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## BA (Hons) Early Childhood Studies

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Are the standards of the EYFS supporting the social and emotional needs of young children on military camps?

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Image available at: <http://www.nhs.uk/NHSEngland/Militaryhealthcare/veterans-families-reservists/Pages/family.aspx>, (2015)

By

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## Abstract

Children receive many developmental benefits from forming an attachment with their primary caregiver, including their social and emotional skills (Golding, *et al.*, 2013). However, children surrounded by chaos and stress sometimes struggle to form these attachments (Gerhardt, 2004). Military children can be included in this group of children, as they are surrounded by uncertainty and often experience frequent parental absences (Malekpour, 2007). These parental absences can lead to social and emotional difficulties within the children such as regression, anger, and depression, often resulting in children as young as 5 years old having mental health problems (Baberiene & Hornback, 2014). Therefore, to counter these negative effects, military camp childcare provisions within the USA are enshrined in laws and standards have been established in order to provide service children with the best and most affordable childcare, so that young children may form secure attachments with practitioners when their parents are away to help counter the negative effects of parental absences (Trautmann, *et al.*, 2015). Unfortunately, there is very little research to indicate whether this is true or similar of the military camp nurseries in the United Kingdom. The aim of this study was to use a case study methodology to investigate whether the UK early years curriculum is supporting the social and emotional development of service children. Two different methods of data collection was used to investigate this, using practitioners and parents of a nursery within a military camp. 5 practitioners were interviewed, including one military wife that also worked at the nursery to discuss the way in which they support military children and whether more can be done to support them in the future. Families within the nursery were given questionnaires, to give an insight into how military families explain absences to their children, and to see if they believed there was enough support available for military families. Both the quantitative and qualitative data was analysed, and using grounded theory analysis the data was coded (Denscombe, 2014). The results indicate that all staff members felt that more training and awareness should be given for practitioners working with service families. Essentially, all the staff reported that there should be more support for military families in the terms of free childcare provisions, as service families are not entitled to government schemes, such as the Two Year Offer. The results of this study point to a need for a wider understanding of service children's needs and the importance

that a stable and secure attachment has upon a child, by providing service children with free childcare places, more children will have the attachment that is vital for their social and emotional skills. The limitations and weakness of the research project was noted to be that there was a low response rate to the questionnaires; limited to 12 families, with a larger number of responses the researcher would have collected more reliable data. However, the strengths of the project were, that the responses that the researcher gained were noted to have a wealth of information and knowledge relevant to the project.

## Introduction

This dissertation investigates whether the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS, 2012) document is meeting the social and emotional developmental needs of service children, or whether there is a need for extra support for this minority group of children. This dissertation seeks to gain the opinions of the practitioners and families within a small nursery, based within a British military camp, and investigates whether more needs to be done to support the social and emotional needs of service children. It argues that, though this is a single case study it is indicative of the needs of these children and the support that practitioners need to provide the best care and education for service children.

The relationship between a parent and child is believed to be the starting point for a child's social and emotional development (Booth *et al.*, 1994; Golding, *et al.*, 2013; Malekpour, 2007). Parents are a child's first educator and a strong, secure attachment is vital for a child's holistic development (DfE, 2012). Unfortunately, service children do not always have their first educators to support their social and emotional development, due to abrupt absences for military duty. Current research has established that military children experience a wide range of emotions such as clinginess and regressive behaviours (Murphey *et al.*, 2011), these different emotions have been observed to be related to the age of the child and can on occasions worsen as the separation lengthens (Murphey *et al.*, 2011; Trautmann *et al.*, 2015).

These emotional changes are also similar to those found in children who do not have a strong secure attachment with a primary caregiver. Due to these extra emotional and social needs, American military childcare provisions are required by the Military Childcare Act (2010) to ensure higher standards of care and education, than those required in civilian nurseries. Unfortunately, this is not the same for the UK; there appears to be no extra guidance or milestones for military raised children. As there are different standards required within America, the researcher asks why this is not the same for the UK, and does the early years curriculum require change to support this small group of children. Ultimately, it is agreed that the effects of military deployment has upon young children is under studied and requires further research (Barker & Berry, 2009; Boberiene & Hornback, 2014; Trautmann, *et al.*, 2015).

Through a case study methodology the researcher hopes to identify areas in which the EYFS (2012) needs improvement, to better support the social and emotional development of service children. The researcher hopes to interview practitioners and observe children at the nursery to gain first-hand knowledge of how military children are supported, and if more can be done to support them.

## Literature Review

The relationship between a child and parent is one of the most intricate and vital connections between humans, and has been the interest of researchers for many years, as this relationship is believed to provide children with a starting point in life (Gerhardt, 2004; Golding, *et al.*, 2013). It equips children with a variety of essential skills that are needed in order to thrive in the world (Booth *et al.*, 1994; Golding, *et al.*, 2013; Malekpour, 2007). The term attachment has been given for this strong and unique relationship between a parent and child, however due to challenging circumstances some children fail to form an attachment with a caregiver, which ultimately can have damaging effects upon a child. To form an attachment it is believed that parents are required to be emotionally available for the child, while also being sensitive and responsive to their individual needs (Kochanska, 2001; Malekpour, 2007; Howe, 2011), the child then learns that the parent will strive to meet their needs to the best of their ability, while also keeping them safe and protected. Research shows that there are many developmental benefits to be had from this strong and stable bond, such as developing a sense of self and expectations, in addition to learning social skills and regulating their own emotions (Booth *et al.*, 1994; Golding, *et al.*, 2013; Malekpour, 2007). These skills then cascade through a child's development impacting their holistic growth and view of the world.

