also excludes them if they do not present behaviours that are synonymous with the expectations of living within a militarised culture. This echoes Foucault's (1975; 1976) explanations of the disciplinary effects of biopower – the perceived constant and undisturbed surveillance by an 'all-seeing' but 'unseen' power subjects individuals into regulating practice and normalising themselves. Disciplinary techniques evidenced are products of the close-knit militarised community where APs regularly report that it is difficult to keep a secret and that gossip, rumours, and ultimately negative judgement are rife. APs discipline one another into conforming to militarised expectations via 'stigma strategies' (Tyler and Slater, 2018a). By reviewing the formation of and experiences of informal support networks, it is clear that APs feel pressure to perform practices that relate to resilience, adaptation, and strength. APs' integrity is questioned and they are stigmatised if they are seen to seek support for an issue that is considered 'not important', 'part of the lifestyle' or as compromising the SP or operational effectiveness. Practices are performed to exhibit the 'successful/good' AP who displays traits of resilience, adaptation, and community involvement. This is most evidenced by APs who have changed their actions by the discipling experiences of isolation within the community (by not attending events), overcoming shyness, and adapted to increase resilience by attending events and "*putting yourself out there*".

However, it must be noted that within the AP community presenting the 'strong-self' can be suspended for short periods of time – there is evidence of their resistance. For moments, APs let their guard down and 'open up' to military friends, show emotions and cry, admit fear, and share a bottle of wine. However, sustaining overt unhappiness is not tolerated for long periods of time:

> I open up personally to my friends. I have a few friends in the military who are all the wives […] it's always like you can't be scared because there's worse off. But sometimes you know you can't help it and think what if this happens […] they'll go well what are you crying about? My husband's away, it's like almost, not every wife but some wives are like I've got no time for it because your husband's not away and mine is [Karianne, AP].

It is inadequate to suggest that stigma towards help-seeking only forms within the AP community. Instead, my research has shown that 'stigma' is (re)created in militarised spaces and within the context of military demands such as operational effectiveness, deployments and the dependence upon the AP to remain at home to keep it running effectively. Stigmatising help-seeking is also evident within the civilian community so to suggest that stigma between the communities is somehow distinct would be incorrect – the stigma APs associate with help-seeking is (re)created through engagement with each other, the civilian communities, and militarised impositions.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the perspectives and experiences of APs seeking support from informal networks. Specifically, it has shown that decisions are complex as APs balance the various opportunities in seeking practical and emotional support from family, other military partners, and civilian friends. Often these decisions are impacted by the military: for example, physical proximity to networks are impacted by military postings, whether the AP lives on/off-patch impacts the ability to meet others, and if the problem is related to deployment there is a perspective that civilians are unable to understand. Furthermore, it seems that many meet other military partners by attending military-organised events and these are less accessible if the AP works or does not have access to suitable transport. From my data, there is no doubt that APs

prefer seeking support from their families (primarily their mother) firstly and then other military partners.

The concept of liminality can be used to understand how APs experience seeking support from informal networks when managing military related stress in three areas – (1) their identity as military/civilian, (2) divisions within social support, and (3) online communities. Each of these involve interactions with militarised processes and thus APs' engagement with informal networks for support cannot be understood in isolation of these processes.

APs have both military and civilian identities whilst at the same time are neither. They display evidence of militarised cultures, a culture which values traits of resilience, adaptation, coping, and the diminishment of emotions. Additionally, they are exposed to military-related lifestyles and manage the stresses these cause such as deployment and high mobility. For this purpose, some choose to live on-patch, in military accommodation, living amongst the AFC. At the same time, they exist outside of the AFC as their role is secondary to their SP – they are not employed by the military and instead may only live on-patch and can attend social events organised by formal welfare as 'partner-of'. Additionally, their immersion into civilian community is ambiguous. On the one hand they are civilianised as they are not employed by the military, some work in civilian roles, they may live off-patch in civilian locations, and many discuss approaching civilians for support in managing military-related lifestyles. Yet all APs said that they experience alienation when interacting with civilians, especially when seeking emotional support, which is heightened during deployment. Therefore, they live liminal lives as they are both inside and outside of the military/civilian community.

There are divisions within the AFC which further estranges APs from total immersion into the AFC. There are social divisions according to association with service – an AP may feel isolated if living in a naval patch. They may also experience divisions according to their SP's

rank/role/regiment as an AP is assumed to share these identities by others. Additionally, rank is not fixed and therefore if a service member is promoted, it is feasible to suggest that APs may experience a breaking down and rebuilding of a new/changing informal support network and expectations. On the one hand APs represent the AFC whilst only occupying a small space within the definition.

Liminality caused by social space, off-patch (civilian)/on-patch (military) divisions, is also evident in APs use of social media to access online communities. Those living off-patch rely more heavily on online communities to maintain communication between themselves and a perceived central-hub of information and like-minded individuals. Those living on-patch also use online communities for similar purposes, and to introduce themselves ahead of relocation and coordinate face-to-face meetings with other Army families. However, these spaces are not 'lived' but rather accessed deliberately and 'left' when they leave the relevant support page.

Chapter 6 will show that a technique APs employ to reify their abstraction from an identity, caused by liminality, is to valorise the identity of the successful AP - one who is resilient, adaptable and coping. This current chapter shows that the successful AP is in part created/maintained through the perspectives of APs. One of the ways this is achieved is by the disciplinary techniques of the AP community where judgement and stigma is attached to other APs who are perceived to be acting outside of this expectation. Each AP aims to be the successful and to do this contrasts her coping and practice to others – by doing so she presents a script of a performance of managing, coping, and flourishing. Each AP stated that they do not judge or stigmatise others, yet all described their own practices in contrast to others. Displays of upset are tolerated by the community if they are temporary and do not undermine the experiences of others who are perceived to 'have it worse'. This causes the 'ideal' to appear real and limits the likelihood of an AP seeking support in 'public ways' – hence they tend to

try and cope privately by themselves (see Chapter 4), privately with immediate family, semi-privately with friends, and potentially publicly with formal support. The next chapter will explore APs' reflections on whether they would (or would not) access formal support, showing how the ideal AP identity is created and maintained through these interactions.

Chapter 6: Seeking Formal Support

This chapter explores the limitations of the current formal support framework available to APs, from their perspectives. Currently it is known that APs access formal support for a wide range of reasons relating to health/wellbeing and practical issues. Also, like SPs (Greenberg et al., 2003; Gould et al., 2007), APs prefer to seek support from informal networks rather than formal services (Dandeker et al., 2006). What continues to be unclear is why this is the case. Additionally, previous research treats the existence of 'formal support' as a given, failing to explore APs' perspectives of the various avenues, and the links to the wider military structure Army families are part of.

Options for formal support are various (see Chapter 3 for overview). First-line support is offered by the UWO (generally a serving-person) who is subject to the Chain of Command (CoC). If the problem is considered more complex, they may be referred to the AWS, who work with, but are outside of the CoC. Additionally, APs may receive advice/support from the independent AFF. There are also civilian organisations such as Homestart and Relate who have contracts and work closely with the military. Of course, there is also the wider support sector that is available to civilians including the National Health Service. The support available to APs relies upon them to approach the service directly or through referral. The fundamental pre-requisite for the system to work is for APs to feel comfortable in seeking help. Help-seeking requires a complex decision-making process, identification of a problem, and requires intentional action. Each of these elements require an understanding of availability, benefits, results, and consequences.

These aspects of engaging, or choosing not to engage, with formal support are explored in this chapter to show which factors increase and decrease the likelihood of APs seeking formal

support. This provides a lens to review the effectiveness of the current model, indicating opportunities for improvement. This thesis shows that APs initially attempt to manage issues, including problems faced around deployment, themselves by bolstering their coping strategies (see Chapter 4). Following this, they may turn to informal support which they assess according to perceived utility for the problem (see Chapter 5). If these strategies are not successful, APs may turn to formal avenues, but this is not without its limitations. This chapter focuses primarily on perspectives relating to seeking support from the UWO as this form of support was most often discussed by APs - unsurprising as the UWO is the first-line of support available to APs. Furthermore, it evidences their understanding of their personal association with the military and their military identity.

From analysing interviews with APs and FSWs, I have identified three themes which impact APs' decision whether (or not) to access formal support relating to concepts discussed in the previous chapter - perspectives of (1) their role/identity as an AP, (2) the quality of support available, and (3) accessibility. Each of these barriers include issues of militarisation, stigma, gender, greedy institutions and liminality which will be tied together in the next chapter. Where possible, the perspectives of the APs interviewed are compared against FSWs, in some cases presenting contrasting opinions. However, these distinctions are often blurred as many of those who work in formal support are also military affiliated or APs themselves.

Identities and Roles

A key barrier to APs seeking formal support stems from APs adopting, performing, and valuing traits of a militarised culture, which purports resilience and strength, whilst stigmatising traits pertaining to 'neediness'. In the interviews, APs regularly refer to their role and identity as an AP which they regard as distinct from a civilian lifestyle – they manage households and families through sometimes lengthy deployments and regularly relocate with ever-changing

postings. Numerous researchers have explored military cultures, which are not necessarily separate to civilian cultures, but can accentuate specific norms and expectations (Coll et al., 2011; Gray, 2015; Hyde, 2015). Through exploring domestic abuse in military families, researchers have shown that exposure to the military negatively impacts help-seeking from formal avenues – often relating to fears about the impact on their SP's career (Williamson, 2012; Gray, 2015). My research presents evidence suggesting that militarised norms and expectations permeate the value-systems of the APs interviewed, reducing the likelihood of them seeking formal avenues of support. Specifically, the pressure to be successful, in relation to militarised norms and expectations, stigmatises help-seeking thus reducing the likelihood of APs seeking formal support post-deployment (or at all).

Militarised norms and expectations are evident within accounts from APs. Many said that they did not stigmatise help-seeking and explained that they resisted perceived military expectations. However, when discussing other APs, they would contrast situations and ways of managing/coping thus evidencing a value system which condemned behaviours in line with militarised expectations relating to the role and identity of the AP. These values and judgements made around roles and identities exist on a continuum where one side reflects the 'successful AP', one who is resilient, adaptable, able to cope, supports their SP, and does not overuse formal support services. On the other side, the 'unsuccessful AP' does not present these valorised traits and is thus open for criticism. It is through these reflections we can identify that APs are militarised which has direct consequences upon their ability to seek support post-deployment.

Previous research has acknowledged the impact that militarised expectations and ideals relating to the 'military wife' have upon practice, behaviour, and perspectives. For example, Aducci et al. (2011) interviewed 25 US Army wives to understand their lived experiences of deployment

and from this they identified a ‘good wife recipe’ which involves traits exemplifying resilience. These include managing uncertainty/anxiety that are products of the military lifestyle (especially during deployment), managing a household single-handedly, providing emotional care, and adapting roles and levels of support around the deployment cycle. As shown in Chapter 4, many of these traits are evident in the APs’ reflections of the reintegration process post combat-related deployment. However, Aducci et al.’s (2011) research does not consider how these expectations impact help-seeking from formal support systems. Nor does it consider how those who do not meet the criteria to be a ‘good wife’ are treated within the community (see Chapter 5).

Gray (2015) explored the responses of military wives who had experienced domestic abuse and left the relationship. By interviewing victim-survivors, perpetrators, and support workers in both military and civilian roles, she reviewed the relation between militarism and responses to domestic abuse. Specifically, the links between hegemonic forms of gendered identity and structural violence were analysed to show how idealised versions of the military partner identity, and related expectations impact responses to abuse including help-seeking. By doing so, she showed how the military’s responses to domestic abuse depoliticise it, obscuring gender inequalities. This chapter shows that the figure of the ideal AP is a key theme within the data collected for this research but extends its applicability to address a gap that takes seriously concepts such as gender, militarisation, and stigma, applying them to seeking formal support post-deployment when dealing with the non-specific.

This chapter also presents reflections from FSWs. Not only has this approach enabled me to obtain more data about APs as they discuss their perspectives of related issues, it has also enabled me to explore the (re)production of stigmatising help-seeking beyond AP reflections. Much of the previous research exploring stigma and the AP community does not acknowledge

narratives from FSWs. By failing to explore this, it disguises the influence of the military, instead implicitly suggesting that the existence of stigma is the fault of the AP community. By looking at these perspectives, this chapter shows that some of the FSWs interviewed (re)produce ideals of the AP identity.

Stigmatising Help-Seeking

It is worth reflecting briefly upon references made to SPs, as of course an APs' connection to the military comes through this relatedness. Previous research conducted within the US and UK has found that serving-person's reasons for not seeking help on return from deployment are fears that they would be considered weak or be treated differently, further problematised by permeating concepts/expectations including 'honour' and 'sacrifice' (Hoge et al., 2004; Hall, 2011; Iverson et al., 2011). The greater the serving-person perceives the importance of honour and loyalty, the higher the chance he/she may sacrifice relationships with family and friends. In this research, many of the FSWs said that although modern society is moving beyond stigmatising issues such as mental health, the military lags behind. For example, Bethan, a member of the AWS said that the main cause of SPs not seeking support is because help-seeking is incompatible with military traditions and values. Although she does expect that this is changing:

> So not to seek support […] especially […] some of the older units let's say have still got a very good value base, you know the old traditional values and you know they might not realise actually times have changed and it's ok to seek help, […] so, they might feel that's a bit of a barrier.

