Behind Family Lines

A Longitudinal Study of Dutch Families' Adaptations to Military-Induced Separations

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The Military, the Family, and the Work-Family Interface

It has long been recognized that military life affects the private lives of service members and their families in some way. Pursuing a military career is challenging, yet also involves a lifestyle that includes recurrent transfers to new work environments, frequent separations from the family (as a result of deployments and training), and risk to life and limb in action (e.g., Booth *et al.*, 2007 ; Segal, 1986). Serving in the armed forces, therefore, demands the utmost of military personnel *and* their families.

Over the past several decades, various trends and developments have altered the character of the military, the family, and the work-family interface, which in turn have had profound implications for service environments and working conditions experienced by military personnel and their families. A long-term shift in institutional and occupational characteristics of the armed forces (Moskos, 1977, 1986 ; Moskos & Wood, 1988) has affected the nature of military organization and military cultures (Soeters, Winslow & Weibull, 2003). Many military organizations have to varying degrees leaned towards a more civilian model of organization in which the military profession is perceived not so much as a way of life anymore, but as "*just another job*". Moreover, the shift from conscription to all-volunteer forces in many countries, including the Netherlands, has altered the composition of the force, which now includes more married service members, more women, and more staff with care-giving responsibilities. It also implies that military personnel have consciously chosen a career in the armed forces. Hence, military organizations have to compete in the labour market for qualified personnel and find themselves faced with the challenges of recruiting, selecting, and retaining competent individuals, whose families may decisively influence, through support or objections, their options to join, or stay in, the military. Military organizations have thus increased their efforts to preserve and promote the well-being of their personnel and their families (Op den Buijs, Andres & Bartone, 2010).

Furthermore, the nature of military missions has moved towards 'operations other than war' and the character and organization of such new missions imply that service members face increasingly demanding challenges and must be highly trained. Intensive (pre-deployment) training requires them to spend time away from their families (even more) frequently. More frequent separations are also the result of the increasing number of

deployments and the rate at which these deployments occur.[1] Finally, the societies in which military organizations are embedded have changed in character. Among other things, the media play a prominent role in today's societies. "*We are witnessing increased public attention to military operations*" (Segal & Segal, 2003, p.231). The public – including military families– has become more vocal, more critical, and more organized, potentially becoming an influential group, demanding immediate attention to certain needs.

Transitions in the family have been influenced by social and demographical trends that have affected the structure of the family. They include – but are not limited to – prolonged life spans, people entering into matrimony and parenthood at a later stage in their lives, decreased incidences of marriage and remarriage, increased incidences of divorce and separation, diminishing numbers of children per family, transitions from traditional (patriarchal) to more egalitarian family relations (with more equally divided household and childcare tasks), and increasing numbers of dual-earner couples (De Graaf & Kalmijn, 2006; Dykstra, 2004; Dykstra & Komter, 2004; Kalmijn, 2007). A diversity of family structures exists in addition to the ideal typical *nuclear family*, defined as a married couple with children running a household together. Single-parent households, gay couples (with or without children), childless couples, and other family structures are now quite common. At the time of this study, the Dutch armed forces employed 42,139 servicemen (91 per cent) and 4,125 servicewomen (9 per cent), in the Army (47 per cent), Navy (20 per cent), Air Force (20 per cent), or Military Police (12 per cent). Their average age was 33 years and over one third (37 per cent) of them were married. At any given time in the last decades, over 2,000 Dutch servicemen and women were deployed to mission areas all over the world, such as Afghanistan, Congo, Chad, and Bosnia-Herzegovina, thereby being separated from their families for several months. As a rule, in the Netherlands, deployments vary between four and six months (with a two-week rest and recuperation leave during a six-month absence), and service members are deployable again after a period of twice the deployment duration (i.e., a six-month deployment is followed by twelve months' non-deployable time).

