



## **Pilot Project: Domestic abuse and military families**

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## **Background and Context**

This pilot project, funded by the Big Lottery, arises from concerns raised by practitioners working with service families who have noted an impact of active military service on domestic abuse within those families. Practitioners subsequently established a multi-agency forum which is attended by: military police; civilian police; legal services; and civilian welfare services. This forum meets to share good practice and identify areas of concern. As a result it has been identified that some military personnel are returning from very stressful and traumatic war zones and bringing these traumatic experiences back to their families.

Some personnel return to find that their families have managed to cope without them and go from being on a constant state of alert to having to deal with the trivia of day to day life. In addition, some families who have been managing to get by without their partners / parent, can find it difficult to adjust to their return. Sometimes the stresses of all these factors, potentially coupled with PTSD and flashbacks (which can affect sleep patterns) can exacerbate issues of domestic abuse, coercion and control.

The political situation at the moment means that more soldiers are being sent to war and for longer periods of time and there does not appear to have been any research conducted about how this might impact on subsequent family life.

There are a small number of US studies which have looked at domestic violence and health, and dealing with perpetrators of abuse within the armed forces, but there has been no research in the UK which has looked specifically at how active service in war might impact on the extent and nature of domestic violence experienced by service families.

## **The Research**

### **Objectives**

This pilot project will seek to ascertain, via a focus group and on-line survey, i) the nature and extent of abuse experienced by military families, ii) service use, and iii) service needs of both perpetrators and victims of abuse in this context. During this developmental (pilot) phase we will be seeking to establish baseline data which identifies service need and potential interventions. The families of service personnel and the personnel themselves will benefit if we are able to identify triggers to abusive behaviour at home and external and internal interventions which may reduce the likelihood of domestic abuse occurring in these families.

This research project examines the:

- 1) Nature and extent of domestic violence within military families;
- 2) Impact of this abuse and identify potential interventions;
- 3) Kind of services families may, or may have tried, to access in the past;
- 4) Ways in which service personnel explain the reasons for their abusive behaviour and whether specialist interventions might be developed to assist them.

## **Methods**

This pilot project included:

1. Focus group with military personnel/partners/key stakeholders
2. Attendance at forum meeting to ascertain the views of key stakeholders
3. On-line survey (hard copies available) which could be distributed to military personnel, and their partners, within the catchment area of the domestic abuse forum

## **Focus Groups**

The research team conducted 2 discussion groups in January 2009, one with the partners of military personnel, and a second group with key stakeholders. The purpose of these groups was to ascertain the key issues affecting military families in order to use the data to help inform the on-line survey. We were unable to conduct a focus group with military personnel themselves. This was due to on-going negotiations about access which were not resolved in time for this report.

## **Survey Respondents**

This pilot project included 2 on-line surveys, one for military personnel and the other for the partners of military personnel. Whilst we received 187 responses from the partners of military personnel, we were only able to collect responses from 5 military personnel. This is not surprising for a number of reasons. Firstly, we were limited in where we could disseminate information about the survey due to the on-going negotiations about access. Informal organisations providing support to military families and their partners were much more likely to distribute the survey than more formal military organisations. Secondly, men generally (4 of the military respondents were men) are more difficult to engage in research. This in itself is an important finding and something that will need to be considered in the development of further research in this area.

## **Dissemination**

The survey was made available on-line for three months in order to give respondents time to complete the survey. We disseminated the survey via a number of different organisations by asking them to put a link on their websites and/or informing their members about the survey. These organisations included: ARRSE; Army Families Federation; Family Support (RAF family federation); HIVE community network; British Legion; The Army Children Archive; and the Media & Communication Branch in the Ministry of Defence. In addition, at a local level, discussions took place with the garrison commander around support from the military for this pilot and the process to be followed in order to gain approval for the surveys to be distributed.

## **Military personnel survey**

Due to the small number of responses to the military personnel survey only tentative and selected findings are presented here. It is also very difficult to identify any relevant conclusions. However, this data is presented first in order to contextualise the partner data which follows.

## Demographics

Only 5 military personnel completed the survey. Of these 3 were from the Army and 2 from the RAF. Four were currently based in the UK and 1 respondent in another European country. Their length of service ranged from just under 3 years to nearly 24 years of service. Four of the respondents were male, one female. All five respondents were married and lived with their partner, 3 in military accommodation on base, and 2 in military accommodation off base. Three respondents have children who live with them in the family home, 1 respondent has children who do not live with them in the military home, and the final respondent has no children. Those who had children had either 1 or 2 children only.

## Separation

We asked the survey respondents to tell us about how often they were posted away from the family home.