She perceives that older units are more likely to hold values which limit help-seeking thus suggesting that military cultures hold a historical basis – as they develop culture becomes more

fixed. By doing so it seems that whilst some areas of the military may become more 'accepting', others are less likely to change. We could transpose this into speaking about this research's specific cohort – APs whose SP has experienced combat-related deployment. This practice has more of a historical basis than recently introduced roles relating to online security, suggesting that whilst society and specific areas of the military change, others lag behind.

All APs interviewed talked about how their role as an AP reduces the likelihood of seeking support post-deployment, echoing militarised cultures. These mainly revolve around exhibiting 'resilience'. Cheryl [AFF] said that one of the reasons APs may not seek formal support is due to "*the sort of resilience that we are supposed to have as military families and that we shouldn't be seeking that out*". What comes through in this quote is that APs are expected to be resilient not as civilians, but as members of a military family. It is inferred that there is something about being associated with the military that demands resilience more so than in the civilian sphere and that military families are expected to be innately more resilient. There is an expectation that APs should be resilient to military-related stressors and that they should overcome the adversity of problems faced, responding to them as challenges. Failing to be resilient is often conflated with 'neediness'. This links to what drives these perspectives – what do APs consider to be the correct use of formal support services – and what is neediness?

Adrienne [AP] was asked in which circumstances she would consider reaching out for support from formal services. She provided a concise set of considerations which involve (1) is it an emergency? (2) is it worth being on a welfare list? (3) are the possible negative impacts on the SPs' career worth it? (4) if the SP is forced to leave the Army what are the necessary changes? and (5) does my case deserve the resources? She associates help-seeking with admitting defeat and regards being known to support services as negative. The need to be resilient was essential to her, and she believed that seeking support would hamper her SP's career, potentially

resulting in dismissal (explored shortly). Additionally, she relayed consequences of leaving the military relating to housing, finances, relocation, changing schools, finding alternative employment, and changing lifestyle. She also suggested that welfare resources were limited and expected that there will always be someone else worse-off. It does show that she measures her 'problem' against others before asking for formal support, questioning whether her issue should/should not be dealt with by formal avenues.

Like Adrienne, Catherine [AP] also considers being in contact with formal support as negative, but places much more emphasis on what this means about the AP's character. Similarly, she regards making contact as admitting defeat:

> If [other APs are] like me they probably wouldn't want to seek help because they don't want people thinking oh here's another wife that can't cope, 'cos you do hear about some wives completely going to pieces and they're in the welfare office every week crying […] And I just think they maybe don't want to be put into that bracket.

This clearly presents the stigma ascribed to help-seeking by the AP community. Additionally, it expresses a concern about the lack of secrecy among the community and confidentiality within/beyond the walls of the welfare office. Other APs spoke specifically about the 'neediness' of others, arguing that some expected too much from the services available:

> Old school women would just get on with most of it, but there's always going to be two types of Army wife, you'll always have the ones that sit around and moan and the younger ones that are only staying in their own circle of age group […] my friend, she's 24, has three children under five and she's moaning 'cos her husband wasn't here, it's like well you know, I don't like have a go at her and put her down, I say I understand exactly how you're feeling but there are millions of women doing this,

> you've had three children, there are always somebody worse off than you, don't be afraid to ask for help, but it isn't as bad as you think [Anna, AP].

Anna rests her perspective on an expectation that the AP community should 'be in this together'. In the extract above she does not condemn those who seek support, but in the account of her friend's experience, she does not consider the issue as deserving of support as 'there are millions of women doing this'. This a common theme in many of the interviews, that someone else always has it worse, so what right do you have to use resources? She later states that although she would support someone struggling, she thinks that it has a negative impact upon other APs. There is an expectation that they should band together and support one another – one AP's struggle weakens the unit of APs. There is a perspective among APs that there is a finitude to both formal and informal support based upon practical and emotional resources/labour, and APs should be aware of this to ensure that those most deserving can access support. Additionally, there are concerns that 'over-use' leads to support workers no longer trusting APs:

> There are so many people […] that take advantage of [formal support] and can make [FSWs] more worried about who to trust, who's being genuine and stuff like that […] especially in the middle of a tour […] and they're kicking off [Anna, AP].

The suggestion that 'taking advantage' is even worse during a deployment further resonates with the notion that operational effectiveness comes first and foremost. It also links to the stigmatising discourses of dependency and undeserving persons cheating the system (Dean and Taylor Gooby, 2014; Jensen and Tyler, 2015; Mittelstadt, 2015). Bethany [AP] suggested that APs should be grateful for the support offered as it is not available to civilians.

> To me it's not normal having these people do this job 24/7 for us […] when you get out, you don't have any of that, you don't have somebody on the end of a phone […] I mean gosh I've heard some right stories of them asking the welfare guys to go and cut the grass […] it's money wasted to be honest on a good handful or more men being paid to sit around at the beck and call of wives with silly little things that need doing. Then on the other hand I had the extreme obviously of our daughter being really poorly, they stepped up and they were amazing, and I couldn't fault them, if they weren't there […] I would have known what to do.

For Bethany the formal support services should be respected as a privilege of being a part of the AFC and that too much reliance will cause problems post-military. She suggests that the existence of this fosters a dependent community which is echoed by some FSWs.

The need to be resilient and to manage crises is enforced within the AFC by the stigma that is attributed to individuals if they are perceived to challenge accepted norms. Earlier excerpts have alluded to stigma being attributed to the practice of help-seeking among APs, and I will now highlight how labelling is used to condemn 'unsuccessful APs'. Many APs directly stated that they would not approach formal support because they do not want to be labelled a 'welfare case' or needy by others:

> It sounds awful, 'cos obviously people go through different things, but you're almost portrayed as that needy person that can't cope, and nobody wants to be the needy person who can't cope […] you get the ones that post constantly on [social media] and you just don't want to be that person [Patricia, AP].

Being called a 'welfare case' is regarded as the product of one's own pathology and the judgement is exacerbated by the close-knit communities fostered by living in military locations

(Williamson, 2012). Even if APs live away from the community, military partners' social media pages act as another lens in which APs may expose themselves to the critical gaze of others.

However, the stigma attributed to help-seeking is not insurmountable as APs do access formal support. Yet, from discussions above there are numerous socially created obstacles and these are developed in part through exposure to militarised norms. Most of the FSWs are aware of the stigma that is attributed to help-seeking among the AP community and many were concerned about overcoming this:

> Not everyone likes coming to welfare, because they think welfare's a dirty word. 'Oh I've got to go to welfare, I'm going to be such a burden now', but they're not a burden, and this is the type of influence that I'm trying to get them out of, you know the concept of that welfare is not a bad thing, welfare is here to help [Henry, UWO].

Some of the FSWs suggested that stigma is produced by the APs themselves, ignoring the influence that militarised norms and expectations may have upon practice:

> [APs] stereotype, and they get stereotyped so quickly, it's like 'oh wow you've been to welfare', hmm 'you've been to welfare but you've had a cup of tea, you've had a cake and we've just chatted about random stuff, to get you out the house', how is that becoming a welfare case? [Henry, UWO].

Henry, like other FSWs, try to tackle the barriers that they perceive APs create by being present at social events (which are military-organised). This shows that formal welfare takes on many forms as is not just based in welfare offices behind the wire, rather it is an 'umbrella of support' which encompasses the AFC by creating a lifestyle (explored shortly). Events such as Families Days are hosted, as well as weekly activities such as

Coffee Mornings, to develop trust and communication between the military and the AP community.

Operational Effectiveness

Stigmatisation of help-seeking and neediness was discussed in relation to the SP's career and the role that APs are expected – and have - to occupy in relation to this. Specifically, this involves a sense of duty to support SPs to maintain operational effectiveness. Ultimately the military relies on the unpaid, gendered labour of APs to operate (see Chapter 4). For example, previous research has explored the caring roles adopted by APs when facing significant hardship such as when their SP returns wounded, injured or sick (Verey et al., 2017). However, by looking at the mundane, everyday and non-specific, Chapter 4 shows that APs' gendered roles extend throughout the duration of military association - they care for the children, compromise careers, manage the household (especially during deployment but also in preparation for further absence of the SP), and facilitate relationships between children and regularly absent fathers. Their roles are produced by military aims and objectives and thus it should come of little surprise that, as mentioned earlier, accessing military resources in the form of formal support can present itself as contradicting this 'duty'.

SPs returning from deployment may experience an array of issues ranging from physical disability to subtle mental health scars that affect reintegration. Additionally, they may have witnessed traumatic events, have trouble with concentration and memory, substance abuse, difficulty with connecting with others, and miss structure and camaraderie (Bowling et al., 2008). Deployments to Afghanistan and Iraq have been characterised by varying degrees of stress including intense combat exposure, long periods of separation, austere living environments and substantial rates of injury (Fertout et al., 2011). UK troops, in comparison to the US, are prone to alcohol misuse post deployment – especially those in combat roles (Fear

et al., 2007; Sundin et al., 2011). There is scant research exploring UK AP's experiences, but clinical levels of depression, anxiety, stress, and perceived stress have been evidenced (Bennett, 2017). Also, they experience significantly greater levels of distress when compared with prevalence rates in general adult and clinical populations (ibid.).

Many of the APs considered the health and wellbeing of their SP as part of their responsibility to manage and this is heightened post-deployment. However, they are not always sure of what issues their SP is facing, who to turn to, and if they do turn to formal support, what impact this will have upon the SP's career. Additionally, just because an AP believes the SP is showing signs of adjusting negatively post-deployment, that does not mean the SP will cooperate in seeking support which can cause tension, limiting the effectiveness of AP's help-seeking actions. For example, Natasha [AP] stated that:

> Everybody does feel that they would like to help their SP coming home […] you think maybe this is […] a problem but I don't know what to do about it, because of course as dependents […] you don't really have access to anybody, you can go and say perhaps to welfare, but there's also the issue if you're going and saying your husband's being a bit weird, you don't want to mess their career up, so you don't want people to know perhaps unless you really really trust them and then actually if they're [the SP] not going to say anything what's the point anyway?

She goes into greater detail when describing anxieties about possible repercussions to SP's career if APs engage with welfare for an issue such as PTSD:

> You may have to mention it [to formal support], but then […] you may have made everything a lot worse […] but even PTSD, you say that to somebody at your husband's work, they then have to deal with that, it will then go on their record, and

> depending on how bad it is, […] they may get down-graded, so it's very very difficult to actually come forward.

There is a hopelessness within the AP community – if the SP is not going to engage then there is nothing the AP can do, and if they do, the SPs career may be impacted. One is trapped between a rock and a hard place and this is likely a common situation for many APs whose SP experiences issues relating to mental health. SPs stigmatise help-seeking due to concerns about the unit no longer trusting them, being considered weak and the negative impact on their career (Iversen et al., 2011; Murphy and Busuttil, 2014). There is no research to show that these concerns are representative of reality, but those diagnosed with severe mental or physical health issues may experience restrictions to their service (Coleman et al., 2017). Stigma has been used to encourage obedience within the armed forces and as such occupies a historical legacy that continues to influence military culture (Wells, 1995), including SPs and APs.

Natasha [AP] also stated that although formal support is meant to help the family, it is not successful as APs do not know who to turn to, leaving problems to become worse:

> You're always faced with […] 'I don't know who to tell and the Army should be supporting me but I can't go to them'. […] A lot of the wives don't really know what to do about things and then don't do things and it becomes a problem, that's their problem, not a problem that's their families' problem.

As alluded to in Natasha's excerpt, and echoed by many other APs, APs assume responsibility for identifying symptoms indicating the mental health of their returned SP. This becomes a family problem - it cannot be isolated to the SP, the Army, or themselves. The absence of an effective, trustworthy system forces APs to occupy a role to mitigate military consequences upon their family (trust is discussed shortly).

Some APs thought that the military could do more to support their SP. Molly [AP] said that one thing the military could do differently is to provide a check in service after a couple of months post-deployment. Specifically, she felt she would have valued the opportunity to talk to another about how things were going. Post-deployment, the UK military currently relies of commanders or peers to detect any mental health issues as there is yet to be a formal screening process, like seen in the US (Fertout et al., 2011).

There is no doubt that providing more opportunities for the service community to discuss mental health issues will raise awareness – a previous study found that Welfare and Medical Officers felt that 'raising the profile of mental health [by introducing a formal screening process to detect mental health issues] would increase awareness of mental health issues in the military, both at an individual, and an organizational level' (Bull et al., 2015, 6). However, it is important, given APs' implicit role as carer within the family, that they are also exposed to discussions around mental health – issues which may affect either the AP, SP or wider family.

APs may attend a post-deployment briefing which can sometimes explore mental health. In these cases, APs become informally part of the 'screening process'. However, this information/arrangement is not conducted centrally, and organisation is instead up to the dispersed AWS or the HIVE Information Service to arrange – not all do or are able to encourage APs to attend. There is an opportunity here for briefings to be conducted in a way that enables APs to speak about issues, explain the benefits of seeking formal support and allay fears about negative impacts upon the SP's career.

Many of the FSWs interviewed were also aware that APs may avoid seeking support for either themselves or another member of their family for fear that it would negatively impact their SP's career. Isobel [AFF, AP] said that the fear of repercussions has most likely come from the SP's perspective.

> A soldier will often perceive that [seeking support] will affect his career, that it will have an effect on him, and the regiment, if his family are constantly with the welfare, and obviously husbands go home and talk to their wives and they'll say oh such and such has been.