Both the military and the family make strong claims on the devotion of their members and have been characterized as *greedy institutions* (Coser, 1974; Segal, 1986). More generally, in most contemporary Western societies, the boundaries between gainful employment and family life seem to have dissolved : both men and women face the challenges of managing the conflict between work obligations and domestic responsibilities. Work experiences are likely to spill over to one's family experiences (or vice versa) – an interpersonal process of work and family trade-offs, or even crossover to one's partner at home, which is a dyadic, or intrapersonal, process of transmission (e.g., Westman, 2001). When work and family demands are incompatible in some respect, tensions occur (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985), which are beneficial neither for organizations nor for families. Many studies show work-family conflict to have (health- or stress-related) consequences for individuals, the family (marital and family satisfaction) and the work

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[1] Deployment rates have increased as a consequence of downsizing, organizational restructuring, and a growing participation in international operations, for instance.

domain (absenteeism, job satisfaction, performance, turnover[2]). Work is especially likely to bear upon family life in the course of job-induced separations.

Studying Military Families

Research on military families dates back to the aftermath of World War II : to the well-known work of Hill (1945, 1949) on wartime separation and reunion. As of that time, military families had occupied an important place on policy and research agendas internationally.[3] Segal & Harris (1993) provided an overview of the large body of research conducted among military families ; an updated report was published in 2007 (Booth *et al.*, 2007). In the Netherlands, policy documents officially recognized in 1993 that the Ministry of Defence had a responsibility in providing support to service members and their families before, during, and after military deployments (Moelker & van der Kloet, 2003). The increased deployment load and perceived risks involved – particularly following the Dutch Parliament's decision to send troops to the southern province of Afghanistan, Uruzgan, in 2006 – made family support even more vital, and necessitated more knowledge on families' adaptations (in continuation of previously conducted studies).

The Present Study

Aim and Research Questions

Data presented in this article are part of a more extensive research project aiming to "*enhance knowledge on job-induced separations affecting family life, by examining military families in the course of military deployments, the factors that are associated with families' (mal)adaptations, and their interrelations*". Employing a multidisciplinary approach, drawing on theories and perspectives of psychology (i.e., family stress, family resilience, single parenting) and military sociology, the overarching central research question that guides the study is : *how do military-induced separations affect family life and how can the (mal)adaptation of family members be explained?*

To answer this central research question, five sub-questions have been formulated, more specifically defining the focus of the study. Each sub-question addresses a different family perspective (i.e., partners, children, parents, couples, service members) with congruous variables of interest (e.g., the partner relationship, the parent-child relationship, well-being, turnover intentions). Those sub-questions were formulated as follows :

> 1. How does work-family conflict relate to *partners*' perceived social support, well-being, and spousal/ partnership satisfaction in the course of military-induced separations?

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[2] Allen, Herst, Bruck & Sutton, 2000 ; Demerouti, Bakker & Bulters, 2004 ; Grant-Vallone & Donaldson, 2001 ; Greenhaus, Collins, Singh & Parasuraman, 1997 ; Kinnunen & Mauno, 1998 ; Kossek & Ozeki, 1999 ; Rode, Rehg, Near, & Underhill, 2007 ; Voydanoff, 2005).

[3] For just a few examples of research on military families in diverse countries, see, for instance, Adler, Bartone & Vaitkus, 1995 ; Booth *et al.*, 2007 ; Dandeker, French, Birtles & Wessely, 2006 ; Delveaux & Moreau, 2008 ; Figley, 1993 ; Manigart & Fils, 2006 ; McCubbin, Dahl & Hunter, 1976 ; Moelker & van der Kloet, 2002, 2003 ; Nuciari & Sertorio, 2009 ; Rosen, Teitelbaum & Westhuis, 1993 ; Segal & Segal, 1993 ; Segal & Harris, 1993.

2. How can the experiences of *children* in the course of service members' deployments be described and what factors predict children's adjustment difficulties during parental absence and upon reunion?