*Table 1: Table to show separation from families.*

	Never	Less than 1 month	Up to 3 months	3-6 months	6-9 months
Considering all of your assignments over the past twelve months (including exercises in the UK), how long would you estimate you have been away from your partner/family?	0	0	1	1	3
How long in the past year have you spent in a different country than your partner/family?	0	1	0	2	2
How long in the past year have you spent in an active warzone?	1	2	0	1	1
How long in the past year have you spent living with your partner/family?	0	0	1	2	2

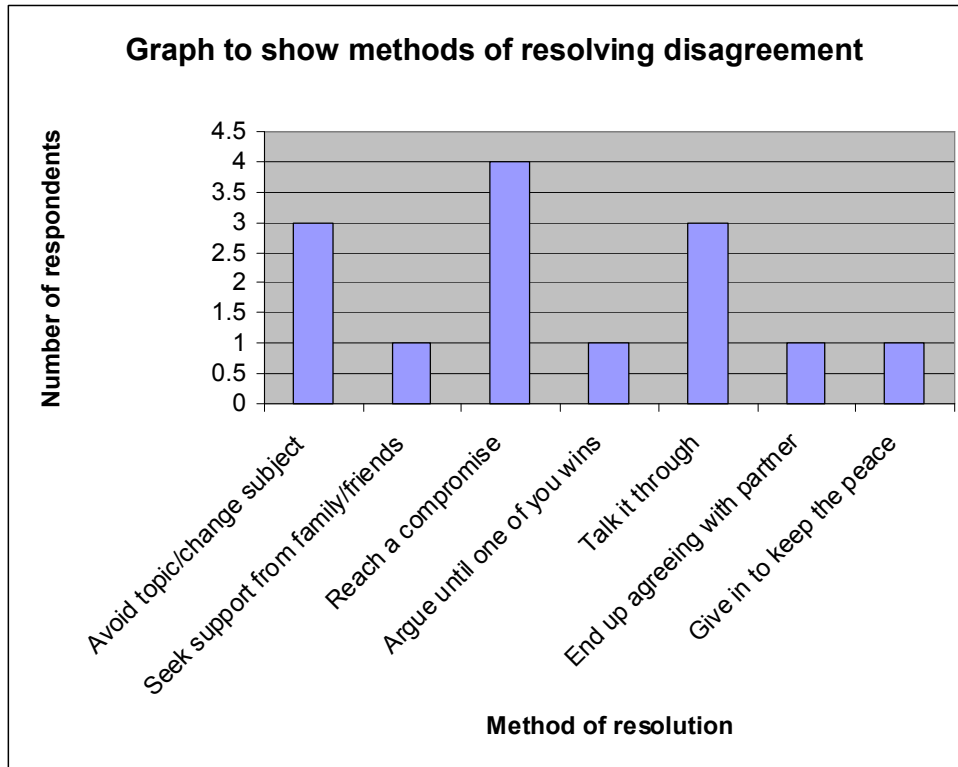
As table 1 illustrates, the five military personnel who responded to the survey have spent considerable time in the past twelve months away from they partner/families.

## Decision-making and disagreements

The majority of decision-making was made equally between partners, although in relation to household jobs, the 4 male respondents said their partner decided how to divide household jobs, whereas the female respondent said she made those decisions, not her partner. The majority of respondents did not disagree about things at all, or only rarely. The only areas where this differed was that respondents stated that they

sometimes disagreed about their jobs. Only one respondent stated that they sometimes had disagreements about them being verbally abusive and bullying to their partner.

Figure 1: Graph to show methods of resolving disagreements



This graph illustrates how the respondents had a general consensus that disagreements were generally resolved through reaching a compromise.

### Identifying Difficulties

Three of the five respondents said that there were difficulties when reintegrating within their families. This included fear of upsetting the household routine, and readjusting to changes in surroundings.

*Have to adjust to living with the family again, get used to considering them, get used to household routines again. It is hard to go from one day being in a warzone and being shot at, to the next being at home again and back to normal life.*

As will be seen later in relation to the partners of military personnel, reintegration following active service can be difficult for families to deal with.

### Services

We asked respondents about the services they might consider using, had used, and would not consider using. All five respondents said they would consider using

combat stress services and private counselling. Four respondents said they would talk to family members. In terms of the services which military personnel have been offered, 4 of the 5 respondents did not remember being offered any services to help them reintegrate back into their families on returning from active duty.

Three respondents said they found it more difficult when they returned home from active duty, although an equal number stated that their partner understands that it is difficult, but also that their partner gets annoyed when they come back. Finally, four of the five respondents stated that if they had difficulties they would know where to get help.

## **Conclusion**

Given the very small number of responses to the military personnel survey there are few conclusions which can be drawn from the data, however, this section is helpful in providing the perspective of military personnel before looking at the responses of partners.

## **Partner Survey**

### **Demographics**

<sup>i</sup>Of the 187 responses we received on the partner survey, 179 were the partner of military personnel. Of these, we have information that 163 were the partners of personnel in the army, 5 the air force and 1 from the navy. All of the partner respondents were female. 95% described themselves as married, 4.7% as being boyfriend/girlfriend and 1 in a civil partnership.