According to Wertsch (1991) the psychological results of living in a military family include secrecy in work and at home (keeping these two spheres separate), stoicism (creating the appearance of stability), and denial (keeping all fears hidden). These traits are considered crucial for the success of personnel, the mission, and the military (Hall, 2008). In the above quote Isobel [AFF, AP] suggests that the SP's career will be impacted if he or his family are *seen* seeking support - alluding to the close-knit nature of the community and the lack of confidentiality. Therefore, there is a fine line in which APs must balance to not be regarded a 'hassle' to the military – they should not be considered regular users (or users at all). Two UWOs [Alex and Jamie-Lee] discussed cases which they considered APs to be 'needy':

> The wives think everybody owes them something I feel, as in these houses provided.

> Nothing's ever good enough, the windows leak or the tap's leaking and if they were on a normal council estate in a normal city, one of my sayings is in the office I say that wouldn't happen on the out you know what I mean, that wouldn't happen you know, the wives expect everything don't they, and the more you give them the more they want. Now I would say that about the wives yeah. […] They're always bitching on and carrying on.

> Mine are needy, but [another FSW's] are more needy.

Firstly, it is suggested that some APs expect too much from the military, and by doing so, it is suggested that the military provides too much compared to services available to the civilian

community. There is an expectation of gratitude from the AP community and some FSWs become exasperated with attitudes they conflated with 'bitching' and 'carrying on'. This is a perception that APs worry about when seeking formal support – that one should not over-use resources (or use them at all) or 'complain too much'. No other FSWs interviewed reflected this perspective and instead focussed discussions on how to encourage more APs to talk to them, reduce stigma, and create more open and accessible spaces.

Secondly, to compare support in the civilian sphere they use the example of 'council housing', another form of accommodation that has state involvement, like military housing. This comparison is interesting as they are associating the AFC with civilians in receipt of state support. The purpose of providing SFA is about alleviating financial constraints *and* to support the AFC who are subject to high mobility, often with short notice periods. There is a worrying trend in contemporary society to regard those who receive state-sanctioned support as dependent, and this dependency is regarded a pathological failure, resulting in victim blaming (Dean and Taylor Gooby, 2014). Mittelstadt (2015) explored the rise of the military welfare state within the US arguing that since 1991, Army leaders expressed concern about how *excessive* social welfare programmes in fact threaten military readiness. There was a concern that the package, which included allowances and provisions that were not available to civilian society, created a dependent cohort of Army wives - a prevailing discourse that surrounds arguments against the general welfare state. The excerpts above reflect this discourse suggesting that the utilisation of state resources and related dependence is stigmatic, and if one is in receipt of welfare it should be met with gratitude – especially if the support is not available to the civilian community. They infer that APs expect too much.

This 'expecting too much' is much more complex than is presented in the excerpts above. The reference to housing completely disregards that fact that it is one of the most contentious issues

in the AFC due to its poor quality. There are reports of rat infestations, lack of heating, dirt, mould, and failures in communication between families and housing contractors Carillion Amey (Norton-Taylor, 2016). I remember returning from holiday to our home (SFA) to find that a pipe had burst in the attic resulting in water leaking through three floors and part of our ceiling had fallen through. My father immediately called Carillion Amey and was told that they would not be able to resolve it for another three weeks. The nature of SFA means that you are unable to get anyone other than Carillion Amey to deal with issues ranging from broken ovens to collapsed ceilings. One of the APs described a situation in which her home was burgled whilst she was at work, her children at school and husband on deployment. The backdoor was broken by the intruders and would no longer close - she was told that a repairperson would not be able to visit for a week, and that she should consider finding alternative accommodation in the meantime.

When asked whether social demographics impact the attributed stigma and therefore likelihood of support-seeking Cheryl [AFF] said:

> Definitely and it depends on how you break down those demographics. Socioeconomic yeah absolutely. Flip side is certain demographics are more capable of engaging but might not want to for reasons such as perceptions. Ranks, NCOs, Officers – don't know. I think the lower rank, infantry, are much more used to a social buffer system where they will lean quite heavily on welfare. Just because their social housing background, I don't mean to stereotype, but often that cohort is from the social housing background they are much more used to relying on the state to help them out with problems. Other Officer and NCO[37] wives might be less inclined

[37] Non-Commissioned Officer.

> to because they also have role in helping. If they are doing the traditional role of stiff upper lip person people can go to. That's another huge generalisation.

Recruitment strategies for persons to join the Army at Rank level tends to be more present in deprived areas thus (re)creating the notion of specific areas of the military being more likely/used to seeking formal support. Her discussion also alludes to APs' role within the community, breaking it down by the rank of their SP, stating that those married to the Ranks may be more likely to be a support-seeking whilst those married to a NCO/Officer are more likely to be the informal support-provider, reducing their likelihood of seeking support. A series of fascinating, complex perspectives which should be explored in future research.

Most of the FSWs regarded the support they provide APs as a means to an end - the operational effectiveness of the SP. Army welfare policy, which covers the role and purpose of both the UWO and the AWS, states:

> This Army General and Administrative Instruction (AGAI) promulgates Army Welfare Policy in order to deliver a key element of the moral component of fighting power and thus contribute to maintaining operational effectiveness […] The principles to be applied to the construction and delivery of Army welfare area. The needs of the Army come first but those of the individual come a close second (Army, 2016: 1).

Again, The AWS's mission statement highlights the secondary nature of families clearly:

> The [AWS] is the Army's professional welfare provider; it delivers a comprehensive and confidential welfare service responsive to the needs of individuals and families and the CoC in order to maximize the operational effectiveness of our service personnel (Army, n.d.).

This leads to the reduction of APs issues in relation to SP/military needs. A member of the AWS said the "*UWO does not understand the work of the Community Support Workers. They only understand personnel issues, not women's issues*". She is criticising the fact that the majority of UWOs are male, and APs are female (discussed later). When asked if an AP was likely to seek support for her own needs compared to likelihood to seek support for SPs needs, Cheryl [AFF] said:

> I feel less likely. I base that on a family that I dealt with and also personal experience. This case, she got a knock on the door to say that her husband had been injured and that was a 10 to 12-month period of going through Selly Oak rehabilitation. She just picked up all the pieces, was there for him, there for the kids, there for his parents and I think halfway through she went to the doctors to say she was struggling a bit, not sleeping well. He said drink a mug of hot chocolate before you go to bed and it'll be fine sort of thing. I think she was going to ask for help, going to say 'I am not sleeping particularly well' was more of a cry for 'I am feeling in a pretty dark spot here' and got nothing from it. I think it's all about the soldiers […] it is all about dealing with the wounded and sick.

APs' needs are neglected. This is likely due to a lack of understanding of the pressures experienced by APs caring for their SP post-deployment – a cause being highlighted by Combat Angels (n.d.), who identify as 'a community of carers committed to the empowerment and education of other carers and family members of UK veterans with PTSD'. These negative experiences are likely to limit the chance of an AP seeking formal avenues of support again and contributes to the narrative developed in the community about having to manage on your own, and be resilient, as an AP should. Ensuring that the correct support is provided is essential in a community that stigmatises help-seeking.

Natasha [AP] said that she fully acknowledges that the support available to her is primarily there to support her SP. But there is an irony here because she thinks that if she engages in formal support, all it shows is that her SP is not doing his job properly:

> I know welfare is paid by the Army to support my husband in his role in the Army […] I don't want welfare to know my business, so I wouldn't go to see them […] everything that might impede my husband doing his job I don't want to give them the idea that he might not be doing his job right.

Thus, not seeking support may actually negatively affect operational effectiveness, as those who may need it are not receiving it. Echoing this, James [AWS] talked about how some APs assume that he is not there to support them, only their SP.

> I think when I turn up families expect me just to be there for the soldier [...] so a wife might just loiter around a little bit to try and work out if they have some kind of role within that and so I just try and engage them really and pull them into what's going on.

There is a need for clarity about which support worker is available for who and for what issues. Perhaps the reticence of APs is due to an awareness of their secondary nature to their SP, according to the military outlook.

Questions of perceived legitimacy of need lend themselves to potential stigma as if an action can be used to suggest a weakness within one's character, they are less likely to be accepted by others (Goffman, 1963). Coping is an essential trait for the military partners as 'although each member contributes to family environments, in current military families, the at-home parent holds the keystone role in establishing and maintaining an environment conducive to meeting the needs of both children and adults' (Green et al., 2013: 753). Like SPs, APs also associate

help-seeking with a loss of credibility, but rather than this loss of credibility existing amongst the unit, the loss of credibility is much more complex. The APs perceive that credibility will be lost amongst the AP community and within the unit, and that her loss of credibility will impact the credibility of her SP in carrying out his role. Her actions can directly impact an SPs career.

The unsuccessful AP is treated as the 'other', their behaviours are labelled as negative and are perceived to not only be over-using the support resources available but also limit the ability for the military to perform effectively as they are not carrying out their duty, to support their SP. They face a loss of status in the eyes of the AP community and are distinctly labelled as 'needy' and 'welfare cases'. At no point did an AP I interviewed regard herself as being unsuccessful, but they regularly reflected on their experiences and perspectives of other APs that they perceive to be worthy of criticism. Within the AP community, my research evidences that an inability to cope is blamed on the APs own unsuccessful pathology and is associated with the behaviour of 'one who expects too much'. This of course disguises the influence of the military – particularly its normalising processes that are validated via policy and practice – and its part to play in the (re)production of stigmatising logics.

The APs interviewed adopt and perpetuate militarised norms/values amongst themselves by valuing resilience and stigmatising neediness. The blurring of military cultures between the SP and the AP community is accentuated by APs' roles as unpaid and unacknowledged members of the military (see Chapter 4). Additionally, FSWs carry judgements about what appropriate need is amongst the AP community – with some accusing members of the AP community as 'bitching' and 'moaning'. Whilst others assess 'need' based on maintaining the operational effectiveness of the SP, thus rendering APs' status as secondary to the military. As Enloe (1983: 66) states 'wives are being aided today in order to ensure that a soldier's first loyalty is to the

military'. This chapter will now show how APs assess the perceived quality of formal support services when choosing whether to use this avenue.

Quality and Trust

The second key theme that impacts APs likelihood to seek formal support is their perspective of the quality of the support that is available to them. As the first line of contact, APs primarily referred to the quality of the UWO and team when making these assessments. If they perceived the UWO to be ineffective it was unlikely they would seek an alternative avenue for support. Therefore, the perceived quality of the UWO is paramount to the support programme delivering an effective service.

Firstly, this section presents the positive experiences when engaging with formal support services relating to regular communication and social activity which are especially valued during deployment. Secondly, it outlines the negative experiences revolving primarily around concerns regarding UWO's training and personalities not being the 'right fit'. Thirdly, concerns about the perceived lack of confidentiality, which are exacerbated by the close-knit nature of the AFC, are explored. Some of these experiences discussed link to points made earlier such as perspectives surrounding the proximity of support services to the CoC, with services perceived to be 'closer' or answerable to the CoC as more susceptible to impacting the SP's career. This is testament to the fact that individual experiences are complex and not reducible to categorisation.

<u>Umbrella of Support</u>

Many of the APs reported positive experiences with their immediate welfare team – the UWO and staff. Key practices identified as supportive include open and regular communication as the UWO is considered the conduit of information between the families and the military.

Additionally, organising regular social activities was often cited as a benefit as it enabled APs to develop their informal network of support and help them to keep busy (key coping strategies identified in Chapter 4 and 5). For example, Tonya [AP] stated that:

> We have a really good welfare team, really good information and they're always happy to sometimes just go in when you just need a chat […] we have really good communication and especially now during the deployment, they've put a lot of stuff on for the wives and the kids, parties in camp, they do different trips to theme parks.

However, this was not shared by all APs interviews, showing that practices across different units varies. For example, Patricia [AP] in a different unit to Tonya said that her welfare team offered many activities and trips during the deployments, yet she felt they were excluded from communication about deployment-related matters. Specifically, she stated that she would have valued meetings organised that focussed primarily on issues of family welfare – building on discussion earlier about post-deployment briefings. The only source of information she said she had come across was:

> A really crap DVD […] I can't remember the name but if you've watched it basically it's when he comes back from like service and he hears, I think he's playing on the Playstation and there's gun fighting on the Playstation and he reacts to that and he reacts to like passing cars and stuff like that. And it's all about you supporting him when he comes back.

This directly links to the earlier point made that APs are implicitly expected to adopt a caring role when their soldier returns from combat-related deployment – the focus is on the SP. I have seen two DVDs provided to families: *Deployment – A Families Guide* (2011) and *Homecoming – A Families Guide* (2011). Each foregrounds the SP's/military's interests and advice is

focused upon what the AP can do to reduce the stress/worry of their SP. It is clear through these mediums that the military mobilises APs by offering advice on how to manage, adapt and cope with the various stages of deployment. For example, APs are advised to throw away letters they might write which criticise the SP during deployment and to take on volunteer work to keep themselves busy. There is also a surprisingly long series of images of a female AP locking doors and windows when inside and when leaving their home. Post-deployment, it is suggested that APs relinquish some of the responsibilities they may have gained in their SP's absence, in order to make space for them upon return (accompanied by a short video clip of an unhappy man, presumably the returned SP, watching a woman, presumably the AP, checking the oil in a car). Patricia [AP] stated that there is a lot of focus on the SP's return but actually the AP has changed too, and this perspective should also be presented back to the SP (see Chapter 4).