However, difficulties and challenges can occur for this relationship, when parents and children are separated for normal day to day activities, such as nursery and work. This separation between the child and parent is believed to be an emotional and challenging time for the parent as well as the child, particularly for the first separation, as the child may feel unsure of their parent's return (Rutter, 1972; Murphey *et al.*, 2011). Literature suggests that separation creates a two part reaction from the child; first the child will become upset and distressed when the parent first leaves, as they are uncertain as to when or if the parent will return (Bowlby, 1979; Howe, 2011). The second part of the reaction is displayed upon the parents return; the child appears not to recognise them (Bowlby, 1979). It is suggested that the attachment that was once there has been broken, and will resume as normal after an undetermined period of time (Bowlby, 1979). In addition, the length of detachment has been noted to have a strong correlation to the length of absence, therefore the

longer the parent is away, the longer it will take to rebuild the attachment that was once there (Bowlby, 1979). Although, it is thought that children who have a strong attachment to their parents are more emotionally competent to cope and manage the separation, as this time is similar to the creation of the attachment, as when the child realises that the parent always returns, they then start to feel comfortable in their surroundings again, as they know that the bond is maintained even through absence (Rutter, 1972; Penn & Riley, 1992). Unfortunately, if the separation is prolonged and unpredictable it may leave the child with feelings of uncertainty and anxiety over future separations, as children need to see and understand that the parent is consistent and routine in their behaviours to become settled and comfortable in their environment (Bowlby, 1979; Bowlby, 1998; Marrone, 2014). It is thought that an attachment is not made when a parent is unresponsive, erratic, and provides an angry environment, which can cause the child to feel vulnerable and unsettled (Booth *et al.*, 1994; Kochanska, 2001; Malekpour, 2007). When an attachment is not made it is often termed as an insecure, ambivalent, or anxious attachment (Bowlby, 1979). Therefore, particular interest has been taken in how, and if these relationships are formed under stress, and how this impacts upon children in later life (Bowlby, 1979; Gerhardt, 2004; Malekpour, 2007). Regrettably, researchers believe that the consequences of a poor attachment can carry forward into later life and that children and adults are more likely to suffer from mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, or eating disorders as a result of this unstable relationship (Bowlby, 1979; Gerhardt, 2004; Howe, 2011).

### A unique environment

The type of attachment formed can also be dependent upon the environment which surrounds the family, Bronfenbrenner (1994) suggests that a child's environment and community have a large impact on the child's holistic development. Therefore, when placed in an environment that is difficult to maintain stability and continuity, it can have adverse effects upon a child's developmental outcomes and have a large impact upon their attitudes to challenges in later life (Kochanska, 2001; Malekpour, 2007). A military community is believed to be one of these unique environments, through the experiences of the service men and women, and the society that surrounds them and their families (Hunter & Hickman, 1981; Kulder & Porter, 2013).

Whether a military family decide to live on a designated military camp that facilitates a close knit community (MacDermid, *et al.*, 2008), or in the surrounding towns and villages, research suggests that these families undergo much stress through spouse deployment, time away due to training exercises, and chaotic and stressful day to day work commitments (Hunter & Nice, 1983; Mulrooney & Williams, 2012; Lieberman & Horn, 2013). Consequently, some children may struggle to form an attachment with their care givers due to these environmental factors and frequent parental separation. With this in mind, researchers have been studying the effects of long term and repeated absences on the children within these families, and whether or not these children form attachments with their parents due to the inconsistencies and unpredictable absences. However, it is important to note that the majority of these studies have been completed in the United States of America, which have different lengths of deployment compared to those of the United Kingdom; in the USA regular deployment is typically 12 months (Mulrooney & Williams, 2012; Trautmann, *et al.*, 2015). However, within the UK Armed Forces the deployment period is typically 6-9 months (Royal Navy and Royal Marines Children's fund, 2009), this suggests that research completed within the UK would be similar to those found in the USA, though not the same.



Image available at:  
[http://www.telegraph.co.uk/content/dam/wellbeing/2016/Spark/support-armed-forces/ssafa-what-is-ssafa-Get-support\\_client-supplied-xlarge.jpg](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/content/dam/wellbeing/2016/Spark/support-armed-forces/ssafa-what-is-ssafa-Get-support_client-supplied-xlarge.jpg), (2016)