We asked about living arrangements as this is relevant to how potential disputes or disagreements might impact on those involved. Eight respondents (4.9%) live alone; 28 (17.1%) live with their partner; and the vast majority of respondents, 128 (78%) live with their married partner<sup>ii</sup>.

In terms of accommodation, 44 respondents (26.7%) live in military accommodation on base; 9 (5.5%) in private rented accommodation; 15 (9.1%) in private owned accommodation; with the vast majority, 94 (57%) living in military accommodation off base. This has implications for the policing of potential problems.

128 respondents (78%) stated that they have children who live with them in the family home. 17 (10.4%) have children who don't live with them. Twenty-six respondents (15.9%) stated other which in the majority of cases was because they didn't have children.

## **Separation**

We asked the partners of military personnel to tell us about the amount of time they function as a family unit, and the period of time their partner spends away.

Table 2: Table to show periods of time in the past year partner has spent with and away from their families.

	Never	Less than 1 month	Up to 3 months	3-6 months	6-9 months	9-12 months
Time away from family including in the UK	3.2% (5)	13.5% (21)	12.8% (20)	21.8% (34)	<b>33.3%</b> <b>(52)</b>	15.4% (24)
Partner in different country	15.4% (24)	12.8% (20)	17.9% (28)	23.7% (37)	<b>25.6%</b> <b>(40)</b>	4.5% (7)
Partner in active warzone	<b>46.7%</b> <b>(71)</b>	6.6% (10)	3.9% (6)	23% (35)	19.1% (29)	0.7% (1)
Time spent with family	0.6% (1)	4.5% (7)	23.4% (36)	<b>31.8%</b> <b>(49)</b>	15.6% (24)	24% (37)

As table 2 illustrates the partners of the survey respondents are spending large periods of time away from their families whether that is in a different country or in the UK. The largest proportion of respondents state that their partner has been away from their family in the last year between six to nine months. However, this isn't necessarily due to them being posted in an active warzone. Of those women who responded 46.7% stated that their partner had not been in an active warzone in the past 12 months, 23% had been for 3-6 months, and 19% for 6-9 months. This highlights the fact that it is not just during military campaigns that families are affected by the deployment of military personnel away from their families.

We asked how many times since joining the forces respondents partners had been posted away. 7.5% (12) stated never, 14.5% (23) stated once, 15.7% (25) stated twice, 19.5% (31) stated three times, 10.1% (16) stated four times, 8.8% (14) stated five times, and the largest group 23.9% (38) stated more than five times.

## Communication

We asked about communication because it is important in maintaining relationships between family members from a distance. We wanted to know how frequently military personnel used different medium to communicate with their partners and their children.



Table 3: Communication between partners and military personnel who are away from their families.

	Every day	Every week	Every fortnight	Every month	Less than monthly
Writing letters	19.2% (25)	<b>40.0% (52)</b>	12.3% (16)	10.8% (14)	17.7% (23)
Receiving letters	6.3% (8)	29.4% (37)	15.1% (19)	15.9% (20)	<b>33.3% (42)</b>
Writing texts	<b>42.9% (48)</b>	14.3% (16)	0.9% (1)	2.7% (3)	39.3% (44)
Receiving texts	36.0% (40)	19.8% (22)	1.8% (2)	3.6% (4)	<b>38.7% (43)</b>
Writing emails	39.7% (54)	<b>44.9% (61)</b>	6.6% (9)	2.9% (4)	5.9% (8)
Receiving emails	29.3% (39)	<b>45.1% (60)</b>	9.8% (13)	3.8% (5)	12.0% (16)
Telephoning	22.8% (26)	<b>42.1% (48)</b>	7.9% (9)	0.9% (1)	26.3% (30)
Receiving telephone calls	22.1% (32)	<b>64.1% (93)</b>	10.3% (15)	0.7% (1)	2.8% (4)
Other	<b>41.9% (13)</b>	32.3% (10)	3.2% (1)	0.0% (0)	22.6% (7)

As table 3 illustrates, partners communicate regularly, on a daily basis through texting, and on a weekly basis through letters, writing emails, and telephoning. A large number, 41.9%, stated that they used other methods of communication on a daily basis. This included: ebluey; MSN and facebook; parcels; webcam phone calls; and live radio link. Another issue raised by families was the cost of telephone calls which falls to families to pay. It is also important to note that when in an active warzone communication it severely restricted, as one respondent stated, communication was restricted during these times to only thirty minutes a week, and in these circumstances partners cannot contact personnel on a regular basis but are required to wait for their partners to contact them.

Table 4: Communication between children and military personnel who are away from their families.