Formal support maintaining communication and being 'present' helped APs to develop trust towards the formal support services available, increasing their likelihood of asking questions and seeking support. For example, Claire [AP] said:

> I think if I really needed counselling or you know anything like that I'd 100% go to welfare and say listen I'm struggling, you know or just say I had a problem with [child's name] you know, and I felt like I couldn't cope, I'd just go to welfare's and say listen I need help.

Following this, Claire referred to her friend who is a member of a different unit who has not accessed the support Claire felt she needed to address her social isolation. She blames this on her local UWO not being as engaged or making him/herself known to the AP community – "*Well me mate […] who just stays in […], she doesn't know the welfare, the welfare don't put on any trips".* Positive experiences of the formal support services available therefore rest upon a feeling that an AP exists within an 'umbrella of support'. Communication should be regular

and various – ranging from the ability to arrange a meeting with the UWO to speaking more informally on a weekly basis at an activity the UWO has organised and attends. During deployment APs said they highly value the opportunity to 'just have a chat' or to be asked 'how are you' by formal support, as it makes them feel acknowledged, especially as they are undertaking an exceptional role in managing their household in the absence of their SP (see Chapter 4):

> I'm independent so I try and do most things myself, but when I was feeling very low and struggling with stuff, even if someone just phoned me and said is everything ok? I wasn't after anything, but a phone call once in a while just to say are you ok, is there anything we can do for you, that would have been nice just to know that I hadn't really been forgotten about [Catherine, AP].

Wanting to feel acknowledged was also discussed by APs who, outside of deployment, wanted to a maintain a modicum of separation between themselves and the military.

Training

Concerns about lack of professionalism of UWOs, confidentiality, and a dislike of the Army as they blame them for problems faced limited APs' likelihood of accessing formal support services. Much of this discontent revolved around first-line support provided by the UWO and team. Reasons for discontent focus upon the level of training, feelings that the UWO was not interested in welfare, incompatible personalities, concerns about maintaining confidentiality, and the impact upon the SP's career.

There was an enduring perspective that the UWO's reasons for taking up the welfare role was not for the purpose of supporting soldiers and their families, but rather to gain their commission/promotion – a degree of authority given to higher ranking personnel by the

Queen/King. In the interviews it was also suggested that some were forced into the role, for reasons unspecified, which impacted the level of attention they paid to the role:

> So, the [UWO] is a soldier who it's his first job on commissioning from the ranks and you get directed into it, you don't choose to do it. Some people are well placed, and some people are just told to go and do the job for two years […] suddenly they don't wear uniform because they're in shirt and tie, and they've got to deal with the wives. And there's nothing in place to ensure that they are appropriate to do that job [Isobel, AFF, AP].

Many other APs shared this perspective. For example, Natasha identified the UWO's level of training as the key limitation of the formal support availability:

> The problem with welfare as you know is that these are just normal soldiers, they're not trained psychologists, they either get it 'cos they're good at people or they don't get it because they're just normal people who pretty much get this two year horror of a sentence over and done with. So, some welfare officers are brilliant, and some are absolutely dire. I think that's reflected in the level of engagement you get when you deploy or when your husband's away. So, if they're really good they'll be carrying on with the with coffee mornings and trying to engage, and if they're not good they don't do that at all. So I suppose what I'm trying to say is it's just the luck of the draw on who your welfare officer and welfare team are at the time of deployment, plus how many horror stories they're dealing with and how much time they've got to give to just general making sure wives are sort of ok.

Here Natasha identifies the lack of training and the possibility of a clash between values of the 'militarised service member' who becomes a 'support worker'. She highlights the period of the

deployment as the period which it becomes clear whether a UWO is good or not, as this is the period where APs require the most support. As mentioned in the previous section the coordination of activities to keep APs busy during a deployment and creating an umbrella of support is highly valued.

The lack of centralised practice leads to first-line formal support, conducted primarily by the UWO and team, being personality driven, which impacts the support-seeking process. Molly [AP] said that "*sometimes it's even down to who your welfare is or who your CO is, whether they're family orientated, and if they're not, they're just not interested"*. Adrienne [AP] said it was important for a UWO to have children in order to actually understand family's needs. Additionally, during one deployment there were a total of four UWO replacements meaning that she turned to alternative sources of support such as the Padre.

Karianne [AP] stated that "*some people hate welfare; welfare have been pretty ok with me*". Her relationship with her UWO is complicated and although she values the support received, she still criticised him:

> I think he's very very arrogant. He would complain about me house not being very clean and the garden not being very clean, I don't know where [her SP] was […] and I was having a really bad mood out, trying to get me meds right, so I went to him hysterically crying going look right now I'm very depressed, told him everything that had gone on, and he was like oh I didn't realise that after going crazy, having a go at me.

In response to this the UWO:

> Gave me a couple of weeks to sort it and said don't worry about it, it got sorted the next day, and they tried to get me counselling […] which I appreciate but I'm already under counselling.

Karianne appreciates the welfare support available to her but felt that in this specific case the UWO could have been more understanding and that he was not as supportive as he should have been initially. It is difficult to analyse this statement without more context or a response from the UWO but perhaps we can regard this case as an example of the welfare team being too paternalistic.

This is a criticism made by Jessica [AWS] when giving an overview of her perspective of military support. She told me about an incident where there had been an issue in the home, and the SP's way of dealing with it in the first instance was to go to the pub. Herself and her team felt he was at risk of overdose so went out to find him to discover that he was alright. Whilst breathalysing him his wife arrived and so Jessica felt that this was a good time to leave, but the CO decided to return later to find him in the pub without his wife. Jessica said that he spent 'ages' talking to the SP, telling him to call when he returned home. However, the SP ignored this advice (or order?). In response to this, the CO called the police and pubs to locate the SP. Jessica criticised this as 'ridiculous' and an example of the military's oppressive nature, which is in direct contrast to the empowerment she facilitated in her practice: "*the CO still pats himself on the back as he had gone to find him and I think he was quite cross that I hadn't done that. Leave the guy alone!*". Jessica provided numerous examples of how the military's authoritarian structure and outlook negatively impacted support provision and joked that it was no wonder the community are hesitant in seeking support.

Previous US-based research shows that civilian social workers working with(in) the military regularly face ethical dilemmas, where they must choose between the military mission and their

client (Olson, 2014). When working with the military institution and persons, they encounter practices that are dissimilar to theirs as social workers, specifically authoritarianism and associations with war/violence (Savitsky et al., 2009; Coll, 2011; Hall, 2011). Although research exists that explores the cultural clashes between the two practices, often calling for social workers to develop their understandings of the micro and macro factors influencing military culture and associated persons, no research exists exploring social worker's experiences of working with the UK military. It is beyond the remit of this thesis to review this in significant depth, but it is important to highlight this issue to further evidence the impact of militarism upon the various formal support systems. Thus, formal support cannot be considered as one homogenous unit but is rather a blend of various outlooks and disciplines (social workers, community development workers etc.), where roles and persons have different affiliations with the military and military mission, working to collaborate in specific and various ways.

Isobel [AFF, AP] provided an example of where her organisation stepped into a situation where the relationship between an AP and UWO had broken down. This was due to incorrect information being passed onto the AP by the UWO, and the lack of interest the UWO is perceived by the community to have in his current role. Isobel reflects that the UWO is "*not bad at it […] but he's not fluffy, and he struggles with it, he doesn't enjoy it, he makes that quite clear*". Highly militarised personalities within the welfare team are not valued by APs (or some FSWs) due to the clash in perspective of what counts as support – empowerment or command and control. In fact, Isobel stated that "*this particular wife said to me I just feel like I'm useless, and he just wants to get it sorted*".

Two of the UWOs interviewed were critical of military-recruited welfare. They argued that recruiting UWOs from the military is problematic due to it being used for promotion, not

wanting to do it and thus not taking it seriously, and the lack of anonymity:

> Because they didn't want the post, they were put in there 'cos it's part of the promotion.

> [UWOs] see it as being one of those jobs that I just have to do, don't really want to do it.

> I'm going to sit with my feet up and I'm not going to do anything.

> From the minute [a UWO] got there […] he told me he said I don't want to be in this job, he said I've got no intention of being in it longer than a year.

> And you're expecting now the guys to go and confide in you and open up and I think that's a problem in a lot of regiments […] you've gone from this guy who is there for discipline, and now you've got to go and tell him all your deepest, darkest fears.

They also discussed how in many cases the UWO is a higher rank to those seeking support negatively impacting the likelihood of SPs and APs approaching the service. This is a situation that is entirely unique to the military and is likely to increase the barriers associated with accessing formal support – from some APs' perspectives seeking support from the UWO is the equivalent of seeking support from your partner's manager.

Some FSWs reflected on the gender of the UWO arguing that it could reduce the likelihood of APs seeking support. Interestingly, APs never mentioned this, but as discussed earlier, they did reflect on how they preferred to seek support from those who have children.

> I personally I don't know any female Welfare Officers but there will be them […]

> and I'd imagine that might well make a difference in terms of how approachable you are, but again it will come down to personality [Isobel, AFF, AP].

Confidentiality

I am not able to say whether confidentiality is broken by FSWs, as APs argue, but that the lack of trust certainly impacts APs' practice. For example, Natasha [AP] said *'I wouldn't go to welfare because they're likely to disclose anything I say to the CO'*, resulting in negative impacts on her SP. She did not feel that it was possible for the services to keep conversations between the user and staff:

> It's absolutely impossible isn't it, there's nothing much you can do because really nobody should be talking about anything, it's just it does get talked about and things leak and people mention something and then someone puts two and two together and it's very difficult. I think the Army does as much as it can, what could be done perhaps is to have a separate institution so not within the Army, somebody dealing with things who doesn't work for the forces, but works alongside them, so you can go outside for counselling. So, and that doesn't get reported back to your OC (Officer Commanding).

Therefore, although certain services may be sought outside of the military, the first-line services are within. However, I would caution that out-sourcing distances the responsibility of the military from the issues faced by APs. Perhaps reframing the support to remove the CO from issues discussed by APs could be beneficial. Other APs talked about how even though they know the service is confidential, it is difficult to overcome the concern that stories may be leaked due to the close-knit nature of the AFC and living on-patch. For example, Molly [AP] said:

> You're always going to think they're going to chat, they're going to say something in the mess or in the bar or when they're down the pub [...] I think it is very difficult to actually go and access when the people that are in your welfare department are people that you see quite regularly around the patch or around the camp […] you've got very little confidence in somebody you see getting absolutely smashed out of their heads on Friday or Saturday night.

When Molly was asked whether she had ever witnessed UWOs or other welfare workers acting unprofessionally or leaking confidential information she further emphasised these sentiments:

> I think it's more anecdotal. You know you get little rumours but then that's not necessarily from welfare, it's because you know close knit community, things do start to leak out and you're just never sure, so you think I'll just keep it to myself.

On the one hand Molly suggests that confidentiality leaks are the fault of FSWs, but when further questioned, she instead retracts and suggests that more of the fault may lie also within the broader AFC and gossip (see Chapter 5). There can be a great deal of exposure between APs and FSWs – they may live closely, children attend the same schools, FSWs often serve themselves or are married to someone serving and they regularly attend social events. A recurring theme is that the close-knit nature of the AFC renders it impossible to keep secrets. This was identified as one of the key reasons why stigma towards help-seeking persists as APs do not trust that the formal support services are wholly confidential, primarily because of the blurred lines between being a member of formal support, serving, or being in a relationship to someone serving.

> If you were suffering from domestic violence, it's the shame that goes with it, but if you're in the Army, as you know it's such a goldfish bowl that you can't

> disappear into the system, people will know, somebody somewhere will be indiscreet and mention something [Natasha, AP].

FSWs are aware of the concerns APs have about the lack of confidentiality. For example, Matthew [AWS] said that that lack of trust also transfers onto services who are contracted to provide support. He said that if Homestart attends Coffee Mornings to advertise services, APs tend to assume that they are trying to 'catch them out'. Support-seeking is stigmatised within the community and in response to this APs are wary of support-providing organisations. I attended a 'Mums and Babies' and a 'Mums and Tots' group to speak about my PhD research to recruit participants and absolutely felt that I was not welcome. The APs in attendance, even though were told I was coming and what my purpose was, were clearly uncomfortable speaking with me.

Two FSWs who work at the contracted charity Homestart, which is separate from the military and the CoC, cited this distance from the military as a key strength of their service. Rose said that if an AP is not wanting to engage with the AWS or UWO due to fear that this information will be included in 'CoC communication', they may access Homestart's services by being referred by alternative avenues such as a health visitor or a children's centre. Lex seconded this and said that the reason for APs choosing not to engage with military organised formal support is that there is a fear that the AWS will take the side of the soldier or information will be leaked to a CO - she had experienced this before. She also said that the issue of pride amongst the AFC further limits an AP and SPs' likelihood to seek formal support. Natasha [AP] affirmed the fact that she would prefer to access support that is separate to the military, as accessing formal support provided can be embarrassing and shameful:

> Spouses and in fact servers as well, don't really want to go to the people who are being provided by the military because it's embarrassing, shameful and you fear

> your OC's going to get to find out. So, if it could be once removed, so it could be a separate institution that they go to for help, such as Relate but not have to pay, that would really help.

It is unclear from FSWs' responses which avenues are preferred by APs. Previous excerpts have shown that APs can be hesitant when accessing support services that relate to the military due to a concern about repercussions to the SPs career. There is also evidence that they present caution when considering whether they would seek support from agencies that operate outside of the military such as Relate.