3. How do *parents* appraise the deployment of their son or daughter with respect to the parent-child relationship, concerns, and need for support and how does this appraisal affect their support for the armed forces and its missions?

4. How do service members and partners (*couples*) maintain their intimate relationship during the separation (through active verbal interactions) and how does this affect reconciliation processes and evaluations of the relationship after deployment?

5. How does work-family conflict relate to *service members*' well-being, relationship satisfaction, and turnover intentions in the course of military-induced separations?

The present article serves to provide a brief overview of the findings.

Sample and Procedure

Service members who participated in the EUFOR (European Force) mission in Bosnia-Herzegovina (rotations 4 and 5) or the ISAF/TFU (Task Force Uruzgan) mission in Afghanistan (rotation 1 or 2) and their partners were asked to fill out questionnaires one month before the separation (T1), just past midway through the deployment (T2), and three months after reunion (T3). Additional interviews were held with a randomly selected subsample of partners (*N*=120). Furthermore, parents of service members who participated in the aforementioned missions/ rotations received questionnaires one month after their son's/ daughter's return. Given that the eyes of researchers in the field were mainly fixed upon partners and children, and collecting data among parents has hardly been done before, this cross-sectional design was expected to provide a satisfactory amount of valuable and new information to start with. Table 1 (next page) presents an overview of the numbers and distributions of respondents in the study.

Regarding service members and partners, the samples predominantly included male service members (96%) and female partners (97%). On average, the service members and partners were in their thirties (service members' average age = 34.5, *SD* = 9.16; partners' average age = 32.9, *SD* = 9.35); little more than half of them had children (57%) and were married (59%). The majority of gainfully employed partners (85%) indicated a large number of two-income families. Given our focus on the EUFOR and TFU missions, which were predominantly filled with Army personnel, this study principally reports on Army families. Rank and file members were in a minority: about half of the respondents were non-commissioned officers, and nearly one third were commissioned officers. For over a quarter of the service members and partners (28%), this was their first deployment; about one third had experienced a deployment once before, and forty percent of them had experienced a deployment at least twice before. The average duration of the current separation was five months.

Table 1

Overview of respondents

	Sample frame		Response			Response percentage	
	Partners	*Service members*	*Partners*	*Service members*		*Partners*	*Service members*
T1 (before)	867	867	453	303	(284)*	52.2%	34.9%
T2 (during)	832	788	386	353	(198)	46.4%	44.8%
T3 (after)	635	635	235	183	(162)	37.0%	28.8%
Total	2334	2290	1074	839		45.2%	36.2%
	4624		1913			41%	
	Parents		*Parents*			*Parents*	
	2000		1098			54.9%	

* (Number of couples)

Measures

The questionnaires mainly contained validated scales, a number of self-constructed items (e.g., regarding children's adjustment difficulties, couples' reconciliation, parents' worries), and additional items to assess demographic variables.

Findings

Partners' perspectives

The degree to which partners felt that military job demands interfered with family life were, generally, moderate and these experiences did not change significantly over time (i.e., before, during, and after the military-induced separation).[4] Over the course of the deployment, 30 to 33% of the partners (before and after the deployment, respectively) reported high levels of work-family conflict. Partners who had children, whose partner was at that time sent to Afghanistan, and who had experienced a deployment at least once before reported higher levels of work-family conflict. Before and after the deployment, non-deployed partners did not experience higher levels of distress than any other individual generally experiences (Figure 1).[5] The actual separation was significantly more stressful ; then, the scores of nearly one third (32%) of the partners indicate evidence of distress (i.e., scores of or above 15), of whom 8% reported severe problems and psychological distress (i.e., scores of or above 20). Partners of rank and file members experiencing a deployment tour in Afghanistan, who were not married, and had been together for shorter periods of time reported higher levels of distress. Marital/partnership satisfaction decreased slightly

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[4] Work-family conflict was measured by Netemeyer, Boles & McMurrian's (1996) Work-Family Conflict Scale. The items among partners of military personnel required slight wording modification, i.e., 'my work' was changed into 'my partners' work'.