	Every day	Every week	Every fortnight	Every month	Less than monthly
Writing letters	3.7% (3)	<b>43.9% (36)</b>	13.4% (11)	9.8% (8)	29.3% (24)
Receiving letters	1.3% (1)	30.8% (24)	15.4% (12)	16.7% (13)	<b>35.9% (28)</b>
Writing texts	4.1% (2)	10.2% (5)	4.1% (2)	2.0% (1)	<b>79.6% (39)</b>
Receiving texts	4.1% (2)	12.2% (6)	2.0% (1)	4.1% (2)	<b>77.6% (38)</b>
Writing emails	8.3% (6)	37.5% (27)	6.9% (5)	8.3% (6)	<b>38.9% (28)</b>
Receiving emails	9.0% (6)	35.8% (24)	6.0% (4)	9.0% (6)	<b>40.3% (27)</b>
Telephoning	16.2% (12)	<b>40.5% (30)</b>	5.4% (4)	5.4% (4)	32.4% (24)
Receiving telephone calls	12.6% (11)	<b>59.8% (52)</b>	14.9% (13)	6.9% (6)	5.7% (5)
Other	30.4% (7)	8.7% (2)	0.0% (0)	8.7% (2)	<b>52.2% (12)</b>

As tables 3 and 4 highlight, there are differences in the levels of communication between children and military personnel, with telephoning happening on a weekly basis and other forms of communication monthly. This is partly due to the lack of contact when children are very young and unable to communicate with their fathers, and also due to mothers not wanting to disrupt and/or upset children when their fathers are away.

### Decision making and disagreements

We asked a series of questions about how decisions are made when military personnel are based at home. These questions related to everyday activities as well as areas of family life where conflict can occur. In the majority of cases, partners stated that decisions affecting both partners were made equally between them. The only areas where there was a slight difference, with women making more of the decisions, was in relation to food and care for children.

We asked a series of questions about disagreements in order to ascertain whether there were specific issues which caused disagreements and how frequently. The responses fell

into the following categories. For a large number of issues the majority of respondents said they never had disagreements about them. This included: partner's neediness (34.2% said they never disagreed); debt (31.5%); partner's jealousy (49.3%); their own jealousy (46.6%); sexual activities (36.2%); partner's friends (50%); friends (49%); partner's relatives (31.3%); relatives (36.9%); partner's alcohol use (51.4); own alcohol use (65.3%); partner going out socially without you (45.9%); you going out socially without partner (53.1%).

Table 5: Table to show areas where disagreements 'rarely' and 'sometimes' take place.

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Not applicable
Your partner's job	18.1% (27)	22.1% (33)	<b>35.6% (53)</b>	22.8% (34)	1.3% (2)
Your neediness	24.8% (37)	<b>34.9% (52)</b>	24.8% (37)	8.1% (12)	7.4% (11)
Your partner's spending of money	23.6% (35)	<b>35.1% (52)</b>	23.6% (35)	14.2% (21)	3.4% (5)
Your spending of money	28.9% (43)	<b>39.6% (59)</b>	20.8% (31)	5.4% (8)	5.4% (8)
What you watch on television	27.0% (40)	<b>39.2% (58)</b>	22.3% (33)	8.1% (12)	3.4% (5)
Children	17.8% (26)	<b>28.1% (41)</b>	<b>28.1% (41)</b>	10.3% (15)	15.8% (23)

As table 5 above illustrates there were only two areas where respondents were more likely to admitted that they 'sometimes' disagreed rather than rarely. This was in relation to their partner's job and in relation to the children and suggests that these two areas are more likely to trigger disagreements than the others listed. This illustrates how being in the military can in itself be a source of conflict and disagreement for partners.

Table 6: Disagreements relating to existence of abuse

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	<b>Not applicable</b>
Your partner's physical violence to you	39.9% (59)	2.7% (4)	0.7% (1)	2.0% (3)	<b>54.7% (81)</b>
Your physical violence to your partner	40.5% (60)	2.7% (4)	1.4% (2)	1.4% (2)	<b>54.1% (80)</b>
Your partner's anger to you	<b>35.1% (52)</b>	16.9% (25)	9.5% (14)	6.8% (10)	31.8% (47)
Your anger to partner	33.8% (50)	20.9% (31)	8.8% (13)	2.0% (3)	<b>34.5% (51)</b>
Your partner being verbally abusive to you	30.9% (46)	18.8% (28)	4.7% (7)	5.4% (8)	<b>40.3% (60)</b>
You being verbally abusive to partner	37.6% (56)	16.8% (25)	2.0% (3)	2.0% (3)	<b>41.6% (62)</b>
Partner bullying you	41.2% (61)	6.8% (10)	4.7% (7)	3.4% (5)	<b>43.9% (65)</b>
You bullying partner	45.6% (68)	5.4% (8)	0.0% (0)	2.0% (3)	<b>47.0% (70)</b>

Table 6 highlights where potential conflict can occur. When asked about behaviours which could be abusive the vast majority of respondents indicated that disagreements about such matters were not applicable or never happened. Table 6 highlights the number of respondents who said that such issues were an issue. 8 respondents stated that their partner was physically abusive, 4 stated rarely, 1 sometimes, and 3 women stated that they disagreed about their partners being physically abusive often. Eight partners also stated that they disagreed with their partner about their own physical abuse towards their partners, 4 rarely, 2 sometimes, and 2 often. Whilst there are some similarities between partners' behaviours and their disagreements about them, the women who responded to this survey identified higher levels of experiencing bullying from their partners than directed towards them. It is important to remember that the sample of this survey is not representative and that these questions about disagreement do not indicate the impact of abuse.