Anti-Military Sentiments

Barriers to seeking support from military services, relating to trust and anonymity, are heightened when APs blame the military for issues faced. This was explained frequently during interviews with FSWs but not clearly from interviews with APs. I expect that rather than this presenting a disjuncture in understanding between APs and support workers, it is a product of my small interview population. The FSWs are exposed to many APs through the nature of their work and had managed more extreme cases than those I interviewed (who were still in a relationship with a currently serving person). For example, James [AWS] said:

> There's some occasions when I'll just get bristles because I'm military and the military have been blamed for everything that's going on, […] I'm outside of the CoC but I'm still seen as part of the problem, so the […] wife might not want to engage 'cos there's still that kind of anger and a bit of blame going on.

This is echoed by Carolyn [AWS] who said:

> I think some wives really hate the Army, they blame the Army for feeling the way they do [they] feel trapped because everything is based on what the Army is doing […] I think every aspect of your life is controlled so for wives there might be a bit of reluctance perhaps because they may come to the organisation thinking are they going to tell me how to think and feel as well.

This is indicative of the military's control over an AP's life – she must move at the military's will, manage deployments, compromise careers and experience the breaking up of informal networks[38]. The excerpts above are fascinating because the two FSWs consider their association with the military as a barrier, yet neither of them are 'military' in the sense that a UWO is often a soldier from the Unit. These FSWs are civilians, employed from the civilian sphere but their attachment to the AWS leads to their bodies and roles being conflated with the Army. Nicola [AWS] described how a lack of trust associated more widely with social work as a profession can limit APs engaging with the AWS, for support:

> Most of the people who end up being known to AWS are people who are involved with child protection services, children's services, so again it kind of builds up that stigma around AWS where people feel you only go to AWS if your relationship is breaking down, if there is domestic violence involved, if there's a child protection case involved, so again people might be reluctant.

Nicola states that barriers to support-seeking include inadequate information about services available and the stigma towards social work as a profession. Previous research has clearly outlined that the media actively mobilises public anger towards social work and social workers through its presentation of cases (Warner, 2013). Additionally, the AWS deals with more

[38] At the time of writing I had just left a job as a teaching assistant at the University because my partner was told to expect to relocate within the next few months. This relocation never occurred.

extreme issues than the UWO, and as discussed earlier, APs stigmatise help-seeking as it is regarded as a failure to support the SP. Furthermore, issues requiring support can be stigmatised in wider society for example those related to mental health. I am not suggesting that within the military these situations are more stigmatised, but the close-knit nature of the community renders users of the AWS much more visible. Thus, seeking support from social workers (or those within the support sphere), within a military context, must overcome at least a 'triple-dosage' of stigma. These barriers are grounded upon individual perspectives/experiences but also the influence of external factors including the media and the military.

Nicola's method for managing this stigma is to capitalise on her distance from the CoC. This means that she is not obligated to share information with the CoC as is expected of the UWO – unless there is a safeguarding issue. Additionally, Bethan [AWS] said:

> It's just trying to take that stigma away isn't it and getting people to realise that we're on their side, we're here to support and help move them forward and not […] let the situation deteriorate, 'cos that's usually when they come to us as well , if they came to us a month prior […] we might have been able to put some measures in place before it got to that level.

Persons not seeking support sooner is an often-cited problem for any support provider. There is no doubt that breaking down the stigma associated with help-seeking and making it clear what services are available will help encourage more APs to reach out before situations become critical.

There are numerous barriers to seeking support relating to trust and concerns about confidentiality/anonymity which are exacerbated by the close-knit community Army families

experience, and anti-military/social worker sentiments. To improve, the support services need to work towards developing their 'umbrella of support' – where contact is easily made between AP and service provider, availability is clearly presented, and providers work towards developing a culture of confidentiality. I am not suggesting that services are currently failing to maintain confidentiality as I have no proof. However, the fact that so many have expressed concerns about it shows that it is in the very least a perspective that needs to be addressed in order to encourage more to seek support as soon as possible.

Accessibility

Practical Issues

Many APs and FSWs described difficulties accessing formal support due to a lack of transport (no car, limited public transport), living away from patch, clashes in working hours and childcare. As described earlier, the formal support available to APs is generally provided on-patch. Whether accessing formal support offices or attending social events organised by formal support/wives' committees, APs need to transport themselves and possibly their children too – not all drive, and many of the garrisons are in isolated areas (separate from other towns). Additionally, not all SFA is located close to formal support services. Jamie-Lee [UWO] and Matthew [AWS] said that the issue of transport is alleviated during deployments as the AP has full access to the car, which is otherwise used by the SP – suggesting isolation is more likely to be experienced when the SP is present.

Many of the APs interviewed developed strategies to overcome isolation and support one another in attending social events such as 'Coffee Mornings' by organising car shares. For example, Tonya [AP] said: "*I rely on my husband to go out, or friends*". However, even with these informal networks, not all overcome the distance: "*so I've got some mates up in*

[Location] and they don't come to the coffee mornings 'cos they don't drive, you know and they've got quite a few kids as well" [Claire, AP].

In addition, mobility is not just about physical access but also the perspective of how accessible the endpoint is. Lynn, AP said:

> I think it helps being closer to welfare because welfare is just down the road from me whereas some people who live further out […] it's a travel to get to welfare and I think it's a lot nicer when you know that there's a group that you can go to that's close by. I think if it involves more than a five-minute walk up the road it's kind of a bit daunting.

Therefore, living further away from services may reduce help-seeking as the more effort it takes, the more 'daunting' it can become. This renders some APs more mobile than others – their experiences are not homogenous, but rather multiple – directly impacting their agency in negotiating the terms of their military-associated lives. Factors that increase APs' mobility is access to a car (or network of friends who drive) and proximity to the services and social events (being close to 'the patch'). When asked what advice she would give to another Bethany [AP] said "*always think that there is somebody worse off than you […] whether it be like somebody not driving and you are driving*" – further indicating the previous comments made about the expectation to cope without complaint.

A key issue facing formal support services is how they are going to manage the return of families from Germany to the region around Salisbury Plain. The level of support available to families living over-seas is much higher than in the UK and there are concerns that those returning expect continuity. For example, in Germany youth centres are open 4 days a week

which is not the case in the UK[39]. I spoke to some APs who had recently returned from Germany and they often cited better services there which negatively impacted their perspectives of seeking support in the UK. Discussions revolved around transport:

> Over in Germany […] you had loads of support, if you needed get down camp […] you know you'd have a minibus and they'd take you down […] But over here you're basically stuck on your own […] on a Thursday we have coffee morning here, I've got to make me own way here, but whereas out in Germany for the coffee mornings I used to be able to ring transport and they used to be able to pick us up [Claire, AP].

Another limiting factor to being able to access formal support was the impact of employment. All the APs I interviewed said that the demands of their jobs and hours worked would clash with being able to speak to a UWO, attend social events, or go to family briefings:

> There always have been family briefings, whether you can go to those or not is up to whether you have a job, because they don't normally happen in an evening. So I've missed both family briefings for both tours because I was working […] Basically I wasn't in [SFA] so I was detached from everybody else, I wasn't in the club of everyone living on the patch and all their husbands going together, because I was working [Natasha AP].

Natasha discusses being torn between the demands of her civilian life and the need to manage military-related demands – showing how she must negotiate the two. It is in these everyday moments that APs must negotiate their identities, specifically their 'civilian' and 'military' identities and evidences the greediness of the military institution.

[39] Discussed during a meeting with the AWS.

A common theme that emerges from my data that although an AP may choose to not access the formal support services available, this does not mean they do not want them available. They live with the spectre of deployment, managing their lives expecting change/disruption caused by military demands (see Chapter 4), many also want a spectre of support. I referred earlier to the 'umbrella of support' which is limited by practical/perceived immobility. No matter how ethereal the umbrella is, physical movement of bodies is required excluding some APs.

Support Spaces

The way in which welfare spaces are designed also impact the experience of APs seeking support. I will not explore this in great detail as it was not mentioned by APs but was discussed by some FSWs and is an issue I witnessed in attending interviews and entering 'welfare spaces'. Exploring these spaces in more depth is an opportunity for future ethnographic research.

> Well my platinum service would be a welfare hub in every garrison. Not these horrible old sheds. A purpose-built building with all UWO in office with a cafeteria and maybe its attached to a leisure centre or whatever where families could all go. That would be amazing. For all those who could get to a garrison town I think that would be modern, it would be a good way of doing things. Having that sort of centre there would be less stigma attached to entering that building as there would be children's playgroups and stuff like that and you interact with. I think that would be gold plated and running alongside that there should be a virtual hub that families could engage with so if they are living in their own homes and they are unable to access the garrison site [Cheryl, AFF].

She wants to modernise the spaces that formal welfare is offered to families and by making

them more ‘family friendly’, interactive and social, she imagines that this will remove stigma associated with support-seeking. Her critique of the current system rests upon ‘the military gaze’ which was discussed in Chapter 5. The current system is flawed because of the impact of the military panopticon – accessing support is limited due to APs not wanting to be seen entering welfare buildings. Spaces within leisure centres limits the gaze and increases AP exposure to welfare spaces, perhaps making them more accessible.

I encountered two entirely different welfare spaces. To access the AWS in the first location I was required to present my ID to the Guardroom which was situated behind barbed wire. In the Guardroom there were three uniformed soldiers who checked my ID and asked who I had come to see. My ID was taken, and I was given a ‘pass’ which I had to be photographed for and it was explained to me that this pass should always be evident on my person . Although APs will likely have their own pass, the formality is striking. I was then admitted entry behind the wire and into the camp where I met my interviewee who escorted me to her offices. She looked immediately different from the men in uniform and the gate with their stern faces. She wore bright colours, smiled and welcomed me, asking if I had been there before – I immediately felt much more comfortable and commented on the contrasting reception between the two encounters. She knew exactly what I was referring to and joked that they were in a ‘good mood’ that day. We then entered the AWS building, which I can best describe as what Cheryl referred to as a ‘shed’. I cannot remember what its interior looked like to describe it in any detail but effectively it was a series of offices with desks and people sat looking busy. My interviewee took me into a room and said that this was generally where she had meetings with ‘clients’. It had a large table with about 10-15 seats and the walls were covered in ‘best-practice’ guidance, a reminder to anyone seeking help that their experiences are processed according to established categories determining ‘need’.

When meeting another interviewee, I was brought to a leisure centre. On the ground floor there was an open space in which families were talking, organising children from play groups and other scenes you would expect as you entered any other leisure centre. Beyond this space was a café and the welfare offices. The set-up was open plan, creating the sense of flow between different spaces with ease. There was friendly noise amongst the families and the various support workers walked between spaces joking with families. It was easy to imagine how an AP may ask one of the workers a question without causing attention or feeling uncomfortable. The space was bright and colourful – it felt great! However, it did feel oriented towards families with young children – perhaps those without children entering this space would feel less comfortable.

A FSW I interviewed said that the military were not very good at creating supportive spaces:

> There are planes going over and the building looks like a 50s health hospital that has been abandoned. I know the room you are in does not dictate the support you get but it is the most oppressive, falling apart, horrendous building [Jessica, AWS].

Although she is speaking specifically about SPs in the RAF seeking support, her comment is still relevant as these traces of 'militaryness' she refers to likely impact support-seeking in a negative way. Another example of this is clothing as some FSWs wear military uniforms. UWO Henry said that he chooses to come to work dressed casually because "*you need to be approachable".* Jessica [AWS] criticised the military for considering putting support workers in a uniform:

> The CO recently said well you all have to wear uniform. And it was like right, if you are a victim of domestic abuse and you have managed to find the courage to come to AWS, some of them are behind the lines, so you have to book in and out, which

> would be a barrier for me, you have then got to sit opposite someone in a uniform, not helpful.

Research has shown that SPs receiving support for mental health issue consider the wearing of uniform as negative to the therapeutic relationship (Wilson and McAllister, 2010) – there is little doubt that support workers wearing military uniforms will negatively affect the experience of support-seeking for APs too.

Neglected Persons

Army welfare policy clearly states that a UWOs responsibility is to 'ensure that full details of welfare and community support services, are communicated effectively to the Service community in a way that is suitable to meet their individual needs' (Army, 2016: 6). There are many ways in which UWOs and other services achieve this. On arrival into the unit it is expected that the UWO will 'arrange meet and greet mechanisms for families, including use or mentoring families. Provide unit induction for single soldiers and soldiers and their families' (Army, 2016: 73). However, this does not always happen immediately:

> They have like the welfare unit people over there but to be honest my experience of them wasn't very good. I mean we moved over there in December, we moved over there and my husband went away in January, so I was left like literally not knowing anybody in a place where I didn't know where I was and I didn't have any contact with welfare until about March [Maria, AP].

Methods for disseminating information include sending emails, organising social events and briefings, publishing leaflets/newsletters/posters, and posting on social media channels. Additionally, schools in military-locations make information available and some FSWs work with schools to refer families if considered necessary. Non-military services such as Homestart

attend military-organised events such as Coffee Mornings to advertise their work. Information generally includes updates about services available and dates/locations for upcoming events. However, providing information does not necessarily overcome the barriers relating to stigma as discussed earlier and some FSWs regarded APs not accessing them as simple as 'choice', ignoring the complexity of decision-making.