[5] Psychological distress was measured by the GHQ-12 scale ; scores between 11 and 12 are defined as *typical,* according to General Health Questionnaire scoring.

but significantly over the course of the separation. Before the deployment, 67% of the partners were (very) satisfied with their relationship. That rate was subsequently reduced to 45%. Among 18% of the partners, relationships deteriorated, whereas among 11%, they actually improved. Seventy-one percent of the relationships were fairly stable (within a margin of − 1 SD and +1 SD).

Figure 1: Partners' levels of psychological distress
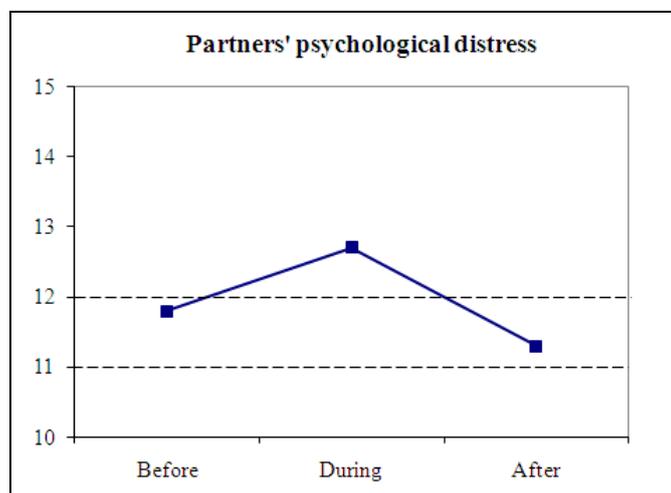
Work-family conflict, psychological distress, and marital/ partnership satisfaction were cross-sectionally and longitudinally related, even after controlling for stressful life events. The relations are bi-directional given that higher levels of work-family conflict are associated with higher levels of psychological distress and lower levels of relationship satisfaction within and across time-frames, but in turn, psychological distress and relationship satisfaction also predict work-family conflict experiences at later points in time. Furthermore, the results emphasized the beneficial effects of social support as it reduced levels of work-family conflict, psychological distress, and enhanced relationship satisfaction.

Family and friends were reported as most important sources of emotional and instrumental support. Additionally, fellow military families were valued in providing emotional support, given that they are the ones who precisely know what a deployment means to a family. As for information, the military (particularly before the deployment) and fellow military families (during and afterwards) were major sources of support.

Children

Notwithstanding missing the presence of their parent, children generally adapted fairly rapidly and were doing quite well during the parent-child separation. When changes were observed in the children, they were not solely adverse (e.g., crying more often, being stubborn or quickly tempered, or having problems regarding toilet trainedness) but were also related to feeling more responsible, and being more helpful and caring. In a quarter of the families, the deployment was rather difficult for the children. Moreover, different ages involved different experiences (and difficulties). Generally, infants seemed too young to notice the absence of the parent (though it should be noted that this group is presumed

susceptible to longer-term attachment problems, which was beyond the scope of this study). Younger children have difficulties keeping track of the duration of the absence, as they have no sense of time and even a few weeks seem to last forever. Older ones (i.e., school-age children) become more aware of the risks involved, which manifested itself in anxiety and concerns about the safety of the absent parent. But it is this group of older children that is also helpful and caring in regard to the non-deployed parent. The results furthermore emphasized the importance of interactions with the deployed parent through various means of communication. The reunion usually is a joyous event and the majority of the children rapidly resumed previous daily routines, although nearly a quarter had to grow accustomed to their returned parent again. Somewhat worrisome are the numbers that point to separation anxiety (which in some cases still persisted three months after reunion). As many as forty percent of the mothers reported that the children were afraid that their father will leave again.