Quantitatively, the majority of respondents didn't identify aspects of abuse in their relationships, but did provide more detailed responses to these questions. These comments ranged from those that acknowledge that the military has an inevitable impact on family life to those that imply more serious issues during integration relating to managing changing expectations.

*Arguments are rare but usually about the helpless feeling that we are left with sometimes when he has to do a job and it seems to be 'unfair' on family life. But at the end of the day it is our joint decision that he is still in the Army and we both know it isn't a bed of roses.*

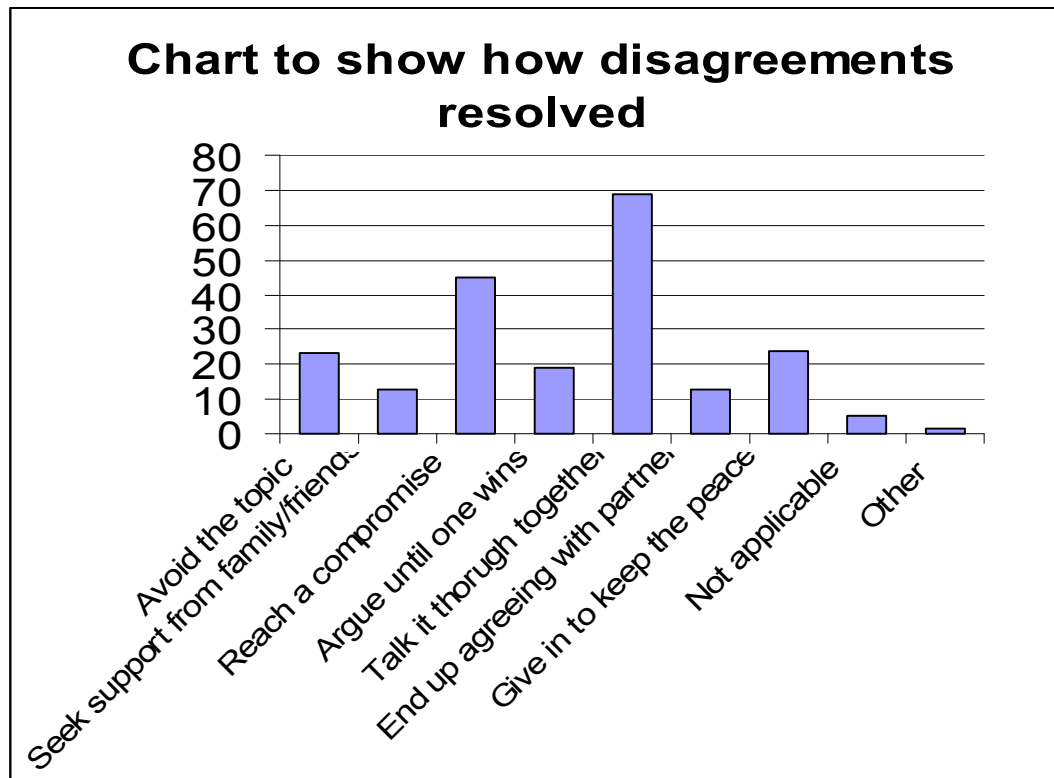
*The pressure of my husband's job sees him working very long hours or being away from home. This affects the children as they don't get to see him very much, which in turn puts a huge strain on family life!*

*our biggest issue is that because he is posted away, when he comes home he hasn't spent enough time with the kids to give him the confidence to know he can deal with them effectively, so he goes overboard trying to control them, and of course I am different when he is home, because I no longer need to be both parents, can be a bit confusing for everyone involved!*

It is also important to recognise that the changing nature of family life can also be unsettling for partners who do not feel supported. One woman told us that disagreements happen because of “*the amount of time I have to spend on my own, becoming withdrawn*”.

In terms of disagreements about all of the issues identified above, we asked how these disagreements were usually resolved. The majority (68.7%) resolved the issue by talking it through together with 44.9% reaching a compromise. It is interesting however that 23.1% avoid the topic or change the subject and 23.8% give in to keep the peace. This is a different finding than from the 5 military personnel who completed their survey. This suggests that gendered roles may impact on the way in which partners resolve disagreements.

Figure 2: Graph to show how disagreements resolved.



