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SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

AN EXPLORATORY STUDY IDENTIFYING HARDSHIPS  
CONFRONTING CANADIAN MILITARY FAMILIES

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BY  
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**AN EXPLORATORY STUDY IDENTIFYING HARDSHIPS  
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**A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of  
the University of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
of the degree of**

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to identify those areas of military life that are capable of provoking hardship situations for the nuclear families of Canadian Forces personnel.

The study was conducted in two phases; the first being a survey of qualified observers to identify hardships confronting military families. Twenty-two military social workers were requested to give their professional opinions regarding hardship events and the military family. The findings from the qualified observer data led to the formulation of a number of propositions regarding hardship events and the military family. These propositions became the basis for a comprehensive questionnaire.

The second phase of the study utilized the above-noted questionnaire in a survey of five hundred military families. This survey was designed to elicit responses from members of Canadian military families in order to test the propositions advanced from the first phase of the study.

The findings from the survey of Canadian military families indicate that there are two major areas of military life that are capable of provoking hardship situations for Canadian military families. These areas are postings, and family separations due to military duties away from home base. The results from the propositions tested in regard to the area of postings, indicate

that a posting may become a hardship situation for a family when that family experiences one or more of the following events: the family is separated for a period of time due to a lack of available military housing at the new base; the renting of civilian accommodation in the area of the new posting creates financial problems for the family; the posting creates complications for a dependent's medical condition; the posting creates problems for a dependent's schooling; the posting creates financial problems due to the loss of wife's job; and the posting negates wife's ability to be gainfully employed.

The second major area provoking hardship situations for the nuclear families of Canadian Forces personnel is family separations due to husband/father absences. The survey findings verify the qualified observer propositions that the following types of separations are hardship events: multiple separations of less than six months that are experienced within three months or less of one another; and separations of six months or more where the family does not have access to supporting social networks.

In conclusion, this exploratory study led to the identification of those areas of military life that are capable of provoking hardship situations for the nuclear families of Canadian Forces personnel.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The following study which is exploratory and descriptive in nature is designed to elucidate the problem areas that are encountered by the nuclear families of the members of the Canadian Armed Forces. After the Second World War, Canada abolished conscription and returned to a volunteer force.<sup>1</sup> Recruitment of its members was from the general labour pool in competition with other large organizations and corporations. With the continuance of peace, the armed forces emphasized the opportunity for travel, trades training, security, and a pension while pursuing a life-time career within the military. This emphasis on a military career of up to thirty-seven years meant that a service person in all likelihood would join as a single person, eventually marry and raise a family while pursuing a military career. These families may be characterized as military families and it is this segment of the military population with which the study is concerned.

When one thinks of the military it tends to be in terms of fighting units; tanks, ships and aircraft. As a first impression this may not be a totally false assumption. However, one should not lose sight of the fact that the military is an

organization of men and women, who like the greater society from which they came, have by and large the same needs, wants and ensuing problems. In Canada, during any one year, thousands of Canadian military families face numerous problems ranging in scope from temporary separation of the service member from his/her nuclear family to alienation of family members through geographical relocations. In a study of the United States military, Raymond M. Marsh stated that:

... many of the families in the study sample experienced a crisis situation as a result of the stressful nature of these problems. It was not within the scope of this research to examine the degree of severity of family crises but the study did provide evidence that hardships resulting from the move occurred in the vast majority of families who participated in the study.<sup>2</sup>

Marsh's study concluded that the majority of American military families sampled did experience hardships as a result of geographic relocations. The question that now arises is whether Marsh's findings have any significance for the Canadian military family? As there are no systematic studies to indicate that periodic moving is a hardship to Canadian military families, one can only speculate that enforced moving is a problem area for the nuclear families of Canadian Forces personnel. This study acknowledges the lack of Canadian research on the above-noted area of mobility as well as any other area of military life that may be classified as a hardship event for the immediate family

of Canadian Forces personnel.