Furthermore, the results revealed that non-deployed parents (in this study, they were all mothers) generally coped quite well with the separation, which was demonstrated by the moderate levels of parenting stress, work-family conflict, psychological distress, and low levels of loneliness. Mothers' levels of psychological distress before the deployment and during the separation were significantly related to children's adjustment difficulties during the deployment. Mothers' levels of parenting stress during separation significantly predicted children's adjustment difficulties upon reunion. These findings suggest that non-deployed parents' abilities to cope with the stressors of deployment are likely to pass on to their children's experiences.

Finally, the better service members believed their home front was coping with their absence, the more often they reported that the deployment was going well for them. Moreover, stress experienced at home (as reported by the partner) was related to service members reporting more negative deployment experiences, suggesting that the better the home front is coping with the separation, the better the service members will function during the deployment.[6]

Deployed Service Members' Parents

Parents' relationships with their deployed sons or daughters were strongly cohesive, though mother-daughter and mother-son relations were noted to be significantly more so than father-son bonds. This is consistent with research on intergenerational relationships, which assumes that mother-child bonds differ from father-child relations. Whether or not the service members lived at home with their parents did not make a difference in parents' perceptions of that relationship (which many parents believed actually strengthened during, or because of, the deployment). A large proportion among parents (40%) also observed changes in their son or daughter. Far more parents perceived these changes positively (e.g., having become more mature and independent, or being more social and attentive) than negatively (e.g., having become harder, indifferent, quick-tempered, or restless).

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[6] Findings on children are described in more detail in an article published in *Armed Forces & Society* (Andres & Moelker, 2011).

Over the course of their child's deployment, parents' greatest need was emotional support, a need that increased as the perceived risk of the deployment intensified. Parents preferred airing their hearts to a relative or good friend; the spouse of the deployed soldier was a popular conversation partner, which is quite obvious given that this partner is a trusted companion and a fellow-sufferer. Parents also expressed a strong need for information, at its greatest during high-risk deployments. Information was provided by the armed forces but media reports (e.g., in newspapers or on television and radio) were monitored to the smallest detail. During the deployment, the media even were the most important source of information among parents of soldiers deployed to Afghanistan. Family members' (not least parents') need for timely and detailed information, as noted in our study, may not be consistent with the military providing limited and sometimes filtered and delayed information for accuracy and security reasons. Parents also obtained information directly from their son or daughter. They stayed in touch regularly (often weekly) by using various means of instant communications that allowed for frequent contact.

Parents were committed, proud, and worried. Fathers and mothers experienced the deployment of their son or daughter differently. Mothers worried more than fathers did. Parents worried significantly more when their child was sent to a more risky mission area. Moreover, parents who worried perceived the deployment more negatively. Parents whose sons or daughters were deployed to Bosnia-Herzegovina (at the time of the study, a more routine mission) reported more positive or less negative deployment experiences than parents of service members deployed to Afghanistan (which was a new mission, perceived as more hazardous). Generally, mothers had more negative experiences than fathers had. They also missed their child more than fathers did. Parents' attitudes towards the armed forces and its operations were more positive among fathers who had a son deployed than among mothers. Such positive attitudes were also apparent among parents…

- whose son or daughter was sent to a less risky mission area;
- whose child had been deployed more often;
- whose child lived at home;
- who had a more cohesive bond with their deployed child;
- who appraised the deployment more positively.[7]

Couples

While being physically separated, couples stayed in touch on a regular basis (often at least once a week, sometimes even daily). Telephone and e-mail communications were the most popular, followed by videoconferencing, text messages, letters, and packages. The results revealed that it is the *quality* rather than the *quantity* of communications that matters. That is, beyond the frequency of communications, the degree to which service members and partners engage in active interactions (e.g., keeping each other informed and involved, inquiring how the other feels, expressing affection) eases later reconciliation

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[7] Findings on parents are described in more detail in Andres & Moelker, 2009.