Some APs are more likely than others to be neglected by formal support including those living off-patch and without children which was discussed in Chapter 4. Additional groups include those who are not married. APs who are married can receive the whole suite of support, yet those who are unmarried may generally only receive signposting to another civilian agency:

> Married soldiers and their wives they get more […] a soldier comes to you and says listen me girlfriend's gone in hospital I need to be off to look after the little boy, it's harder to get that soldier time off than if it was his wife […] the Army recognises wives in every way, shape or form, but not girlfriends […] I mean the amount of soldiers that come in the office and say I need to speak to you about me girlfriend, and you think yeah come on tell me the story and I do feel sorry for you, and you've got every sympathy, you've probably been together for ten years, you probably have four kids, however in the eyes of the Army she's not your wife, you know, and you think while you talk to them and get all the information off them, I know for a fact I can't do anything for you and I know that [Alex, UWO].

Monica [AWS] said that this approach was likely to change in the future. This is interesting because the Future Accommodation Model will alter living arrangements enabling SPs to live with who they want – married or not – so it is worth asking the question, how far will the Army go in modernising its other services which ultimately impact ways of life within the AFC. Some

of the APs described the difference in support they received before and after marriage. For example:

> When he went to Afghanistan properly, I didn't really know anyone from the battalion, we were only boyfriend and girlfriend, so I wasn't kept up to date. I got all my information off the news [Karianne, AP].

Yet there were also reports of non-married APs receiving support - "*before we got married, before he got deployed, I got sent a leaflet saying what was going on, you know, like coffee mornings*" [Catherine, AP]. The status of being married leads APs to expect a level of service that is not always met:

> I can give you the example of the unit welfare I had at my last posting, who despite the fact that we were married so there shouldn't have been any reason, I wasn't just a girlfriend, and I had a baby during the time that I was working there, well my husband was working there, but throughout the whole thing there was no contact […] to the extent I don't even know the welfare officers name [Natasha, AP].

This provides a further example of those on the lack of consistency between support provision by the primary support providers.

This section has shown that there are a series of barriers faced by APs which relate to access including practical barriers, a lack of communication, inappropriate support spaces, neglected demographics and a lack of consistency in provision. Many of these elements have been discussed earlier in the thesis. Support services need to consider how to bridge these gaps, often relating to a lack of clarity surrounding eligibility and availability.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the key barriers faced by APs when considering whether to access formal support services. Specifically, it has outlined the complex decision-making considerations relating to (1) militarised identities/roles, (2) perceived quality and trust and (3) access. Much of the discussion has focused upon accessing the UWO as this was most regularly discussed by APs.

The successful AP identity – one who is stoic, resilient, adaptable and independent – is (re)produced and (re)enforced via their engagement with formal support services. Their identities are liminal as on the one hand they are civilians, whilst on the other they are absorbed into military aims - their gendered roles and identities support deployments and other forms of instability experienced by the family. Identities and roles are situated within the military sphere, are influenced by militarised cultures and practices which feed into the perspectives APs have towards support-seeking. Barriers APs associate with seeking support from formal avenues serve as disciplinary techniques to maintain the status quo. Therefore, this chapter shows that the stigma associated with help-seeking, existing at a micro-level within the AP community (see Chapter 5), is related to macro structures as it is (re)produced via military structures. Many of these issues feed into the lack of trust APs experience towards the formal support services. These themes have also occurred and have been explored throughout the thesis - they are compared in the next concluding chapter.

Chapter 7: Discussion

This chapter draws together conclusions of this thesis. Specifically, it highlights the original contributions of the research, answers research questions, and finishes by presenting recommendations to improve current support provision for APs.

Originality

This thesis explored APs' lived experiences and perspectives of accessing support when dealing with military and non-military related issues, during the reintegration period, post combat-related deployment. It fills a gap in the otherwise scant research exploring this topic within a UK-based context. Furthermore, it captures the experiences of persons in a relationship with a member of the British Army who live in the UK rather than in over-seas bases (which has been explored by Dandeker et al., 2006; Jervis, 2011; Hyde, 2015). It moves beyond work with a positivist leaning which treats military processes as a 'given', thus failing to question why trends in practice/perspective occur (for example Dandeker et al., 2006). Rather than treating the existence of (in)formal support as a given, this thesis explores how these systems come into 'being' and the associated perspectives and lived experiences of use from APs. Additionally, it captures the everyday lived experiences of APs whose SPs have experienced combat-related deployment, addressing a gap in previous research that tends to focus on specific populations such as those who have experienced domestic abuse or whose SP has been diagnosed 'wounded, injured or sick' (see for example Williamson, 2012; Gray, 2015, 2016a, 2017; Thandi et al., 2016).

Therefore, this thesis is aligned and contributes to the growing research programme Critical Military Studies (CMS) (see Basham et al., 2015). Moving beyond the positivist accounts which dominate military research, CMS aims to create a body of research that is theoretically

informed, interdisciplinary, and political. Specifically, this thesis contributes to work conducted by Gray (2015, 2017) and Hyde (2015) whose research exploring military partner experiences takes seriously the theoretical implications of gender and militarism in the home. By examining the qualitative data collected alongside relevant theories – militarisation (Gray, 2015), greedy institutions (Segal, 1986), liminality (Thomassen, 2009), gendered AP identities (Gray, 2017) and stigma (Hall, 2011; Tyler and Slater, 2018a) – this thesis critically engages with the impact that military culture(s) and, more specifically, expectations have upon APs' experiences of their military-associated lifestyles and help-seeking.

This thesis also takes a problem-solving approach as the analysis of experiences and perspectives are used not only to give APs a voice but to improve the services available to them. At the end of this chapter a series of recommendations are provided which have been identified through engaging with APs and FSWs.

A further original contribution of this thesis, which was not initially expected, is that focusing on one period of the deployment cycle artificially reproduces notions of linearity which does not correspond to the perspectives and experiences of APs. Instead, this research shows that when coping with the deployment cycle, APs tend to alter their practice, roles and responsibilities within the family to limit the impact of the SP's fluid absence/presence in the home. I have found that APs' coping strategies revolve around increasing their ability to manage the transition of their SP in response to the demands of deployment. They struggled to speak about the reintegration period as an isolated independent event and would often refer to pre-deployment and deployment periods to explain their strategies. Additionally, they would reflect upon the impact that expecting future deployment has upon the reintegration period. For this reason, I argue that APs are haunted by the 'spectre of deployment'. This will be discussed shortly. What follows is an overview of the three coping strategies APs utilise post-

deployment; (1) personal, (2) informal support and (3) formal support – this includes discussion of further contributions to previous research.

Personal

As shown in Chapter 4, the APs interviewed said that they would often try to manage the pressures of the deployment cycle personally at first which is consistent with findings from the US-based literature. For example, previous research has shown that post-deployment APs cite 'patience', 'making space for one another' and 'not expecting the return to be smooth' as strategies to ease the experience of familial reintegration (Lapp et al., 2010; Marnocha, 2012). The APs I interviewed discussed how they and their family units aimed to go back to 'normal' (their pre-deployment normal). However, this was unobtainable as each family member had been impacted by the deployment and time passed. Deployment(s) altered family routines, relationships and expectations of one another.

Post-deployment APs do not utilise strategies to 'cope' per se, rather they focus on what Dimiceli et al. (2010) termed 'problem-focused coping' which is defined as doing something to address the stressful situation, such as planning and acceptance. My research found that APs negotiate the adjusting relationships within the family home by seeking time away with their SP or encouraging communication between the SP and children. By doing so, they seek a 'new normal' with different (to greater or lesser extent) familial routines/responsibilities, relationships and expectations of one another. They face 'problems', as explored in Chapter 4, including the renegotiation of family chores (not wanting to relinquish control, yet wanting to be acknowledged for their work during deployment) and managing changes within themselves and family members (the traces of deployment). However, these challenges are considered temporary by APs as they hoped for a better future and believed the new normal was obtainable

– indicating that APs cope by imagining better futures rather than embroiling themselves in the present.

My research found that post-deployment, personal strategies are more often employed such as giving the returned SP space and accepting negativity, allowing each other time to adjust, accepting that there is going to be an adjustment process, and 'domesticating' their SP. Post-deployment, APs may seek external support from family (and sometimes friends) to look after children to allow her and her partner time to re-establish emotional connection. This differs to Faber et al.'s (2008) work which argued that to cope with boundary ambiguity, APs would seek information, attend family support groups, and talk to others.

Informal Support

Many of the APs interviewed discussed their perceived utility of informal support – family and friends. This was not just in the context of post-deployment, but in managing their 'military-associated lives' which are marked by regular separations including deployments, training and courses (discussed in terms of liminality shortly). As shown in Chapter 5, if personal coping strategies were considered ineffectual by APs, many said that they would turn to informal support networks *before* considering accessing formal support avenues (if at all). Previous research such as that conducted by Dandeker et al. (2006) has shown that APs prefer to seek external support from their friends and family rather than formal avenues. However, their work treats 'informal support' as homogenous and a 'given' that APs have unproblematic, equal access to. By asking APs what informal support means to them, this thesis has shown that navigation of various avenues is complex.

For example, most of the APs interviewed chose to seek support from their mother, especially with regards to childcare, practical difficulties, emotional support and as an opportunity to

leave the patch. However, this is complicated by the considerable distances some APs lived from their families due to the postings required for the military. Some talked about the guilt experienced if they were unable to provide support to their wider family (ageing parents for example). Seeking company from friends was regularly cited as a valuable source of support, especially if living far from the wider family network. Additionally, all APs discussed the difference in experiences seeking support from family members and friends who are military-associated, and those who are not – preferring to seek support from military-associated persons. This resonates with findings from Gribble's (2017) and Davis' (2011) studies. Specifically, Davis (ibid.) found that engaging with civilians could lead APs to silence themselves to protect themselves from the 'pain' of some civilian responses such as forgetting about the deployment, pity, talking about death, or responding with politically charged sentiments (e.g. the military shouldn't be there anyway).

However, my research goes into further detail in understanding how APs experience and perceive the utility/effectiveness of military-associated friends/family. Specifically, my interviews show that decisions about who to access for support and the expectations relating to the quality of support are complex. Support sought and received from military-associated friends was highly valued, especially if dealing with military-related issues such as the deployment of their SP. The value of these relationships was explained by contrasting them to friendships with non-military-associated friends. The APs reported that civilian responses to their situation could be met with criticism or ambivalence leading to them feeling isolated and at worst, alienated. Additionally, many APs said they were often met with sentiments such as 'well you knew what you were marrying into', disregarding their concerns. Yet all the APs interviewed had close friendships with individuals not associated with the military and this was cited as a strength in situations where the AP wanted an 'escape from the military gaze'.

Building on that, just because there is a perception that speaking with someone who is military-associated increases the likelihood of a shared understanding, does not mean that these friendships were always considered useful and effective by APs. Previous research conducted within the UK has hinted about the stigma associated with 'not coping' and/or seeking support within the AFC – relating to divisions within the community according to rank and concerns regarding suspicion and gossip (Dandeker et al., 2006; Gribble, 2017). These concerns and worries about the lack of confidentiality within the community were shared by the APs interviewed in this project. However, there was also evidence of resistance to militarised norms which will be discussed shortly. This finding further justifies, and aligns the overall thesis, with arguments made by researchers such as Gray (2017) and Hyde (2015) that APs should not be treated as a homogenous group but rather a group that is diverse.

Furthermore, this research has found that access to the military-associated community was impacted if living on/off-patch. Networks of friendship within the AP community are difficult to disconnect from military structure and policy. Housing available to Army families is often organised in/around a military base (patch) meaning families can live close to one another. Previous work conducted by the AFF (2016) has found that the ease of access to the AFC was a significant benefit of living in service housing. I found that community development work of the formal support services in/around the patch aims to further engage military communities and facilitate the development of informal networks of support. However, not all families live on the patch, and there is an expectation that fewer will in the future due to housing policy changes (see MoD, 2018e), potentially increasing feelings of isolation from the AFC and difficulties in accessing organised social events. However, as alluded to earlier not all APs feel welcomed and comfortable within the AFC due to concerns relating to gossip, judgement and the performance of being an 'AP' (as will be discussed shortly).

Formal Support

Currently, the British military offers a network of formal support options to APs to support them when dealing with crises generally relating to emotional/wellbeing issues, medical issues and practical issues such as housing. Additionally, the military attempts to bolster the informal support systems within the 'AFC' and a 'need to know' level of information about what to expect with regards to deployment.

There is yet to be a significant UK-based study reviewing the effectiveness of the formal support system available to APs. Nor has there been a review of how APs assess the effectiveness of the formal support framework, on their terms, around the deployment cycle. Higate and Cameron (2004) interviewed UK APs and found that they considered the formal support services' interest in their lives unnecessary and outdated, explaining that this is due to the military being a paternalistic total institution. For example, some felt discomfort in being considered a 'dependent' and the level of data the military required of SPs including their marital status. However, Higate and Cameron (ibid.) did not consider how perspectives may or may not impact help-seeking perspectives and practices. Work conducted by Dandeker et al. (2006) states that APs tend to not seek support from formal avenues, and nor do they expect to but again, gives little detail on why this is the case.