### Rationale

The need for systematic research into the problem areas encountered by the Canadian military family was clearly expressed and substantiated during a 1977 military and civilian social work conference on the Canadian Military Family held at Canadian Forces Base Trenton, Ontario. During this conference, delegates unanimously endorsed the need for future systematic studies into the problem areas that confront the nuclear families of Canadian Forces personnel. A quote from the official summary of the proceedings of the conference stated:

Few, if any of the problems that surfaced at this conference have been adequately addressed through systematic study ... Specifically, frequent moves appear to place additional strains on a large portion of families, particularly where the movement involves teenagers, greater financial outlays with no compensating rewards (e.g. promotion and higher salary), or where family problems already exist. The Forces represents one of the few employing organizations that demands even its lower participants (i.e. non-supervisory levels) to frequently move from one location to another and it is within this group where many of the financial and other stresses are likely to be the greatest. Frequent moves may be bound up with other specific problems inherent in social trends mentioned above. For example, they may create for the single parent a great deal of difficulty; they may interfere with one spouse's career plans in a two career family or otherwise create tension; they may create financial hardships in high cost areas where military

living quarters are not provided; they may force separation in cases where accommodation is either non-existent or unavailable for an extended period of time ...

Finally, there are a set of problems that stem from the frequent absences of the husband. While in a large number of cases, the family adapts to the absence of the father/husband, in a significant proportion of cases it either does not adapt (i.e. the family disintegrates) or it adapts too well (i.e. the husband is written out of his family role). It may also be expected that absences provide the circumstances that may lead to mental illness of a spouse, juvenile delinquency, family neglect, divorce, separation, or other types of family dissolution.

Although these situations are not entirely absent from Canadian families at large, they appear to be much more prevalent in the Forces and research is required to determine their impact.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to identifying certain problem areas encountered by nuclear families of Canadian Forces personnel and the need for research into these areas, the conference findings also alluded to the symbiotic relationship that exists between the family and the military establishment. That the nuclear family by virtue of its association with, and dependency upon the military organization, periodically is placed under periods of hardship that may have the propensity for provoking a crisis situation within the family. Further, that the family is central to the effective maintenance and functioning of the Forces and that for many members there is a conflict between the demands of the

Forces, and the demands of family life.

In spite of the above-noted hardships, not all families react adversely to problems that arise from military service. In fact many families appear to gain an added sense of family solidarity and commitment to neighbours and community. To cite examples of this community involvement, one has only to look within the rosters of various volunteer organizations to see the high proportion of military members and their dependents.<sup>4</sup> The positive aspects of inter and intra family support systems as an effective measure for coping with hardship situations has been recognized by numerous social researchers. Hill (1958), in a discussion of social stress on the family, noted the significance of the family's attitude and interaction within the community as a mechanism for dealing with hardship situations. Hill stated:

It has always puzzled observers that some families ride out the vicissitudes of floods and disasters without apparent disorganization ... The key appears to be at the meaning dimension. Stressor become crisis in line with the definitions that the family makes of the event ... The families who adjust least well were families whose relationships with relatives and neighbours had become tenuous ... These families lacked the nest of supporting families with which to share their troubles and were therefore forced to live alone in an enforced anonymity. Left to their own devices, crisis stricken families in a new neighbourhood withdrew into their narrow family circles and festered inwardly rather than risk being rebuffed.<sup>5</sup>



Hill, in this study of mobility, indicates a relationship between intensity of family crisis and the interpretation the family places on the hardship event, plus the family's ability to develop and maintain external support systems.

In the decade that followed the Second World War, the Canadian military family was supported and nurtured by the military establishment.<sup>6</sup> During this time period the proportion of serving personnel with families was relatively small when compared to the overall strength of the military. Most military camps provided rental accommodation at a moderate rate, schools for dependents, recreation and social centers for use by the families.<sup>7</sup> The majority of these facilities were physically located within the camp which led to many military families viewing themselves as separate from the larger body of Canadian families. However, during the late '50s a change in the ratio of married to single personnel produced situations where growing numbers of military families were forced to live in surrounding civilian communities. The impact of physical separation from the closed military community, plus the changing economic and social dynamics of Canadian society during the '60s, has led many Canadian military families to view themselves as being like "any other Canadian family."<sup>8</sup> In an address to social workers at a conference on the "Military Family," Benjamin Schlesinger noted how close the military family has come to any other family.