Deployment and training away from home are thought to be typical of the military lifestyle, these absences have been reported to change the dynamics within the household, many documents suggest that the parent left behind with children will often feel like a single parent while their spouse is away (Drummet, *et al.*, 2003; Farrell-Wright, 2011; Trautmann, *et al.*, 2015). The departures of service men and women are often random, short notice, and unpredictable (Royal Navy and Royal Marines Children's fund, 2009). Furthermore, it has been reported to be difficult to explain absences to family members and children, and not enough time is given to help them adjust to the information (Drummet, *et al.*, 2003). This can be particularly difficult for parents of young children aged birth-5 years, as children this young often do not have the understanding or the language to comprehend the situation and the true meaning of the separation (Murphey *et al.*, 2011; Murphey, 2013). Moreover,

many of the studies agree that there is not enough research completed to see the full effects that a military lifestyle has upon young children (Hunter & Hickman, 1981; MacDermid, *et al.*, 2008; Barker & Berry, 2009; Boberiene & Hornback, 2014; Trautmann, *et al.*, 2015). Nevertheless, Murray & Kuntz (2002) believed that children are the most effected family members and have more negative experiences from deployment and absences. On a critical note, current research completed in the UK suggests that there is no registered number of children growing up within a Ministry of Defence (MOD) camp to date (Ofsted, 2011). Therefore, it can be implied that the true impact of a military upbringing upon young children is unknown in the UK, as the number of children effected is unregistered.

### Separation and stress through deployment and work

The effects of long term and repeated deployment during a child's early development, and the implications for the child's well-being has sparked the interest of many researchers. It has been questioned whether or not young children form significant attachments with the absent parent during this critical stage of development, and the implications this has upon their social, emotional, and cognitive development (Department of Defence, 2010; Farrell-Wright, 2011; Murphey *et al.*, 2011; Mulrooney & Williams, 2012; Baberiene & Hornback, 2014; Trautmann



Image available at: <http://www.teachingtimes.com/news/green-light-salisbury.htm>, (2008)

*et al.*, 2015). Many studies suggest that young children will often pass through emotional stages when a parent is being deployed, this emotional rollercoaster starts during the pre-deployment phase, through to the actual deployment, and then the reintegration into the family unit (Murphey *et al.*, 2011; Murphey, 2013).

This confusing time for children can often cause them to feel many different emotions such as: anxiety and stress over whether or not the deployed parent will return, as well as showing signs of anger, depression, attention difficulties, or hyperactivity (Hunter & Hickman, 1981; Drummet *et al.*, 2003; Barker & Berry, 2009; Department of Defence, 2010; Baberiene & Hornback, 2014). It has been reported that a child's reaction to parental absences can be related to

their age and stage of development, such as infants often display moodiness, hyperactivity, and refusal to eat when there are changes to the primary carer and routine, as the infant will feel unsettled (Murphey *et al.*, 2011). Whereas, toddlers are reported to display clinginess, sadness, frequent tantrums, and sleep disruptions when a parent is sent on operations, these behaviours displayed are often because toddlers do not have the communication and language to express their feelings and emotions over the situation, so their actions often become erratic and can be difficult to manage (Murray & Kuntz, 2002; Murphey *et al.*, 2011). And finally, preschool aged children often show signs of clinginess, regressive behaviours, verbalising their fears and thoughts, and can feel guilty for the caregivers' absence, believing that the absence of the parent is their fault (Murray & Kuntz, 2002; Murphey *et al.*, 2011). These behaviours have been noted on occasions to worsen with longer and repeated absences, as children become more unsettled and confused by the situation (Masten, 2013; Murphey, 2013; Trautmann *et al.*, 2015). However, it is unclear whether these emotional behaviours have a long lasting effect upon a child's social and emotional development. Stereotypically, it is assumed that children will have more negative emotions and experiences while one or both parents are deployed. However, research shows there are also positive outcomes for children raised on MOD camps, as they have been reported to be more resilient than their civilian peers (Ofsted, 2011; Masten, 2013), which would enable children to cope better with change and challenging situations. In addition, service children are exposed to more multi-cultural experiences due to frequent relocation, and interactions with other nationalities based in UK camps (Ofsted, 2011). Furthermore, it has been reported by Rowe *et al.* (2014) that older children raised in the military tend to display less delinquent behaviour, and have better self-control. This unique environment and lifestyle is suggested to help form good support networks, as most of the families will be experiencing similar stressful situations (Farrell-Wright, 2011; Clever & Segal, 2013). Hunter & Hickman (1981) suggest that children raised in these environments tend to be more family orientated when compared to their civilian counterparts, due to the closeness of the community around them. On the other hand, parents on military camps are thought to believe that the MOD camp lifestyle has more negative outcomes on their children than a civilian lifestyle (Rowe *et al.*, 2014). Unfortunately, it is thought that young children mirror the emotions and

feelings that their parents display, therefore when a parent experiences and shows stress, fear, and anxiety while their spouse is deployed, the children will also feel these negative emotions (Booth *et al.*, 1994; Drummet *et al.*, 2003; MacDermid *et al.*, 2008; Murphey, 2013). Consequently, it is reported that children raised on military camps as young as 5 years old are visiting mental health clinics within America (Waliski, 2012; Baberiene & Hornback, 2014).