### Identifying difficulties

Respondents were told that some people had identified that it could be difficult to re-adjust to family life when partners returned from active service. 51.8%(73) of the respondents to this question stated that this had been an issue for their partner, and 58.7% (84) said this had been an issue for them. 84 respondents went on to describe in more detail how this was a difficulty within their family. A number of themes consistently emerged from the data which indicate areas of family conflict where abuse might be more likely to take place. So, whilst respondents have not identified themselves as experiencing abuse in their families per se, when expanding on the difficulties they face, they are outlining contexts in which abuse might be more likely to occur.

### Routine and independence

The majority of respondents talked about how they had more independence when their partner was on active duty. They described their life without their partner using words such as 'independent' and 'individual'. Once their partner returned, families often experienced problems which could manifest themselves in everyday activities.

*Its all about routine and then some one comes in and disrupts it even though they do not mean to*

*Finding space for my husband in the house, this is hard when you have had to be completely independent for six months or more.*

As with the majority of the difficulties raised by respondents, individual partners and families had found different ways in which to deal with problems as they arose, and they reacted differently to the problems they faced. In terms of routine and roles, one respondent described how she was expected to pick up where the military had left off which created some conflict.

*I find it difficult when he comes back after being away for 7 months ...he still expects everything to be the same way as when he left , but ultimately things are always different because as the one left behind you are having to run the house alone , shopping , working , bills , almost as if you are a single person. When he comes home he is very much used to having all his meals cooked for him and washing done etc and Im expected to just pick off where the ship left off no matter if I am tired or ill.*

This extract illustrates how expectation is an important element of the reintegration process as individual family members readjust to a changing family routine.

### **Being a single parent**

Respondents also identified how it was sometimes difficult for them and their children to adjust to changing parental roles which could result in some children experiencing additional problems.

*It is difficult for me/ family to adjust because you effectively become a single parent family whilst they are away. You get into a special routine which you develop specifically when they are away. For my husband, depending on where he has been it takes time to adjust to normality upon return especially if they have been in a war zone and working extremely hard and under threat and stress. It takes time to let these things settle down and return to 'normal.*

*You have to learn to live with someone over again, where you put things ,how you do things and how you handle things suddenly become an issue. When your husband is away for a long time you HAVE to get into a routine which gets thrown out of the window when he arrives home again. This often is unsettling for my children and causes behaviour problems. My son suffers from anxiety thinking his dad will leave again.*

There is no doubt that issues of separation for military families has an impact on children. This was a concern raised by partners throughout the survey. Concerns about partners behaviour once they returned from active service was often pre-empted by concerns relating to children and their understanding of the situation.

### **Resentment**

Respondents to the survey also identified how readjusting to partners leaving and coming back could cause resentment.

*Partner comes back and it is as if he is intruding because for 8 months, I have been running the house by myself and making all decisions alone. When he comes home, I feel as though he does not acknowledge the importance of what I have done while he was away, and the stresses I have been under. I feel as though the partner at home is expected to be understanding and allow the*

*service partner "time to adjust" but we do not get afforded any such privilege. For partner, I think it is difficult to go from being in a warzone and living with his friends for all that time, to being back at home, not under any threat and have to get back into a normal routine and life. Also, he has to go from only considering himself, to having to think about the family again.*

*Partner can often be distant and pre-occupied with previous tour and or work pending. There seems little or no family time until soldier gets his block leave which usually does not coincide with school holidays, all these areas become an issue to the partner but not so much to the serving soldier as he in my case puts us second to his job.*

Many partners resented the way in which military life dictated family life in such an inflexible way as well as how their partners might take their work as single parents for granted in their absence. For the respondents, their "work" as parents did not stop when their partner came home but intensified as the changing circumstances created new upheavals and challenges to be dealt with.

## **Trauma**

Partners also identified how experiences of active service can impact on their partners when they returned to family life in the form of trauma.

*when they have been in a war environment it can be difficult for them to adjust to family life as they have seen lots of things that the average person as not, they can sometimes bottle things up and go into there own little world and it can be difficult for them to open up.. I think 7month tours are to long and should be shortened.*

*partner suffering with PTSD following traumatic service, complete lack of a family life over last 4 years means i am virtually a single parent which causes difficulties when he is home, he does not want to engage with the children, can't cope with stress or difficult issues at home*

As these extracts highlight, not only are partners' having to negotiate the changing roles of family members during reintegration, but without knowing how their partners will return. As identified here, traumatic experiences can impact on the returning family members ability to reengage with his family, including his children.

## **Control and abuse**

In most of the responses we received there was an acknowledgement that there were shifting boundaries of responsibility during reintegration which was an inevitable part of that process. However, in a small number of cases the respondents identified issues of control in a more explicit and problematic way.