He attributes this to the changing demands of Canadian life, coupled with a military life-style that has become less isolated physically and socially from the life-styles of any other Canadian families.<sup>9</sup>

Although it may be argued that the military family may not be unique from many other Canadian families in regard to life-style and the hardship situations with which it has to cope, a question may be raised as to whether the military family, due to service requirements, is confronted with a greater frequency and multiplicity of hardship situations. In a 1971 survey conducted at Canadian Forces Base Portage la Prairie, Manitoba it was determined that the sample population of fifty-five military families moved on the average of once every 2.43 years,<sup>10</sup> while according to the 1971 Canada Year Book, 16.9 percent of Canadian families moved on the average of once every five years.<sup>11</sup> It would appear from a cursory comparison of the above-noted information that by and large the incidence for confrontation with a hardship provoking situation is substantially greater for military than non-military families. When one considers the large number of families connected with the military, plus the requirement of periodic enforced relocations, the implication that moving may provoke hardships for the nuclear family has important meaning and dimensions for the helping professionals who provide services to these families as well as

those military directorates that control the overall policy relating to nuclear families of Canadian Forces personnel.

As of November, 1976 almost 65 percent of the Canadian Forces personnel were married; however, if we subtract those individuals who are undergoing initial training (approximately 50 percent of the single personnel) and add those individuals who are divorced, separated, widowed, single parent, or who are living commonlaw, the estimated figure is closer to 90 percent.<sup>12</sup>

TABLE 1

MARITAL STATUS CANADIAN FORCES PERSONNEL  
01 NOVEMBER 1976

Status	Number	Percentage
Married	51,389	64.4
Widowed	155	0.2
Divorced	814	1.0
Separated	885	1.1
Single	25,154	31.4
Undefined	1,594	1.9
Total	79,991	100.00

Due to the extremely high proportion of service personnel who are involved in some type of family arrangement, there is a need to examine those conditions of military service which may provoke hardships for the families of Canadian Forces personnel, especially since the families may be either supportive

or non-supportive of military participation. This study recognizes the need to systematically research the effects that a large organization like the military has upon its personnel's immediate families.

### Purpose

The purpose of the study is to further identify and describe those areas of military life that are deemed by this study to provoke hardship situations for the nuclear families of Canadian Forces personnel. As outlined in the above-mentioned rationale, no systematic studies have been carried out in the area of the Canadian military family. Therefore, in the planning of this study it was determined that if a comprehensive body of knowledge is to be compiled on the Canadian military family through this research and through future research, the most logical place to begin scientific investigations of the Canadian military family would be through an exploratory and descriptive study.

In keeping with this goal of compiling a comprehensive body of knowledge on the Canadian military family through systematic research, the purpose of this study is to elucidate by means of exploratory and descriptive analysis, those areas of military life which create hardships for the families of Canadian Forces personnel. The study will be conducted in two

phases:

1. An analysis by qualified observers of the problem confronting military families
2. A comprehensive survey of selected military families based on the findings from the qualified observer data

In summary, this study is being undertaken to illuminate those areas of military life that directly or indirectly provoke hardship conditions for the families of Canadian Forces personnel.

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Hector J. Massey, The Canadian Military: A Profile (Toronto: The Clark Publishing Company, 1972), p. 42.

<sup>2</sup>R.M. Marsh, "Family Disruptions During the Moving Process" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Brandeis University, 1970), p. 92.

<sup>3</sup>Canadian Forces Personnel Applied Research Unit, Proceeding of the Regional Social Work Conference on the Canadian Military Family (Toronto: Canadian Forces Personnel Applied Research Unit, 1977), p. 5.

<sup>4</sup>Volunteer Bureau Winnipeg, Volunteer Listing, 1977.

<sup>5</sup>Reuben Hill, Families Under Stress (New York: Harper and Bros., 1949), p. 141.