### Support and childcare on military camps

Stability, routine, and early education can be seen as essential for children living in such a chaotic and unpredictable environment, therefore nurseries and childcare provisions within military camps appear to be a necessity. Within the UK, nurseries and childcare facilities follow the guidelines set about by the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) document (2012), a national government document. These guidelines are implemented to help children meet their developmental outcomes in seven different areas of learning, including social and emotional development. Some developmental milestones include: building relationships with others, enjoying exploring new toys and surroundings, and understanding and recognising their own emotions (Sroufe, 1997; Denham, *et al.*, 2003; Hansen & Zambo, 2007; DfE, 2012). The EYFS (2012) provides generic guidance to practitioners for many different types of childcare facilities such as: encourage and provide opportunities to discuss and explore their own emotions and feelings (Elfer, *et al.*, 2012, DfE, 2012). As the EYFS (2012) is a government document, nurseries within military camps must also adhere to these standards and outcomes. However, as mentioned previously children raised in a military environment may have some social and emotional difficulties, and to best support children experiencing difficulties and stressful living conditions, practitioners need to be more vigilant in their approach to supporting child development (Elfer, *et al.*, 2012; Golding, *et al.*, 2013). Unfortunately, there appears to be no compulsory qualification or training that is needed to support these vulnerable children, only the minimum level 2 qualification (DfE, 2014). On the other hand, research conducted in the USA has been suggested that levels of childcare are at the highest of standards, in order to provide the stability and support that are lacking for families and children during their time on a military camp, while also

ensuring that childcare is affordable for all families. These standards for early years in USA military camps are enshrined within the Military Child Care Act 2010 (Zellman *et al.*, 1995; MacDermid *et al.*, 2008; Petty, 2009; Mulrooney & Williams, 2012; Murphey, 2013; Trautmann, *et al.*, 2015). Therefore, with current research stating the importance of stability and attachments for child development and all the support available within the USA for families and practitioners, the researcher poses the question; is there enough support for the social and emotional needs of service children and are they being met by the EYFS (2012), or is there a need for additional support and guidance in nurseries for military raised children?



Image available at: <https://www.ssafa.org.uk/about-us/latest>, (2016)

## Research Findings

The researcher implemented a case study methodology to investigate whether the Early Years foundation stage document (2012) supports the social and emotional needs of service children. The researcher completed 2 different methods of data collection: interviews and questionnaires. Unfortunately, at the time of data collection no children were experiencing absences, so no observations could be recorded to gain more evidence as to how military children are supported socially and emotionally in the nursery setting.

It is interesting to note that during the interviews the highest level of qualification held was a degree in leadership and management from the manager of the nursery, the deputy manager held a level 3 in childcare and education (Staff3, Appendix F3). While the lowest level of qualification held was a level 2 in childcare and education (Staff1, Appendix F1). All of the staff interviewed appeared to have a wealth of experience working with children, spanning from Staff4 having worked the least number of years in childcare with 5 years of experience, to Staff3 having worked with children for over 20 years. As all the interviewed staff have many years of experience, it can suggest that they are more than competent in meeting the needs of children within the early years setting. As mentioned in interviews with Staff3, Staff4, and Staff5, the staff have learned and improved upon failed techniques at supporting the families living within the military lifestyle (Appendix F3, Appendix F4, and Appendix F5).

Questionnaires were given to all parents present at the time of distribution, approximately 30 questionnaires were distributed and 12 were returned. In the questionnaires the parents were asked questions regarding separation and support available within the military lifestyle (Appendix C). The mean age of the children involved in the research was 3 years old. It is widely known that military families frequently relocate, therefore the researcher asked how long each child had been attending the nursery, and the longest period of time at the nursery was reported to be 2 years and the shortest period of time was 3 months. Within the families the mean number of parents serving in the military was found to be 1 parent per household, during the interviews, staff stated that this was typically the father that served in the military (Staff5, Appendix F5). Analysing the data from the

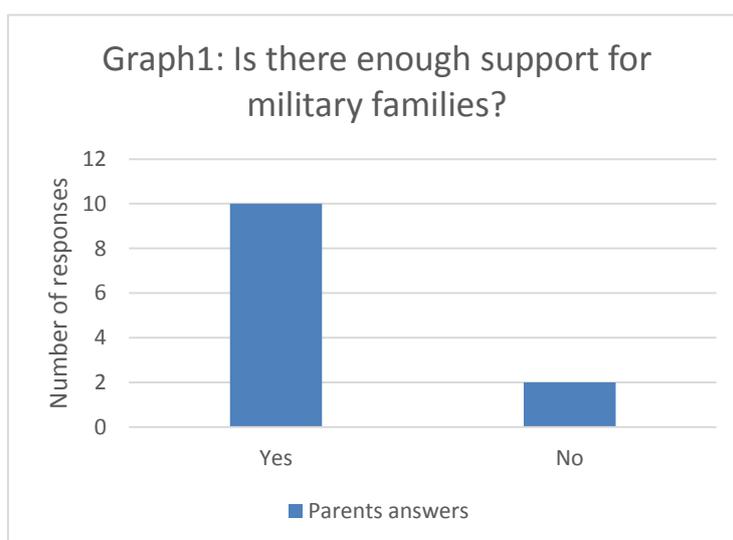
questionnaires, it can be seen that 10 of the 12 families have experienced separation either from training exercises or deployment, the median number of days separated was recorded to be 36 days. Using grounded theory analysis a code was used with the qualitative data from both the interviews and questionnaires and common themes were found, these themes are, support, training and qualifications, military lifestyle, and child behaviours (Bell, 2005; Robert-Holmes, 2011; Denscombe, 2014).