*When he is away, I become father, mother, disciplinarian, worker, shopper, cooker, gardener, playmate, chauffeur - in fact I do everything, and if I can't do it then I find someone who can. When he returns, it can be difficult for him to find a role again as everything has been done in his absence. It can be difficult to relinquish some of my roles - instead of asking for help I just do the task. Coming from an environment where he has been in charge, being the centre of activity and knowing that people will listen to him and do as he asks with little questioning,*



*returning to a family home full of opinions, discussions and disagreement can be difficult to negotiate.*

As this extract highlights, military personnel work in ways where control is an integral part of the role. Whether giving or receiving instructions or making decisions. As such, reintegrating into a domestic context where the use of control can be problematic in relation to the autonomy of individual family members could be an area of potential conflict and abuse, as the following extract illustrates.

*It was like having a stranger, the face was the same, but his attitude to me was disrespectful, he felt that I had had an easy life whilst he was on active service and that I should suppress any needs I had for at least a month to give him time to adjust. I had to listen to him constantly talk about his time over there but was not allowed to talk about my time, despite having a nasty car accident and moving house. Was constantly told that he had worked so hard that why should he help me with the housework or anything else.*

As well as highlighting issues of control and autonomy, this extract also raises the issue of gendered roles and expectations. As eluded to earlier, the women who responded to this survey do not get leave when their partners come home because their gendered roles (food and children) continue. As we have seen in terms of the areas where disagreements might arise, for example in relation to children and child-care, this can lead to resentment and sometimes conflict.

### **Reintegration strategies**

As the extracts included here illustrate, when there are problems family members use a range of techniques to help everyone to adjust to changing situations. This includes giving the partner space to get used to being back in the family, and giving everyone time to get used to one another again. Some families accept that disagreements and arguments are inevitable during this process and recognise that this is part of the adjustment period. It is important to recognise that not all of the respondents to this survey found reintegration difficult, even where they recognised that for many it was.

*It never seems to affect me and my husband or our daughter for that matter, which I thank god for 'cause I know some people find it very difficult*

In addition, some respondents felt very strongly that separation was an inevitable part of the military and something that you expected as a military partner and got on with.

### **Services**

We asked a series of questions about which services respondents would consider using in order to ascertain how and where domestic violence services might fit within an inter-agency context. We had some indication from the earlier focus group that there were few services available to families to deal specifically with issues related to reintegration.

In terms of the services which women had used to address issues in their families these were ranked as follows: talking to friends (67.4%); talking to family members (63.1%); and accessing information and advice from web-sites and forums (39.8%).

Table 7: to show those agencies women would consider using to address family issues

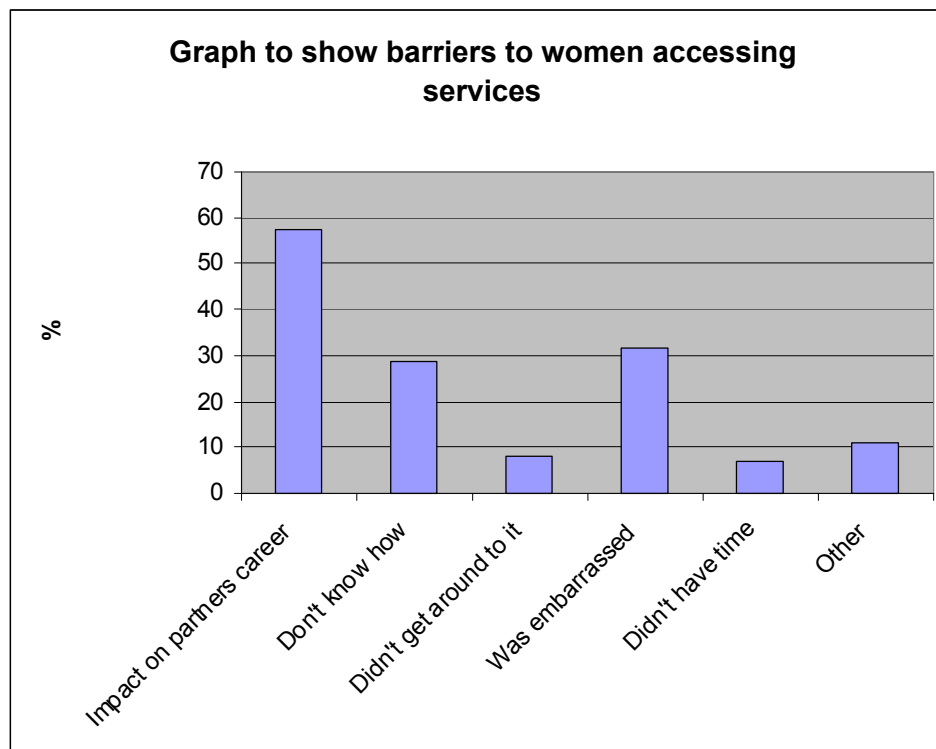
Service	N
SAAFA	74
Combat stress services	72
Private counselling	67
Relate counselling	67
Army Families Federation	66

In addition to the services which women had used, they also identified those services they would consider using which focused on support agencies specifically for military families which deal with both family issues and combat stress, alongside counselling and Relate counselling. 79 respondents categorically stated that they would not consider using military based counselling services.

