

**Service Children's Progression**



The education of children from  
armed forces families: lessons  
from the international literature

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June 2019

# Structure

- About the SCiP Alliance
- About Service children
- A review of the literature on Service children's educational experiences
- Group discussion



# Practice

It is only what we do differently that will deliver different outcomes



# Research

We need to understand the service child's journey and how to improve it



# Policy

We influence policy, so that it supports our work for service children

# Who are Service children?

Children who have undertaken part or all of their education within families with at least one member serving in the:

- Royal Navy
- Army
- Royal Air Force

or who has served during that child's lifetime.



# Competing dynamics



**Contextual factors:**  
mobility, separation,  
deployment, caring duties,  
differences in local  
regimes



**Personal qualities:**  
resilience, maturity,  
determination,  
confidence, pride,  
responsibility



The significance

**Service children are around one third less likely to go to University than the general population**

(McCullouch and Hall, 2016)

## The significance

- Service children rarely meet commonly-used indicators of exclusion from higher education (McCullouch et al., 2018).
- Yet they appear to be under-represented in higher education (McCullouch and Hall, 2016).
- Challenges in identifying precise numbers in HE, experiences post-16 etc (McCullouch and Hall, 2016).
- For many Service children, “it may be that the daunting and persistent obstacles created by the range of factors contributing to the complexities and demands of their lives become overwhelming, determination and intent dissipate and ambition fades” (McCullouch et al., 2018, p.21).

## Why the “Five Eyes”?

- Educational experiences of Service children are relatively under-researched in the UK context.
- Similar military cultures (professional armed forces, no conscription).
- Commonalities of culture, language etc.
- Close collaborators in international defence and security.





## Method

- First stages of an integrative review (Whittemore and Knafl, 2005) drawing on literature pertaining to education of children of armed forces families grounded in the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.
- Comprehensive search via *Academic Research Complete* database.
- Initial manual sifting of abstracts for relevance and to identify emergent themes.
- Second level review of full texts to confirm relevance to topic.
- Total articles found:  
USA: 39; Australia: 7; New Zealand: 1; Canada: 7
- Further work needed as part of analysis; what is presented here are the emergent themes.

## Emergent themes

- Six key themes emerged through an initial eyeballing of the data:
  - The impact of deployment and reconnection post-deployment;
  - Resilience, coping and mental health;
  - Stakeholder perceptions of Service children;
  - The nature of schools and schooling;
  - Disability and special educational needs;
  - The impact on the serving person's career

## Deployment and reconnection

- Negative impact of deployment on **family stability** (Sheppard et al., 2010) [USA].
- Negative impact on **children's wellbeing**, routines and family dynamics (Skomorovsky and Bullock, 2017) [Can], potentially independently of impact on non-deployed parent (Tupper et al., 2018) [Can].
- Changes to **parental functioning of remaining parent** (Saltzman et al, 2011) [USA]; need to support non-deployed parent (Harrison and Vannest, 2008) [USA] (Hathaway et al., 2018) [USA].
- Need for **flexibility at time of reunion** (Berle and Steel, 2015) [Aus] and for family teamworking (Ashurst et al., 2014) [USA].
- Risk of returning personnel experiencing **frustration** (Saltzman et al., 2011) [USA]; small but elevated risk of family violence (Berle and Steel, 2015) [Aus].

## Resilience, coping and mental health

- Increasing **behavioural difficulties** of children whose families have experienced more deployments (McGuire et al., 2016) [Aus] – particularly when non-deployed parent is distressed by deployment (MacDermid Wadsworth et al., 2017) [USA].
- Families of **lower ranks** may experience greater challenges than those of officers (Lester et al., 2016) [USA] (Fallon and Russo, 2003) [USA].
- Need for **support tailored to the unique experiences** of Service children (Hathaway et al., 2018) [USA], e.g. improving parent-child attachment (Mogil et al., 2015) [USA]. Experience of supporting Service children may be significant (Robson et al., 2013) [Can]
- **Tailor teaching approaches** to needs of child (Russo and Fallon 2015) [USA].
- Bear in mind the **resilience and intrinsic strength** of Service families (Berle and Steel, 2015) [Aus].

## Stakeholder perceptions

- Schools need to be **places of stability** for Service children (De Pedro et al., 2014) [USA].
- Parents reassured by **availability of supportive adults** for specific needs (Macdonald and Boon, 2018) [Aus].
- Teachers can carry **negative perceptions** of socioemotional and academic impact of separation (Stites, 2016) [USA].
- Need for community services to be **sensitive and knowledgeable** about specific military needs (Davis et al., 2012) [USA].
- Need for **cooperative working**, understanding and trust between service providers (Lewis-Fleming, 2014) [USA].

## Nature of schools and schooling

- Parental deployment disrupts a child's academic performance (Engle et al., 2010) [USA], (Phelps et al., 2010) [USA].
- Difficulties with schooling are identified as a **main reason for leaving the forces** (Rowan-Legg, 2017) [Can].
- Academic penalty associated with deployment can **persist over time** (Engel et al., 2010) [USA].
- Some children can be **pushed back a year to compensate** for curriculum differences (Daigle, 2013) [Can].
- Need for a **supportive school climate** (Astor et al., 2013) [USA] including **culturally-sensitive pedagogy** and **proactive monitoring** of Service children (Garner et al., 2014) [USA].

## Disability and SEN

- Preschool age children with a deployed parent during lifetime often have higher rates of **adverse developmental indicators** (Nguyen et al., 2014) [USA].
- Absence on deployment during developmental years is likely to impact adversely on child's **interpersonal behaviours** (Nguyen et al., 2014) [USA].
- **Attunement to family experience of mobility** is part of providing effective support to Service children with disabilities (Jagger and Lederer, 2014) [USA].
- **Partnership working** between agencies allows mutual recognition of constraints and targeting of gaps (Lewis-Fleming, 2014) [USA].

## Impact on serving person's career

- Active duty parents can be concerned about **stigma** of children's incidences of poor mental health – but this does not necessarily reflect actual actions by military (Sansone et al., 2008) [USA].
- Barriers to **spousal employment** reported, particularly when children are involved or in moving between jurisdictions/countries (Daigle, 2013) [Can].
- Increase in **dual-career families** where both parents may be involved in deployments (Berle and Steel, 2015) [Aus].
- Most research on impacts has been conducted in the US context (Kaczmarek and Sibbel, 2008) [Aus].



## Discussion

Consider one of the six emerging themes and reflect together on the following questions:

1. What existing work (e.g. with other groups) is effective (or showing promise) in addressing the kinds of issues raised here?
2. What are the principal challenges in applying similar approaches to work with Service children?
3. How could these approaches be developed to mitigate or take account of these challenges and be useful in supporting Service children?

Feedback the single biggest challenge AND the most promising development or approach.

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