### Support

The researcher asked the staff if they had noted any different behaviours displayed by children while experiencing parental absences and many different behaviours were listed, however when discussing child behaviours, practitioners expressed that free childcare places, and government funding would be extremely beneficial for military families. Practitioners identified that service children displayed different emotional needs while experiencing parental separation, such as “different behaviours” (Staff1 and Staff3), impacts upon how children form attachments (Staff2 and Staff4), withdrawn (Staff3), separation anxiety, emotional, and struggling to form relationships with their peers or staff (Staff4). This is in agreement with the evidence identified in the literature review, stating that children undergo many emotional phases during separation from parents such as, anger, depression, and attention difficulties (Hunter & Hickman, 1981; Drummet *et al.*, 2003; Barker & Berry, 2009; Department of Defence, 2010; Baberlene & Hornback, 2014). During the interviews the 2 year old offer was frequently mentioned, suggesting that it would be particularly, beneficial for children living on military camps and would help practitioners and parents to support children during these challenging times. Unfortunately, during the interviews Staff4 and Staff5 stated that due to high wages, service families did not meet the requirements, and are not entitled to the free child care places. In addition, the pupil premium was also suggested to be very beneficial for service families, however like the 2 year old offer, service families do not meet the financial requirements (Staff5, AppendixF5). Staff4, Staff2, and Staff3 were reported to state that deployment and training exercises often took its toll on the parents left behind, and that by including service families in the offer, would not only help the children but also the parents. Staff4 suggests that the 2 year old offer would particularly benefit the parents financially, as many of the families have one working

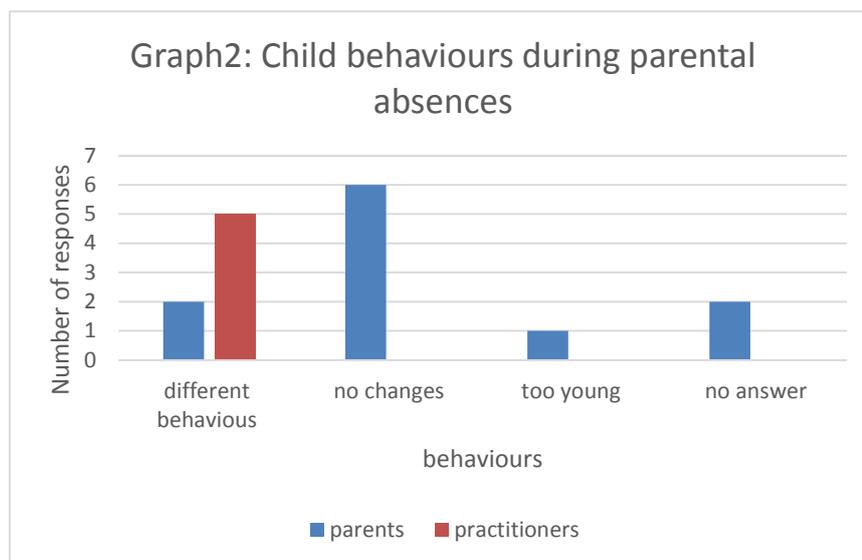
parent, as one parent needs to be available at home while one parent is away on deployment. Furthermore, Staff5 stated "...why shouldn't they be included in the funding..." (Staff5, Line 89, Appendix F5), she went on to say "...there is no type of accountability for those children..." (Line 92, Appendix F5). Therefore, it was suggested that by including military children within the funded nursery places, that service children would be better supported when experiencing parental absences (Staff5, Appendix F5).

Staff3 was noted to state that service children are often in environments that are sad and depressing, and that the 2 year offer would benefit children by "...getting out of the environment for a couple of hours a day..." (Line 100, Appendix F3). Family1 suggested that free childcare provisions should be provided for families while the mother or father is away on training or deployment, would help improve support for service families (Appendix G1). This is in agreement with Staff2, she believed that government investments in children's clubs and groups would be very beneficial for the children, while also giving the parents left at home time to themselves, she also suggested that there should be some investment in parenting support groups. Ultimately, if service children were entitled to the free child care schemes, it would provide them with a stable and routine environment, whilst surrounded by the chaotic and unsettled environment that is associated with the military lifestyle, this in turn would help support the children in their development.



However, in terms of support available for parents and military families, many of the parents disagreed with the practitioners. Parents were asked, within the questionnaire, whether they believed there was enough support available for service families (Appendix C). Graph1 shows that 10 families believe there is enough support for families, on the other hand 2 participants, Family1 and Family2 suggested that it was difficult to find the support, although once the support was found, it was in fact very good. This is supported by a statement made by Staff3 during the interviews, she stated that there was a wide range of support for parents, including parenting groups and support workers, stating that the provision were offered to parents and that it would be their choice if they accepted the support. This is also in agreement with literature in the review, it is suggested that as the military community is so close knit and restricted that there is good support networks within the military camps themselves (MacDermid, *et al.*, 2008). Interestingly, when answering question 9 in the questionnaires "Have you ever sought advice and support about military family life?" only 1 out of the 12 families that completed the questionnaires had in fact sought support, all other participants answered no to the question (Family2, Appendix G2). This appears to contradict statements made by staff members during the interviews. It was reported that all staff stated that being an emotional support for parents during times of deployment or training exercises, was a large part of their job role, staff were reported to say that they make themselves available for parents during these difficult times (Staff4, Appendix F4). Staff5 reported to have consoled parents on numerous occasions, in addition Staff3 was noted to state that many of the families are very young and inexperienced, and often need a lot of support and help from the practitioners. Staff4 was noted to express difficulties over forming relationships and building up trust with the parents, as parents are often "...wary of building relationships because they have to move all the time..." (Line 149, Appendix F4). This suggests that the nursery facility and the staff within are seen as a big part of the support network within the military community, which is a large responsibility for the practitioners.