processes and helps maintain an intimate bond. During the separation, couples adopted fairly high levels of active verbal interactions, and strove to preserve their intimate relationships despite the absence of physical contact. The reunion usually brought an end to the intense contact by means of letters, e-mail, or telephone. Still, couples' levels of active verbal interactions after the separation were still fairly high. Yet, both during and after deployment, partners communicated more openly than service members did. This may be related to gender (being male or female) or professional norms (being a service member or not, as military personnel are not always able or allowed to share everything). At both stages, service members' active verbal interactions attenuated difficulties in keeping the relationship harmonious and in adjusting upon their return. Among partners, active verbal interactions with the deployed service member after reunion rather than during the separation affected their reconciliation processes. Partners who reported higher levels of active interactions felt that fewer efforts were needed to harmonize and adjust. Among both service members and partners, active verbal interactions during and after the separation positively affected their subsequent evaluations of the relationship.

Reconciliation after deployment clearly involved a process of adaptation, which was more difficult for partners than for returning service members. Many interviewed partners described the process of reintegration as requiring efforts on their part to get used to each other again, take into account the presence of the other, tune in to each other's daily rhythms, make concessions and adjustments, and no longer act as the only boss in the home. Nonetheless, reconciliation generally went rather smoothly, and many couples believed things went back to normal rather quickly. For a majority of the couples, things were stabilized three months after reunion, although levels of relationship quality – albeit still fairly high – had dropped significantly in the course of the separation.

Service members

Interestingly, service members experienced significantly higher levels of inter-ference of military job demands with family life than their partners did, before, during, and after the separation (Figure 2, next page[8]). Service members who were married, had children, were deployed to Afghanistan, and were officers or non-commissioned officers reported higher levels of work-family conflict. This was related to the work domain (i.e., turnover intentions) and to family life (i.e., spousal/ partnership satisfaction). Turnover intentions increased slightly but significantly over the course of the separation. Before the deployment, one in ten service members was thinking about leaving the service. Afterwards, this was one in eight. Service members who were younger, not married, did not have children, had lesser seniority than others, and were privates reported more turnover intentions. Furthermore, among service members, levels of general well-being and partnership satisfaction decreased significantly (though not substantially) over time, while no significant changes were found in mean levels of work-family conflict.

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[8] Scaled down to a scale from 1 (low) to 5 (high).

Figure 2: Couples' work-family conflict experiences
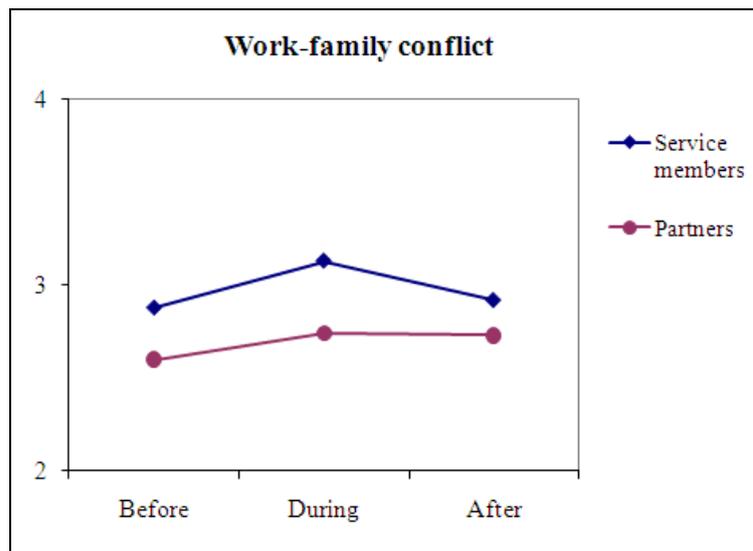
The findings suggest that it is not so much work-family conflict experiences, service members' well-being, or partnership satisfaction that account for turnover intentions (although significant within-time relations are displayed) ; rather, turnover intentions before a military-induced separation are the best predictor of turnover intentions at a later stage. That is, service members who were already thinking about quitting before the separation were likely to do so afterwards. A cross-lagged relation was displayed between general well-being before the separation and relationship satisfaction afterwards, suggesting that service members who feel well before their departure are likely to end up in more satisfying relationships than service members who report poorer well-being before the separation. Interestingly, declining well-being leads to increased perceived conflict between work and family demands at a subsequent point in time, which, in turn, is associated with one's well-being within that time-frame, and so on.