57.9% of respondents said they had ever accessed any of the services we listed compared to 28.6% of their partners who had ever accessed such services. This illustrates the importance of involving female partners in any initiatives aimed at helping military personnel to reintegrate into their families.

We specifically asked about whether there were any barriers to accessing services.

Figure 3: Graph to show barriers to accessing services.



As figure 3 illustrates the biggest barrier to accessing services to help address family based issues was the potential impact on the career of their partner. We gave respondents further opportunity to explain to us why they might not use such services

and received 28 detailed responses. The most common response related to participants views of inadequacies within the military welfare system which were described as inadequate; lacking in confidentiality; untrained; unprofessional; and ineffective. In particular, and of relevance to this research, participants claimed that there was a stigma attached to families who used such services, often called “Welfare Cases”, which everyone knew had an impact on the careers of military personnel. Whether accurate or not, the fact that the partners of military personnel fear using welfare services because of the potential lack of professional confidentiality and impact on military careers implies that such services need to address these concerns in order to improve the use of their service.

*Table 8: Showing whether the police have ever been involved in abusive incidents.*

	Ex partner	Current partner	No, never
Have you ever called the police about your (ex) partner being abusive?	6.4% (9)	4.3% (6)	90.1% (127)
Has your (ex) partner ever called the police about you being abusive?	0	0	100% (141)
Has someone else ever called the police about you or your (ex) partner being abusive?	3.5% (5)	2.8% (4)	93.6% (132)
Has your (ex) partner ever been arrested for domestic violence?	4.3% (6)	2.9% (4)	92.8% (129)
Have you ever been arrested for domestic violence?	0	0	100% (137)

No respondents had ever been arrested for domestic violence or had the police called by an (ex) partner as a result of being abusive. 9 respondents had called the police about an ex partner and 6 about a current partner. 6 ex partners had been arrested for domestic violence and 4 current partners.

The final section of the survey asked respondents about how they feel about certain issues. Respondents were given a series of statements and asked to respond whether they felt the statements were ‘true’, ‘false’, or ‘don’t know’.

Half of the respondents said they find it more difficult when their partner has returned home and difficult to adjust (compared to 37.9% who disagreed and 12.1% who stated they didn’t know). Encouragingly 68.7% said they would know where to get help with 80.5% stating they could talk to their friends about family issues.

Finally, over 88% of respondents stated that readjusting is just part of military life and something they just get on with.

### **Final comments**

Respondents were given an opportunity to tell us about other aspects of military life which affected them and their families. 46 women took this opportunity. Most of these comments mirrored the comments and issues already raised in this report, but some additional areas should be considered. These included:

- Impact on children
- Uncertainty
- Support of other wives/partners
- Bullying from other wives/partners

- Lack of family friendly policies and procedures
- Additional impact for families from overseas
- Lack of confidential services for families
- Lack of support for those with PTSD
- Inconsistency of provision in different countries and areas
- Lack of recognition.

As well as the many negative issues affecting military families, which this research sought to explore, respondents also told us of the immense opportunities which they and their families had been afforded due to being in the army.

## **Key Findings**

A number of key findings emerged from this pilot project relating to issues affecting military families in the process of reintegration following active service. This pilot project found that:

1. Many military families find it difficult to reintegrate when military personnel return home;
2. This had an impact on personnel, partners' and their children;
3. This tension could result in arguments and disagreements within the family home;
4. Those that had found positive ways to reintegrate talked about lowering the expectations of all family members during this time;
5. The majority of partners who completed the on-line survey would not voluntarily access welfare services provided by the military due to fears about confidentiality and potential impact on careers;
6. Only a small number of respondents explicitly identified themselves as currently experiencing abuse or domestic violence;
7. Many more found that negotiating the giving up of control on their partners' return difficult;
8. It appears that military families both perpetuate and challenge gendered family roles which may create additional tensions within intimate relationships taking place in this context;
9. Currently there is limited take up of interventions to help families in terms of reintegration;
10. Partners were more likely to talk to family and friends to gain support;
11. Military personnel stated they could talk to family members;
12. Without institutional support in the dissemination of material it is difficult to access military personnel as participants of research.

## **Conclusion**

This research did not find high levels of self reported domestic violence and abuse amongst military families but did find high levels of anxiety and concern amongst the partners of military personnel about the impact of family reintegration on all areas of family life. It is possible that these levels of anxiety may contribute to the incidents of domestic violence identified by local service providers. This research highlights the need to use much broader approaches which address areas of control and decision making

within families in order to identify risk of domestic violence and abuse. In particular, confusion about gendered roles within military families when military personnel are present and absent appeared to be an issue for the participating families. This is something that warrants further investigation and research.

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<sup>i</sup> The responses to each question vary. As such the numbers are given for each question but might not relate to the full sample of respondents.

<sup>ii</sup> Including civil partnerships.