My research has addressed these gaps and found that when asked about seeking formal support, APs were more likely to describe reasons why they would be hesitant in doing so. As presented in Chapter 6, APs' perspectives of formal support are complex and relate to perspectives regarding confidentiality, quality, stigma, awareness, and access. Generally, the most often cited source of formal support was the UWO which is not surprising as this individual acts as first-line support and is (generally) highly engaged with the community. Many of the APs interviewed expressed concerns surrounding the lack of confidentiality amongst support

workers, who are often military themselves, living within the AFC. Additionally, some questioned the quality of the support provided by military-organised systems due to a perspective that training was lacking, the support role was a route to promotion within the military, and that support workers were unable to understand issues from an AP perspective. Some also felt that they would be judged negatively by the AP community and those working in formal welfare if they were to seek support too regularly or were considered 'needy'. Of course, others said they were less likely to seek formal support due to a lack of awareness about provision or clashes with other responsibilities such as childcare and employment. From the data, it seemed APs were more likely to seek formal support from their UWO if they regularly communicated with them and organised social events on camp. Moreover, a significant factor leading to concerns about seeking support from formal avenues related to how they perceived themselves, their role, identity and purpose. As many of these themes are discussed in detail shortly and relate to the analysis and findings of the research project, I will pause here and focus this section on presenting the views of FSWs.

Chapter 6 contrasted AP perspectives against the perspectives offered by FSWs. By doing this it has found that FSWs are highly aware of the issues the APs discussed with regards to help-seeking decisions. Of course, all individuals interviewed were willing to provide APs with the support they needed to manage their military-associated lifestyles (especially during deployment). However, this was often conflated with the need for the military to maintain combat effectiveness. In other words, support was provided to APs because it served the military's interests. The effectiveness of services provided is not measured - perhaps effectiveness is measured via retention figures and the reasons given for an SP leaving the military.

Much of the formal support available to military families relies upon the individual to approach the service or, less directly, approach via referral. The fundamental pre-requisite for the system to work is for military partners to feel comfortable in seeking help, yet this creates a barrier to receiving assistance. Help-seeking requires a complex decision-making process, focussing on the problem and requires intentional action – therefore necessitating an understanding of services available and likely impacts of accessing these. The stigma associated with help-seeking ultimately reduces the likelihood for an individual to seek help (Vogel et al., 2007; Cornally and McCarthy, 2011) as there is a perception that in doing so there may be social consequences such as judgement or at worst, exclusion from the community or job-loss. Although research within the US, and to an extent, the UK has identified stigma as a limiting factor of APs seeking support, there is no research that considers how it develops amongst AP communities and how it is understood by APs – a gap this thesis addresses.

Theoretical themes emerging from the data relate to liminality, gender and stigma strategies (disciplining deviance and maintaining sameness). The following explores these ideas with the purpose of complicating the ECD (Pincus et al., 2001) and showing how stigma strategies, in line with militarised cultures, operate throughout the AFC, limiting help-seeking.

Liminality

The most pertinent finding that in fact frames other findings was in a sense accidental. Initially this project sought to contextualise help-seeking during the post-deployment phase, when families are experiencing the process of reintegration. However, during the interviews it became clear that APs struggled to speak about their experiences of help-seeking in these terms. Rather, to express their experiences during reintegration they reflected upon other stages of the deployment cycle, previous deployments and expectations for the future. Therefore, the APs interviewed did not discuss their experiences of reintegration post combat-related deployment

in the cyclical, categorised frame that the often used ECD suggests. Therefore, previous studies that focus on singular or cyclical nature(s) of deployment – although useful – cannot capture the complexity of experience and incorrectly frame the cycle as chronological. Specifically, they do not acknowledge the qualitative implications of cumulative deployments, separations (or other military related experiences) or how APs work towards imagined futures.

By moving beyond considering deployment as a linear process, my research shows that for APs, liminality is a constant condition where identities, roles and practices rarely become stabilised as disruption enforces constant change. They live under the 'spectre of deployment' where they exist in a state of 'what is' and 'what if' as they move between each phase of military-related transition(s). They wait to experience 'normal', but this never comes – they exist between the negotiation of the self and the social structure which is governed by military norms and values – often occupying military spaces which (re)create many of these social practices and perspectives. There is no evidence that during reintegration they let go of their deployment experiences – they bank their memories and coping strategies to be utilised again. As argued in the Chapters 4-6, APs exist in liminal states, a state of ambiguity or period of limbo in which their role(s), status and understanding of self is ambiguous and yet to be realigned into the next social state.

APs learn from previous experiences and this impacts their future experiences of deployment – they learn that post-deployment will likely offer a honeymoon period, which is then replaced with the complex task of renegotiating roles and relationships, or they may learn to engage more with social support during a deployment to manage loneliness and to 'keep busy'. Some APs may become so accustomed to the deployment cycle that the absence of their SP feels more 'normal' than when he is present – this knowledge and experience disrupts the assumed chronological nature of deployment. APs share their experiences and advice with less

accustomed APs. Previous research has neglected to consider how information flows amongst the AP community which is a key determinant in shaping their experiences of the military lifestyle, hence the utility of Chapter 5.

Chapter 4 showed how APs manage the constant (and in some cases frequent and lengthy) deployments/absences of their SP which alters their family dynamic. Their role, status and understanding of their self changes to adjust, adapt and manage the disruption caused by unnegotiable military demands. The state of liminality does not stop as they do not become realigned with a next social state as that next social state is also temporary – instead they move between various stages of liminality. Throughout their military lives they regularly experience transition which leads to social relations within the household being revised or temporarily dissolved, disruption of family traditions and uncertainty about what the future holds. Pre-deployment APs prepare for the eventual absence of the SP by bolstering their coping strategies and assuming more control over the household to limit the impact of his departure. They change their role, status and begin to assume a new identity in preparation for deployment. During deployment, APs take on almost total domestic and childcare responsibilities, yet they facilitate and maintain 'space' for their SP, aware of the need to keep communication avenues open to ease experiences for all family members post-deployment when reintegrating. Therefore, they never reach the social state of 'being without' but rather experience the ambiguous presence (Faber et al., 2008) of their SP. When the SP returns, APs and their families seek a 'new normal' but they live under the 'spectre of deployment'. All family members change due to deployment and SPs can carry echoes of combat which can be exacerbated by displaying symptoms of PTSD for example. Reintegration is not permanent and re-deployment often possible. Family members go forward with the marks of the deployment informing future perspectives, decision making and practice.

For resulting deployments, APs incorporate new strategies to make the experience more 'manageable'. This means that some stages of liminality become more familiar rather than being totally unknown. For example, due to previous experience, APs may choose to engage more with social networks, attend events to keep themselves busy, and interact with formal welfare. Additionally, as their experience grows, many find themselves supporting less experienced APs by providing them advice, emotional support and in some cases arranging events and activities in/around the patch (of course, helping others can help oneself). Transition, defined as inner reorientation (Bridges, 2004) is multi-directional – some days APs feel they are on the right track, managing the deployment cycle well, and other days they struggle. Experiences and emotional reactions to phases of deployment are better understood as a response to the ongoing accumulation of experiences relating to transition, adjustment and adaptation and it is this that impacts their practices – rather than by relying on the chronological model of the ECD which infers a beginning, progression and an end.

Chapter 5 has exposed other ways in which APs live liminal lives revolving around their identity as 'military' and/or 'civilian'. APs have both military and civilian identities whilst at the same time are neither. They are exposed to military-related lifestyles and manage the stressors this causes such as deployment and high mobility. For this purpose, some choose to live on-patch, in military accommodation, living amongst the AFC. At the same time, they exist outside of the AFC as their role is secondary to the SP – they are not employed by the military and instead live on-patch and can attend social events organised by formal welfare as 'partner-of'.

Liminality caused by social space, off-patch (civilian)/on-patch (military) divisions, is also evident in APs' use of social media to access online communities. Those living off-patch rely more heavily on online communities to maintain communication between themselves and a

perceived central-hub of information and like-minded individuals. Those living on-patch also use online communities for similar purposes, and to introduce themselves ahead of relocation and coordinate face-to-face meetings with other Army families. These spaces however are not 'lived' but rather accessed deliberately and also 'left' when they leave support pages.

Additionally, there are divisions within the AFC which further estrange APs from total immersion into the AFC. Chapter 5 evidences that there are divisions according to association with service – an Army partner may feel isolated if living in a naval patch. They may also experience divisions according to their SP's rank and role as some APs said there is limited 'mixing' between senior ranking and junior-ranking SPs' partner. The 'rank' status is interesting as it carries connotations of social class where senior-ranking SPs are associated with middle/upper classes whilst junior ranking SPs are associated with the working class. These identifiers may not be shared by SPs, nor APs – just because she is married to a junior-ranking SP, does not mean she regards herself as working class. Additionally, rank is not fixed and therefore if an SP is promoted, it is feasible to suggest that APs may experience a breaking down and rebuilding of a new/changing social support network and expectations.

Hyde (2015) asserts that women married to servicemen 'do' belonging between themselves, meaning that identities are created through interactions with each other considering militarised processes they are exposed to. Specifically, she discusses the rank structure as a form of gendered and classed power, which women married to servicemen negotiate and interpret finding that 'women's identities are relational and fluid, and entail processes of disavowal, disassociation and resistance, as well as (often simultaneously) processes of recognition and assimilation in relation to rank' (ibid: 143). Rank therefore is not simply an administrative military source of power that is dispelled top-down onto serving personnel. Rather, its disciplinary power is absorbed by the AP community and negotiated, interpreted and

appropriated or not amongst themselves. Through the lens of help-seeking, my thesis also finds that APs 'do' belonging between themselves within the context of militarised processes. Identities are built around perceived appropriate and inappropriate roles and practices which revolve around presenting an image of one who copes, one who is support her husband – this is explored shortly.

Chapter 6 shows how the design of formal support offerings increases an AP's experience of liminality. Gray (2015: 30) argued that 'civilian women married to servicemen are positioned by the structures of military life in a precarious situation in liminal space on the borders of the AFC' due to housing and welfare policies which on the one hand absorb them into the AFC, whilst at the same time prevents them from being equal members. Her work focused on APs' experiences domestic abuse and their experiences of support-seeking. She found that due to their experiences of liminality where housing and support was provided whilst they were 'partner of' limited their help-seeking practices and agency. The military structure disempowers APs as it renders them secondary (to the SP) or tertiary (to the SP and the military) which is normalised via the rhetoric of operational effectiveness. Like Gray (2015), this thesis has found that the inclusionary/exclusionary nature of formal support within the military impacts APs and extends this line of argument to those who have not indicated that they have experienced domestic abuse – non-specific, everyday experiences around deployment. There are various barriers to help-seeking that were discussed by the APs and FSWs interviewed which relate to the perceived 'AP identity' which is reinforced by the liminal inclusion/exclusion into the military mission (to maintain the operational effectiveness of the SP) and the stigma associated with practices that are perceived by the community to not be supportive.

The Military, Gender and Stigma

Little research has explored how the gendered/gendering nature of the military influences APs' help-seeking perspectives and practices. Yet is has been convincingly argued that militarised norms, cultures, and systems are gendered and hold gendering powers upon those who are exposed to it (Enloe, 2000; Higate and Cameron, 2004; Gray, 2015; Carreiras, 2017). By applying this theoretical frame, this thesis finds that APs live lives of reaction with limited ability to plan. They face constant transition and live in a state of reconstructing their identities through the performance of practice, that are constrained by the social field they exist within – the military - where certain identities and behaviours are positioned as socially acceptable and others stigmatised.

The disruption caused to the family unit due to the absence of the SP during deployment means that APs adopt primary responsibility for domestic and childcare responsibilities. Green et al. (2013: 753) state that 'although each member contributes to family environments, in current military families, the at-home parent holds the keystone role in establishing and maintaining an environment conducive to meeting the needs of both children and adults'. My thesis finds that the needs of the children and adults extend beyond the practical challenges of the household, but also in maintaining the emotional wellbeing of family members. This relationship has been captured by other researchers who argue that the military partner is traditionally expected to care for the military personnel, she is the invisible caregiver and necessary for the smooth-running of the military institution itself (Segal, 1988; Wood et al., 1995; Ramchand, 2014). This includes reproductive, practical, and emotional labour (Gray, 2015). My research finds that APs' exposure to the demands of deployment, and the presence/absence of their SP, means that they tend to occupy most of the domestic responsibility regardless of the period of deployment – in constant preparation for the next

absence. This contrasts with general societal trends where since the 1980's women are becoming more involved in the labour market, and that men and women are less likely to support a gendered division of labour (man as earner, woman as carer) (Park et al., 2013).

Chapters 4-6 showed that APs' likelihood to seek support is impacted by the idea of being a 'successful AP' where success criteria and resulting practice echoes militarised norms and values. It may be that this is in part produced via disciplinary techniques primarily related to stigmatised practice related to the APs' assumed role (supporting the SP) and help-seeking. Tyler and Slater (2018a: 721) state succinctly that 'the conceptual understanding of stigma inherited from Goffman, along with the use of micro-sociological and/or psychological research methods in stigma research, often side-lines questions about where stigma is produced, by whom and for what purposes'. Previous research conducted by Dandeker et al. (2006) has referred to the existence of gossip, judgement and stigma within the AFC as a concern of APs when seeking support. However, their research does not question the source of such stigma and by doing so suggests that it is created, enacted and sustained through the communities – ignoring the impact of the military as an institution. Alternatively, Hyde's (2015) ethnographic study of the everyday lives of women married to servicemen, living over-seas, shows how APs 'bargain' with the militarisation processes therefore arguing that they are not militarised subjects by default. As earlier mentioned, power operates not only vertically but horizontally where 'women personalise and domesticate the social and cultural values of regimental belonging' (ibid: 26). Following this line of argument, it is clear how forms of power - stigma should be considered as a source of disciplinary power - operates within both the macro and micro levels of the military as an institution and as a community. The military is a cultural space in which behaviours are performed corresponding to its norms and values and this is evident in the coping strategies APs employ when managing deployment and transition.