Conclusion and Discussion

This study has shown that job-induced separations affect not only the soldier and the spouse or partner, but also their children and (the soldiers') parents. On the whole, military families seem to adapt quite well. Partners were fairly resilient in the face of psychological difficulties. While the highest levels of psychological distress were reported during the actual separation, levels of distress decreased significantly after reunion, and partners rebounded to levels equal to – or even somewhat better than – before. Moreover, partners' levels of psychological distress before and after the separation were similar to what people generally experience in daily life. Additionally, the greater majority of the children appeared to adjust quite well to the parent-child separation and reunion. Nonetheless, this does not alter the fact that a number of the families do experience difficulties. For instance, the scores of nearly one third of the partners during the separation pointed to evidence of psychological distress, among whom 8% indicated severe problems on that score ; for a quarter of the children, the parent-child separation was rather difficult ;

roughly one in six relationships deteriorated; and about one fifth of the service members' parents had negative deployment experiences.

Practical implications

The findings reveal that one need not consider military families as especially vulnerable or problematic in that regard: the greater majority adapt quite well to military-induced separations. Nonetheless, the present study emphasizes the importance of (and need for) fostering balance between service life and family life. Its results show that service members perceived significantly higher levels of interference of military job demands with family life than their partners did. Interventions aimed at allowing individuals to allocate resources more adequately, thereby minimizing tensions between service and family demands, are imperative. Such interventions relate, for instance, to family-friendly policies (services, work-environments, ethos), but perhaps even more importantly to managing perceptions regarding supportive cultures. Although "*some level of [work-family conflict] may be inevitable, particularly with the demands associated with military service*" (Adams, Jex & Cunningham, 2006, p.184), making sure that tensions generated by conflicting claims are minimal and manageable benefits service members and families in terms of well-being and improved family relationships, just as it enhances organizational effectiveness.

In recent years, more and more concerns have been expressed about worsening spousal relations and rising divorce rates in the military, in particular as a result of military deployments and combat experience (e.g., Angrist & Johnson, 2000; Burrell, Adams, Durand & Castro, 2006; Gimbel & Booth, 1994; Karney & Crown, 2007; McCone & O'Donnell, 2006; Solomon *et al.*, 1992). However, research has produced divergent results. On the whole, the findings of our study do not indicate severe problems that imply increased divorce rates over the course of a four- to six-month deployment period. Nevertheless, while relationships remained fairly strong, levels of spousal/ partnership satisfaction declined significantly over the course of the separation. As mentioned earlier, service members and partners who were less satisfied with their relationship before the separation were likely to feel so afterwards; however, changes that manifest themselves in such a short period of time must point to the impact of job-induced separation in some way. This observation is important, not only to military families, but to a larger population of individuals and families who are faced with job-induced separations.

This study confirmed the beneficial effects of social support provided by family, friends, and others, brought to light by previous studies[9] showing support (and *feeling* supported) to be important for families in adapting to and managing the stress from separation. Family and friends appeared to be most important when it comes to emotional and instrumental support. Fellow military families were valuable as well, given that they are the ones who precisely know what a deployment means to a family (and they usually are in possession of deployment-related, or mission-specific, information).

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[9] For instance: Bowen, Mancini, Martin, Ware & Nelson, 2003; Burrell, Adams, Durand & Castro, 2010; Watson Wiens & Boss, 2006.