## Child behaviours



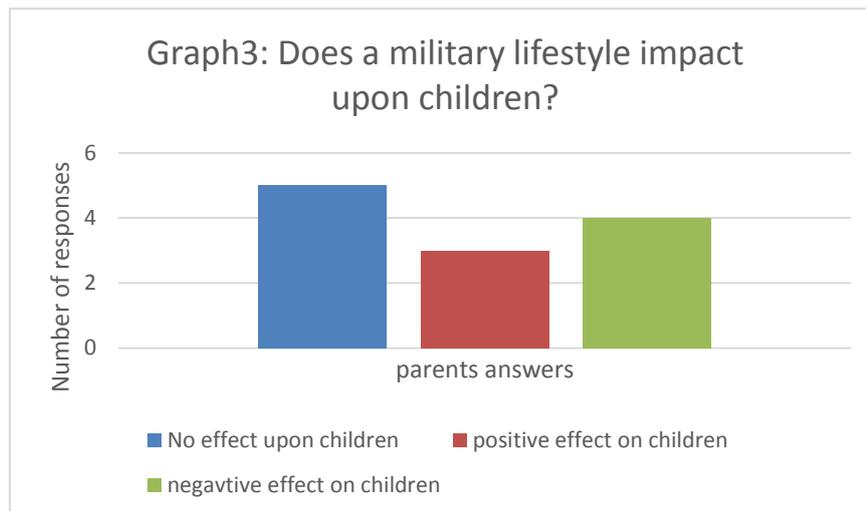
Graph2 depicts the answers given by both practitioners and parents regarding attitudes and behaviours, which children may or may not have displayed during parental absences. As seen on Graph2, all 5 early years practitioners were noted to recognise several social and emotional changes in children, while they are experiencing parental absences, such as clingy and tearful behaviours. This is in agreement with Family1 who described some of the behaviours displayed by their child while experiencing parent separation, it was stated that the child was “Naughty” (Appendix G1) and displayed more attention seeking behaviours, while also having a disturbed sleep pattern. Family3 was noted to describe their child having challenging behaviours for the first 2 weeks of the separation (Appendix G3). This is in agreement with the literature review, where it was identified, that in addition to clinginess and tearfulness, children can also display more temper tantrums and sleep disruptions (Murray & Kuntz, 2002; Murphey *et al.*, 2011). However, Family2, Family4, Family7, Family6, Family8, Family10, Family11, Family12, were reported to not have noticed any different behaviours in their children while parents were away. One reason for not noticing any differences was reported to be that the child was too young to understand that the parent was absent (Family6, Appendix G6). Family5 and Family9 participants did not answer the question, this was due to the fact that their children had not experienced any parental absences (Appendix G5 and G9). As all staff members’ recognised different behaviours displayed by children, this raises

the question of the reliability of the data gathered from the questionnaires. In addition, it is important to note that during the interviews Staff3 stated that babies were "...not so much..." (Line 21, Appendix F3) effected by parental absences when compared to their older counterparts. On the other hand, she added later in the interview that she did not work directly in the rooms with the children anymore as she is the manager of the nursery, and that the key workers notice more (Staff3, Appendix F3).

The different behaviours displayed in children have been found to be age and stage of development related (Murphey *et al.*, 2011), and interestingly this is also evident in the answers given by the practitioners, whereby the leader of the baby and nursery room described numerous behaviours and attitudes that changed within the children when their parents went away (Staff2 and Staff4, Appendix F2 and F4). However, when interviewing the deputy manager (Staff5) she stated that children may appear quiet or not want to participate in activities, she added that these changes often did not last very long (Appendix F5). This disagrees with the literature review, it is stated that often the different behaviours that children display when experiencing absences can often worsen due to the length of deployment, or the frequency of the training away (Masten, 2013; Murphey, 2013; Trautmann *et al.*, 2015). Nevertheless, Staff1, Staff2, Staff4, and Staff5 agreed that a child's overall development was not effected by parental absences "we have never really seen a child that has gone backwards" (Line 32, Staff5, Appendix F5), when monitoring regression within children Staff5 stated that parental absences had "never been any of the reasons that's come up" (Line 34, Appendix F5).

### Military lifestyle

Another common theme throughout the research was noted to be the effects that a military lifestyle has upon families and children. During the questionnaires parents were asked whether they thought that the environment has an impact upon their children. Graph3 shows how the parents responded to Question 6 "Do you feel that life on a military camp impacts upon your child?" (Appendix C). As it can be seen the parents had a mixed response to the question, with some parents answering that the environment had no impact upon their child, while others answered it had both positive and negative effects.