<sup>6</sup>Massey, Canadian Military, p. 79.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Canadian Forces, Conference on Military Family, p. 9.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>11</sup>Dominion Bureau of Statistics, Canada Year Book (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1972), p. 102.

<sup>12</sup>Canadian Forces, Conference on Military Family, p. iv.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a literature review of previous studies/research that have been conducted on Canadian and American military families.

An extensive review of the available literature on the military family reveals that no systematic research has been carried out on the problematic areas that confront families of Canadian Forces personnel. The limited number of articles and papers (i.e. Tomlinson, 1972, "The Service Family," Mullen, 1974, "Family Life at Cold Lake") that have been compiled on the Canadian military family appear to be by and large impressionistic viewpoints rather than empirical studies.

To establish any meaningful review of literature on the military family, one must turn to the studies that have been conducted on the American military family. Before proceeding to the review however, one should not lose sight of the fact that important differences do exist between Canadian and American military philosophies and policies, and that these philosophies and policies are disseminated through the chain of command to the lowest echelon and thereby influence the lives of all service personnel and their respective nuclear families,

Janowitz (1960). That is not to say that much of the American research findings are not applicable to Canadian military families, but rather to advise caution in the over-generalization of one to the other.

By way of introducing the research on the American military family, it should be noted that the majority of studies have been carried out during the last decade. In this regard McCubbin, Dahl and Hunter state:

Since the late 1940s, the growth of behavioural science research, represented by the emergence of large civilian and military laboratories to investigate various aspects of performance, behaviour under stress, and human effectiveness, has been reinforced by the military's mission to create and maintain a combat-ready military institution. Therefore, research emphasis has constantly been placed upon selection procedures, troop morale, combat effectiveness, and socialization of the soldier into military life. It was not until recently that family research was even considered as a possible approach to understanding the development and functioning of military personnel.<sup>1</sup>

For the purpose of structure, the following review of literature will be divided into two main content areas; mobility and separation.

#### Geographic Mobility

Of all the tasks that a military family must accomplish in their relationship with the military establishment, the task of periodic geographical mobility appears to create the most



hardships and problems. Sorokin (1959) noted that geographical mobility has both positive and negative aspects for members of military families. On the one hand it appears to broaden the mind and intensify life; while on the other hand it appears to cause emotional and interpersonal problems. Sorokin hypothesized a relationship between psychological pathology, alienation and mobility. However, he goes on to conclude that the cause-and-effect relationship between the hardship of moving and pathology is not a direct relationship. Instead it seems to be influenced by the individual's unique interpretation of the moving experience. Problems stemming from family member's interpretation of enforced geographical relocations were also alluded to by Pederson and Sullivan (1964) in a study of geographical mobility and emotional disturbances in children. In this comparative study, the histories of mobility in normal and emotionally disturbed children of military families were compared. Although the two groups displayed no significant differences with respect to incidence of mobility, Pederson and Sullivan found that the two groups differed significantly in regard to parental attitudes about mobility. In general the parental attitude toward the move was found to be of more importance in affecting the children's behaviour than the move itself.

Litwak (1960) in a study of geographical mobility and the extended family, noted the importance of the extended family

in the moving process. In a summary of his findings he concludes that extended family ties offer emotional support through periods of transition in geographical mobility during which the nuclear family's social contacts are temporarily severed. This research has important implications for the military family as they are usually "shorn of extended kin," due to the family's nomadic existence within the military system. Thus, constant moving of the military family denies them the opportunity to rely on extended family for emotional help when faced with relocations. As commented on by Burchinal and Bauder (1965) the importance of interaction between the military nuclear family and the community at large in adjusting to geographical mobility becomes paramount for the well-being of family members.

Alienation and isolation become prime factors in family pathology when associated with the hardship of relocations. To shed light on the relationship of alienation to the incidence of marital and family problems in general, and associated in time with moving, McKain (1969) studied two hundred enlisted army families. His analysis revealed that the American army family likely to experience the greatest incidence of family problems associated with geographical relocations was the family in which the wife/mother feels alienated from society and from the army community. Further, the families who experienced the greatest number of problems also tended to be minimally involved