As regards information, family members' need to obtain full and timely information with a view to lowering stress may not be compatible with the usual military practice of restricting or delaying the flow of news for legitimate (security, accuracy checks, etc.) reasons. In their study on boundary ambiguity among reservists and their families, Faber and colleagues (2008) also described family members' need for obtaining as much information as possible in order to reduce stress (e.g., concerns about the safety of their relative). They noted, however, that too much information, especially regarding incidents such as bombings and attacks, is likely to create additional worry. Furthermore, in our study, levels of perceived available support decreased significantly during and after the separation compared with the pre-deployment stage. Military organizations should endeavour to improve access to support in the course of military-induced separations in order to keep feelings of isolation to a minimum. Attention should additionally be paid to the *continuity* of informal support networks among military families. For example, if service members return home with trauma-related symptoms –which often become manifest months or even years after the return –, to whom should families turn for informal help or advice ? Obviously, family and friends might not be able to satisfy such specific needs, simply because they lack the necessary knowledge or experience. Informal social networks of military families seem to function quite well when enough continuity is secured (Moelker *et al.*, 2008).

Finally, service members' parents are an elementary component of military families. Although parent-child relationships change when children grow older, "*parents continue to provide affection, support, and nurturance to their adult children*" (Hay, Fingerman, & Lefkowitz, 2008: p. 104). They are concerned and committed. Mothers were less supportive of mission objectives, and believed to a lesser degree in the credibility of operations abroad. Hence, the potential for discontent and protest is probably greater in mothers than in fathers.

Theoretical Considerations

Family members' experiences have been found to be interrelated. Mothers' conditions were shown to be related to children's adjustments, and stress experienced at home was related to service members reporting more negative deployment experiences. These findings thus suggest that the adaptation (or maladaptation) of families in the course of stressful events/job-induced separations is better explained by the interrelations between various factors rather than by any one single factor.

Current states were shown to be predictive of future states. For instance, individuals who experience higher levels of work-family conflict, poorer well-being, dissatisfaction with their partnerships, or turnover intentions at one point, are also likely to score higher on these variables at a later point in time along the deployment cycle. Nonetheless, underlining the impact of deployment, significant changes were observed in the study variables over the course of the military-induced separation. The findings also throw light upon the complex nature of certain relations between relevant variables ; such relations cannot exclusively be viewed as unidirectional. This implies that fully understanding the

dynamics goes beyond previously theorized cause-and-effect linkages, and requires gathering more longitudinal empirical evidence with a view to refining theory.

Finally, more theoretical and empirical emphasis should be placed upon *parents* and *couples*. In particular, the focus on parents, which involves a totally different type of relationship than the partner dyad, is lacking in theory and research. Regarding couples, more attention should be paid to dyadic coping and communications in the course of stressful events, as well as to partners' shared (or different) perceptions of conditions. Dyadic coping involves spousal support and communications, which is clearly different from the social support provided by (and interactions with) family, friends, neighbours, and others. When people encounter a stressful event, the partner is often the primary and most important source of support (Bodenmann, Pihet & Kayser, 2006). Moreover, many stressful events, such as military-induced separations, affect both partners, which makes dyadic coping crucial in maintaining a well-functioning relationship. Apart from several (cross-sectional) studies that emphasized the vital role of communication in the maintenance of intimate relationships, it has received little attention in theory and field research concentrating on physically separated partners. Further, while they endure job-induced separations together, as a couple, partners can have different perceptions regarding the conditions in which they find themselves. This study revealed, for instance, that service members reported significantly higher levels of interference of military job demands with family life than partners did before, during, and after deployment. Likewise, service members believed that these separations are a burden to their partners more often than partners themselves reported. Thus, in addition to crossover processes, partners' shared (or different) perceptions should be taken into consideration. Follow-up studies may help broaden our insight.

Although military-induced separations differ from other types of provisional separations in several important ways, they also share some common traits (temporary nature of the absence, return and reintegration of the family member into the family again). The theoretical insights applied in this study may therefore be of interest to a larger population of individuals and families confronted with job-induced separations in other, non-military contexts.

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