The positive effects of a military lifestyle were noted to be that Family1, Family4, and Family7, believed that their children interacted with other children more than they would do in a civilian environment. In addition to the safety of the environment giving children the freedom to explore and become social beings. Family4 and Family7 suggested that it helped their children to meet new people and stated that there was a lot of support in the environment for families (Family1). This is supported by the findings within the literature review, where it was suggested that there are also positive outcomes of a military lifestyle, such as resilience and being able to form good support networks (Farrell-Wright, 2011; Clever & Segal, 2013; Masten, 2013).

However, the negative effects reported by parents were noted to be, the frequency of deployment and how often the children are experiencing parental absences. Family6 were noted to answer that the institutionalised environment had negative effects upon their children. Furthermore, Family5 suggested that it is a very sheltered life within a military camp, and that having to move every 2 to 3 years has a large impact upon their children (Appendix G5). This is in agreement with Staff5, during the interviews she stated that the frequent relocation had a larger impact upon a child, when compared to experiencing parental absences (Appendix F5). She also stated that it has a negative effect upon the children that are not relocated, as they are often confused and upset that their peers have moved. Sadly, Family8 answered that he felt that his son was missing something from him as a father, and that he himself was missing something from his son as a result of the military environment. Using Bronfenbrenner's theory of ecological cycles (1994), it can be seen that the child is at the centre of everything, and all of their surroundings have an impact upon them

whether it is the parents, the parent's job, school, or the environment they live in, This emphasises the large impact that a military lifestyle has upon a child and their wellbeing. On the other hand, Graph3 shows that 5 parents; Family10, Family11, Family12, Family2, Family9 answered that the military lifestyle has no impact upon their children, whether that be a positive or negative effect, suggesting that their children would have the same experiences in a civilian environment.

### Training and qualifications

As very little research could be found regarding nurseries and childcare facilities on military camps in the UK, the researcher asked staff within the interviews whether they thought there was any differences between the nursery on a military camp compared to a civilian nursery. Interestingly, the staff all agreed that the level of education and the delivery of the Early Years Foundation Stage document (2012) is the same as the delivery in a civilian nursery, however some differences were noted to be discussed (Staff3 and Staff5). Staff1 and Staff4 stated that they had only ever worked in a military nursery, and therefore could not discuss difference, however Staff4 stated that during her level 3 training she had attended a civilian nursery as a part of her placement, she was recorded stating that, due to families frequently relocated "it's very difficult for practitioners to see where they are in their development" (Line 71, Staff4, Appendix F4). Although she did state that when a parent is away due to training, the stay at home parent is often thought of as a single parent, which is similar to the single parents attending civilian nurseries. However, military families and children have the constant change in routine when the parent is away and then when they return (Staff4). Staff3 suggested that the military nursery appeared to provide more support for parents when compared to a civilian nursery, Staff3 also added that the military nursery is more flexible for parents to stay and play with their children. Unfortunately, one of the main differences to a military nursery and civilian nursery, are the frequent relocations for families, Staff4 and Staff5 stated that this was one of the major challenges to working with military families, as the children usually do not attend the nursery for long periods of time, and so there is always a constant new intake. Staff4 was reported to say that the files to track child development had to be kept up to date and ready for the next nursery that the children would be moving on to. On a positive note, Staff2 stated

that she felt that the environment was very safe for children, and would often take children on walks around the camp “knowing that the children are safe at all times” (Line 69, Staff2, Appendix F2).

After differences between a military and civilian nursery had been identified, the researcher asked the staff whether they believed their qualifications and training was sufficient to work with service children. All of the staff agreed that their training and early childhood qualification, did not provide them with the correct tools for working with children with a military background. Staff2 was noted to say that having a course or training to prepare staff for the emotional and social difficulties of military children, and how best to support children’s emotional wellbeing while parents are away on exercise or deployment (Staff2, Appendix F2). She went on to say that it would help practitioners if there was a course discussing “What to expect when you come and work in a military environment” (Line 163, Staff2, Appendix F2). This is in agreement with Staff3 who stated that “no, no, we have had to learn and we have made mistakes going through it” (Line 106, Staff3, Appendix F3). Staff4 stated that she had completed her own research into military families and how best to support them and had asked advice from other staff members, however she did state that it was difficult to understand, and know how best to support the families when she first started. Staff5 stated that her qualifications alone would not be enough to support staff working with military families, however she did state that because she entered the nursery as a mature woman with personal experiences that helped her support military children. Staff1 was the only member of staff that lived on the military camp, she stated that her qualification was sufficient for the nursery, however she did add that it was her own personal experiences of living on the camp with her children, which aided her the most. With all the data gathered from the interviews it is clear that the staff members relied on their personal experiences, to help them best support service children and families. This suggests that more could be available for staff in order to provide them with the skills to best support children living in a military environment.

## Discussion and conclusion

The aim of this study was to investigate whether the Early Years Foundation Stage document (2012) is supporting the social and emotional development of children raised on a UK military camp. Much of the current research surrounding social and emotional development in service children, has been conducted in America with many negative impacts identified for young children (Mulrooney & Williams, 2012; Trautmann, *et al.*, 2015). Additionally, there appears to be very little mention of nurseries within military camps, however the childcare facilities that are mentioned within USA military camps boasts of higher qualified staff and the best childcare facilities throughout the whole of the USA (Mulrooney & Williams, 2012; Murphey, 2013; Trautmann, *et al.*, 2015). Though, within the UK there is little to no mention of childcare facilities located within the camps, or the standards to which they work towards.