Applying this theoretical lens, my research found that an AP's primary coping strategy is to bolster their personal resilience and strength, to manage the stress and experience by themselves – not dissimilar to the masculine traits encouraged (in)directly by the military and evident in the literature reviewing the limitations of SP help-seeking (see Greenberg et al., 2003; Gould et al., 2007). In engaging with informal support networks, specifically the wider AP community, there is evidence of the tensions and disciplinary techniques that run through the fabric of AP lives. It is through these interactions that behaviours that are perceived to deviate from supporting the SP are commented upon, judged, and stigmatised. An AP must be seen to be coping as coping is associated by the community as evidence of supporting the SP and by extension, the military and its purpose. As shown in Chapter 6, many APs align themselves with the purpose, principles, aims and objectives of the military and by doing so believe that their experiences are part of ensuring the safety of their SP and effectiveness of the military. Specifically, this push towards maintaining the operational effectiveness of their SP and the negative impact that this has upon help-seeking practices renders their needs tertiary to the military and SP.

This finding is strongly aligned to those of Gray (2015) who reviewed APs' help-seeking experiences related to domestic abuse. She argued that the pressure to stay strong limited APs who were experiencing domestic abuse to seek support and seeking support was associated with admissions about being unable to cope – APs perceived this to be the antithesis of being 'strong', therefore embedding themselves into self-policing and a 'circulation of shame'. Gray (2015: 126) asserts that this is not coincidence but instead a manifestation of the social relations of militarism 'which rely upon the performance of symbolic and practical roles by civilian women married to servicemen'. My thesis finds that the pursuit to become the 'successful AP' disciplines the community by (re)producing stigma and thus conformance to military values. What drives these perspectives and resulting role expectations is the impact of engaging with

the masculine military, as a cultural field and structural force when managing deployment phases.

APs' identities and the meanings behind their practice/coping are interpreted on the militaries' terms. Writers have coined the concept 'greedy institutions' to explain the demanding relationship that the military and the family have upon the SP. Their totalising influence upon a SP's life has been documented primarily by researchers such as Segal (1986) and a later edited collection published by Moelker et al. (2015). However, little attention has been given to the totalising effect upon APs' experiences. Of course, Segal's (1986) work has shown that the military requires the loyalty, time, commitment of the SP which can result in separation, risk of injury (physical and mental) and mobility. In practice, this means that APs cannot choose when their SP goes on deployment, when/where they relocate, and have limited choices about where their family live, their employment opportunities, and their children's education. De Angelis and Segal (2015) argue that the family is expected to adapt to the military, and the military should not have to adapt to the family. The militaries' greediness is exacerbated during deployment and not only does it require SP loyalty, but AP support too (Juvan and Vuga, 2015). Indeed, my data demonstrates that APs do not only manage and adapt to the physical and emotional demands it makes of her SP, but also the physical and emotional demands of herself. Specifically, periods of transition enforced by the military such as the deployment cycle and postings, which an AP may negotiate but can never 'control', subsumes them into militarised expectations and cultures. This inevitably influences their perceptions of self and resulting practice – hence the evidenced loyalty to the military and its purpose. Here we can look to Coll et al.'s (2011) work as they argue that key virtues that are purported by the military and AFC – honour, courage and loyalty govern how members of the community may think and communicate. My data shows that these values impact APs' everyday experiences.

My data suggests that APs attempt to reify abstraction from an identity by valorising their perception of what it means to be an AP, specifically the ideal AP - resilient, adaptable and coping. By doing this they create a stable identity and way of being which they aim to employ when dealing with transition and the liminal phases of their lives. APs are proud of who they are, and previous research has found that this identity has been a source of strength for some (Enloe, 2000; Gray, 2015). This research shows that a key feature of an APs strategy of coping is to make sense of their experiences by linking them to their perceived identity. The identity of an 'Army wife', 'military partner', 'AFC' creates a sense of stability through belonging to an exclusive social group, club, or as many refer to it, family. That is not to say that all want to be a part of this community and participation varies amongst all 'members' yet each of the APs interviewed highlighted the value of a supportive AFC – other APs and the formal support system. In doing so, they draw lines of inclusion/exclusion according to their perception of who understands the military lifestyle and who does not which fundamentally influences who they choose to access when seeking informal support.

One of the ways this is achieved is by the disciplining techniques of the AP community where judgement and stigma is attached to other APs who are perceived to be acting outside of this expectation. Each AP aims to be the 'ideal' and to do this contrasts her coping and practice to others – by doing so she presents a script of a performance of managing, coping and flourishing. Each stated that they exist outside of the judgement and stigma that is evident in the community, however all presented their practice in contrast to others. Displaying upset is tolerated by the community if it is temporary and does not undermine the experiences of others who are perceived to 'have it worse' (longer deployment). This causes the 'ideal' to appear real and limits the likelihood of an AP seeking support. True resilience is perceived to be to manage issues by yourself, if needed "blurt it out" to the AP community (but keep it brief) and finally, if really needed, to access formal support. It may be the case that reaching out to become the

‘ideal AP’ may help APs to cope with liminality, however it is this ‘ideal’ that limits the effectiveness of coping strategies utilised to manage specific events.

Recommendations

On this basis, this thesis has identified the following practical recommendations for those offering APs support in relation to deployment:

- Formal support services need to explore how they can improve outreach efforts – not only to those who live off-patch, but those on-patch too.
- Given the possibility that more families will live away from patch due to the upcoming Future Accommodation Model, it is essential that formal welfare service are attuned to continuing to develop and maintain support networks between military families. Accessing other military families, who are often in the same position, is important for APs as it is felt that they are more understanding than civilian relationships during times of military-related stress such as deployment.
- Formal support services should continue to focus on providing partners support during deployment. However, it would be useful to continue this level of support post-deployment. Specifically, this thesis has found that APs would value more information about the return home date and what to expect. Additionally, APs would value a check-in a few months after the return. Deployment is not a linear process with a beginning, middle and end. Rather, it is an ongoing experience.
- Formal support services should explore ways to organise social activities which appeal to APs without children and/or who are employed.
- Formal support services should explore how they may create opportunities for APs to share experiences with others, rather than relying on briefings delivered by serving members. It has been suggested that the inclusion of other AP’s voices and experiences

during briefings will make them more relatable. Additionally, briefings should be used to encourage APs to seek support if needed and this format could be used to allay fears about the negative impact help-seeking may have upon the SP's career.

- Practice differs not only between international-national locations, but also between national locations too. Given the mobility of families it is advised that formal support services explore opportunities in how to streamline services to encourage consistency of practice.
- The concern around service personnel providing families with support through the role of UWO needs to be addressed. APs perceive a lack of training, a lack of confidentiality and inappropriate personalities.
- Post-deployment briefings should be held before the return of the SP, and during hours that suit those working or managing childcare. This could involve multiple briefings being held at different times of the day and running them alongside child-friendly activities to facilitate maximum attendance opportunities. They need to ensure that they do not just focus on SP's perspectives, but also cover APs too.

Future Directions

It would be beneficial to explore experiences of the post-deployment period, and help-seeking practices, by adopting a different method – longitudinal case studies. If a small number of families could be identified, and willingly participate, the researcher could work alongside them collecting data from each individual member intermittently pre, during and post-deployment. This would enable the researcher to capture live phenomena as it arises, feedback from each member of the family, detail on how the family transitions through change, immediate reactions, the process of help-seeking/coping with deployment and the minutia of

experience. Additionally, by encouraging participants to maintain a diary, phenomena may be captured on a day-to-day basis.

It would also be beneficial to apply similar research questions to other areas of the military such as the Royal Navy and Royal Airforce and beyond combat-related deployments to general separation (training, courses, exercises, national and international separation etc.). Other demographic's experiences could also be explored – specifically male partners, those in dual-serving relationships, non-heteronormative relationships, those without children and those in the 'Foreign and Commonwealth community'. Additionally, it would be beneficial for future research to capture more nuance between the experiences of those married/unmarried as this was a regularly cited factor that may limit help-seeking within the partner community.

Given that this thesis argues that APs are militarised subjects, it would be useful for future research to explore how this *happens*. This may be achieved by utilising a longitudinal method which tracks the experiences of those in relationship with a person who has applied to the military, through to their joining/becoming a serviceperson. Other opportunities for future research include an exploration into: (1) what it means to be part of an online AFC and resulting impacts of help-seeking experiences (some of these themes were briefly discussed in Chapters 4 and 6); (2) whether seeking support from civilian organisations such as Homestart or the NHS is experienced differently to seeking support from military avenues; (3) the impact of FSWs wearing military uniforms upon help-seeking; (4) social worker's experiences of working with the British military and; (5) whether exposure to militarised cultures changes the stigma associated with affairs compared to the civilian community (briefly discussed in Chapter 4).

It is also important to indicate that APs do not simply exist within a military culture, they exist within numerous cultural and social contexts. Abraham et al. (2017: 1358) contend that

‘military culture is conceptualised rather simplistically as a way of life, a common history and identity, shared values, or some combination of the latter’. They do not deny that culture has an impact on the military-associated experience, but they unify these ‘simplistic’ notions with the sociological understanding that Bourdieu (1977; 1986) provides via his theory of practice to show how individuals negotiate between their desires and the constraints imposed upon them – the point in which the micro interacts with the macro. They argue that although previous research can suggest that the military institution in part impacts help-seeking practice of SPs managing mental health issues, there is not enough evidence to suggest that the military has more influence than structures of social class outside of the military, or early socialisation before enlistment. There are multiple fields that an individual exists within, and rather than simply ascribing practice and beliefs to the military, researchers must be aware of other structural factors that influence individuals. This is a key weakness of much of the literature exploring military communities. Perhaps future work would benefit from not assuming that the AP’s most relatable identity is a directly militarised one – perhaps her own perceived primary identity relates to her interests, paid employment, political views or other relationships.

To conclude, this thesis argues that militarised cultures and expectations directly influence APs’ experiences of support-seeking not only during the post-deployment period, but throughout their military-associated lives. They live liminal lives where change and disruption to familial roles regularly occurs and in response, they develop strategies to manage these to mitigate chaos. Successful management, which is defined according to protecting their family, SP and, consequently, military aims/objectives, gives them a sense of strength and pride. Indeed, managing deployment and its effects influences their everyday practices and shapes what it means to *be* an AP. Yet this *being* reduces the likelihood of support-seeking as APs feared being considered ‘needy’ by other APs or the formal support services. Hence, they focus on resolving problems on their own, away from the public gaze.

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Appendix A: Interview Schedule – APs

Introductions

- What is the nature and length of your relationship?
- Do you work, number of children, based in the UK, number of deployments?

Formal Support

- Were you contacted during deployment by the military? Did you know who you could speak to? Was this sufficient?
- Were you contacted again about the reintegration process? Did you feel prepared for this? Who did prepare you?
    - If so, how long did this feeling of support last? Was this sufficient?
    - Did you attend a briefing or receive a pamphlet?
- Can you talk about your deployment experiences and your experience of post-deployment?
- Did you utilise any of the formal support offered – approach a UWO, speak with the AWS or AFF?
    - What were your experiences of this?
    - How beneficial was this?
- Could you have benefited from further support from the military estate or other related charities?
    - What would you hope to see changed in the future?
- Barriers to help-seeking - What sorts of issues would you turn to formal support for? What may stop you from doing so?

Informal Support

- Did you speak with friends, family etc? Other military partners?
    - How were these networks developed in the first place? Pre-deployment, deployment or post-deployment relationships?
    - Do you still speak with those you turned to?

Impacts of the Family Dynamic

- Do you think that your status as a wife impacted the experience than if you were not married?
- How did the children adapt to the return? Did you aid this?
- Do you feel that your role changed throughout the whole deployment experience? Did roles differ pre during and after deployment?

For Going Forward

- Does the deployment and reintegration still impact you?
- What are your top methods were for coping with deployment and also post deployment?
- Did you prefer to use formal or informal support? What were the reasons for this?
- If you could give any advice to another who was about to experience reintegration with their partner, what would it be?

Appendix B: Interview Schedule – FSWs

Background

- Your role?
- What does your organisation do, for whom?
- Has the unit been deployed recently, where?
- What are the primary issues faced?
- What does your day-to-day look like?

Deployment

- Do you inform families about what to expect within each phase of deployment?
    - How does this work and what information is shared?
- What are the primary issues faced by families during combat-related deployment?
    - How are these issues specific to the partner?
- What issues are faced specifically on return post combat-related deployment?

Formal Support

- How do APs deal with issues experienced post combat-related deployment?
    - Are they more likely to seek support from friends/family or from formal support?
    - Is there a difference in coping strategy between those that live on/off-patch?
- What does your organisation do, with reference to the problems faced by families during reintegration?
    - How does it work alongside partners? Does your organisation help them individually or is it in tandem with the issues facing the serving personnel?

    - Do your services extend to those that are not married?
    - How do you work with other services once families have been signposted?
- Do you think that all those who need formal support access it? If not, why is this the case?

Informal Support

- Are there informal networks of support within the community you deal with?
- Do you facilitate/support informal networks?
- How do informal communities sustain themselves?

Final Points

- Do you perceive any limitations to the services currently provided? What could be achieved without these limitations? Likewise, what is done well and should be protected?
- If you could provide a platinum service of welfare to military families, what would this look like?

Appendix C: 'Peeling Back the Onion' A Welfare Framework Provided by the AWS