Studies show that within the UK and USA there has been a sudden increase in the research surrounding early years development of service children (Department of Defence, 2010; Farrell-Wright, 2011; Murphey *et al.*, 2011; Mulrooney & Williams, 2012; Baberiene & Hornback, 2014; Trautmann *et al.*, 2015). Nevertheless, the current studies neglect to investigate the support available to these children in the early years, or in fact the child care facilities themselves. Upon starting the research, the researcher expected to find service children delayed in certain social and emotional skills due to the stress and unique circumstances of the home environment. Along with the EYFS (2012) suggesting unreachable targets for children, that are suffering social and emotional difficulties. Conversely, evidence gathered during data collection suggests that it may in fact concern staff qualifications rather than the EYFS (2012) curriculum, which may need improvements in order to best support service children.

During the interviews it was agreed by the majority of the staff was that there does not appear to be enough support or training for practitioners when supporting these vulnerable children. When answering questions during the interviews, it was evident that a major part of the practitioner's role was not only to meet the needs of the children at the nursery, but also to support the vulnerable parents. One member of staff stated that she had often found it difficult to create a bond and relationship with

parents and had to often ask advice from more senior members of staff. In addition, it was suggested that it had taken time and practice to understand the parents, and know how best to work effectively with the families. This suggests that there may not be enough training for practitioners to specifically work with, and support military raised children and their emotional needs, as it has been identified that service children undergo much stress, and upset during parental deployment and staff should be fully equipped with knowledge to support their emotional wellbeing. By providing staff with training to specifically support military families, it may help staff to better support these families during vulnerable and difficult times, while also highlighting the importance of forming a secure attachment with service children. In addition to helping staff to become more confident in their own knowledge and skills.

It is well documented that service children undergo much stress and chaos as a part of the environment and lifestyle that they are surrounded by (Hunter & Nice, 1983; Mulrooney & Williams, 2012; Lieberman & Horn, 2013). Research suggests that the best way to support children raised on a military camp is to provide some consistency, and for them to build up an attachment with an early years worker (Murphey, 2013; Trautmann, *et al.*, 2015). Therefore, giving children a regular and consistent person within their life, particularly when one or both of their parents are away due to deployment or training (Petty, 2009). As a result of this unique lifestyle, service children can in fact be referred to as vulnerable children (Ofsted, 2011). Therefore, it surprised the researcher to discover that UK military families were not entitled to, and did not meet the criteria for government funding that supports vulnerable children, to form attachments with qualified early years workers. Without the support of local early years practitioners and the attachment that they can provide children, may struggle to cope with the varied emotions that are related to parent absences.

Recent government agendas have been implemented across the UK to support children living in poverty, as children living in poverty are believed to live in chaotic, unstable, and challenging environments that often impacts upon children's social and emotional, and other areas of development (Penn and Riley, 1992; Simpson, 2015). However, it was highlighted in the interviews that children living within a military environment are not included in most government schemes to support vulnerable

children and families. Therefore, it raises questions that even though these children are raised in a challenging and unique environment, why they are not included in any government funding. These children face many difficulties in life due to the environment in which they live, and so should be entitled to some kind of free day care provision in order to provide the children with stability and continuity, while they undergo parental absences. This dissertation project will help to raise awareness of the difficulties that young children raised in the military go through, and hopefully in future, funding will be changed to include military families and service children.

During data collection prior to the interviews, several members of staff stated that they were nervous and that they were unsure as to whether they would be able to answer the questions. This would impact upon the ecological validity of the data gathered, as the participants were tense and nervous, and so may not have been able to answer the questions to the best of their abilities (Greig, *et al.* 2013). To rectify, the researcher will attempt to calm them prior to the interviews and attempt to make the interviews similar to an informal conversation to create a relaxed environment. In addition, the researcher will use other methods of data collection to increase the validity of the answers given by practitioners, this could be done through using questionnaires as well as interviews with the staff, so that they have time to think about the answers without feeling pressured. Unfortunately, the researcher was unable to complete observations of the children experiencing parental absences, due to no children experiencing absences at the time of data collection. The observations would have helped the researcher to increase the validity of the data collected, as well as an accurate account of how practitioners support children experiencing absences. Next time the researcher will plan and liaise with practitioners and parents, as to what is the best time and day to complete observations.

With the growing interest into the effects of a military lifestyle on young children, it is clear that much of this area is still to be discovered, such as the implications of frequent relocations on children under 5. Therefore, it would be interesting for the researcher to undergo a longitudinal study from birth to 5 years on the emotional highs and lows, and compare and track the development in comparison to civilian children. In addition to investigating other nurseries based within the tri-service

camps, and compare the nurseries within the Navy, Royal Air Force, Army camps. Unfortunately, as the current number of service children is unknown within the UK (Ofsted, 2011), it is difficult to identify the true positive and negative effects that the military lifestyle has upon young children. However, it is clear that in order to best support these children they need to be supported by highly qualified staff, so that they are able to build up a relationship and attachment that supports them through parental absences, and the best way to do this is through consistent contact with practitioners.

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