THE EFFECT OF DEPLOYMENT ON CANADIAN MILITARY FAMILIES:

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

By

ELNA ROBERTS

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of
The University of Manitoba
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the Degree of

MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK

Faculty of Social Work
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Winnipeg

THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

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ABSTRACT

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Throughout history, the Canadian Forces has been well known for both its peace-keeping and peace-making roles. This changed, however, after September 11, 2001, when the United States launched an international campaign against terrorism. The Canadian government subsequently committed 2,200 soldiers to assist in this endeavour. Currently the Canadian Forces has about 8,000 members preparing for, engaged in, or returning from an overseas mission on any given day (Department of National Defence, 2008). The purpose of this study is to examine the lived experiences of military female partners whose partners have been deployed, and, in particular, to explore how the military female partner experiences the situation within the family context. The central research question of this study is: From the perspective of the female partner, how has deployment affected her family?

Presented are the findings from a qualitative methodology with a phenomenology approach; semi-structured interviews were conducted with nine female military spouses married to Canadian military members who had experienced a deployment between 2002 and 2006.

The data revealed that the stressors the military wives faced could be linked to the deployment of their spouses. Clear patterns emerged in the data, as each emerging theme of deployment revealed the significant changes and challenges these military spouses and their families had to adapt to and overcome. Specifically, the themes that emerged from this study were stressors related to the deployment which included: employment of

participant during deployment, children and deployment; coping, support from family, and supports from the military and the Military Family Resource Centre.

The roles and responsibilities faced by the military wives highlight their strengths and draw special attention to their ability to cope with the demands of a military lifestyle and deployment. The increased roles and responsibilities were often a challenge and these women identified how their personal ability to cope and rely on supports helped them during the deployment period. The women in this study identified a number of informal and formal supports they relied upon during the deployment.

While faced with many stressors that go along with a military environment, these women paid credit to the military lifestyle which provided them with the independence and strength to overcome any challenges presented to them. The women in this study all described themselves as strong, competent, and independent women.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The military dominates the lifestyle of the military family, requiring it to accommodate to various missions, postings, and extended periods of being separated from loved ones (Bowen & Orthner, 1989). Deployment and separation is part of military life, and with the attacks of September 11, 2001, the war in Afghanistan, and the increased demand for deployments of Canadian troops, more public attention has been drawn to the Canadian Military.

Military families cope with issues that are common to most families. These include issues such as childcare, education, and parenting. The military family, however, unlike most families, is also subject to unique stressors related to deployment. During a deployment, the family roles change as the military spouse takes on extra duties and responsibilities. For military families, the pressure of a military environment forces them to behave a certain way that is conducive to a military lifestyle (Hunter, 1982).

The purpose of this study is to examine the lived experiences of military female partners whose partners have been deployed, and, in particular, to explore how the military female partner experiences the situation within the family context. The central research question of this study is: From the perspective of the female partner, how has deployment affected their family?

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

<u>Deployment and the Canadian Military</u>

The Department of National Defence (2006) defines *deployment* as temporary

duty, special tasking, field exercises, restricted postings, or overseas operations, which

are more than 30 days in duration. Deployment, then, is a term used to describe the

assignment of a military member on an unaccompanied duty for a period of time. Since

1947, the Canadian Forces has completed 72 international operations which have

required soldiers to be deployed to various peacekeeping locations (Department of

National Defence, 2007a). Peacekeeping has been a major focus of the Canadian military

since the end of the Korean War (The Loyal Edmonton Regiment Museum, 2000).

The Department of National Defence states that its mission is to "protect Canada

and Canadian interests and values while contributing to international peace and security"

(Government of Canada, 2007). Canada's peacekeeping role began to change with the

September 11, 2001 attack on the United States. As a result, high readiness has become

the Canadian Forces' paradigm with the impetus of the United States Department of

Defense (Department of National Defence, 2004). Canadian Forces members now find

themselves exposed more often to war missions rather than peacekeeping missions

(Department of National Defence, 2007).

The Canadian Forces has increased overseas peace support and other military

commitments to overseas missions. A recent report by CBC indicated that, between 2002

and 2007, approximately 13,500 Canadian soldiers have served in Afghanistan on a

rotating basis (CBC News, 2006; Graveland, 2007). Statistics provided by the

Department of National Defence (2007) indicate that there are approximately 62,000

Regular Force members and 25,000 Reserve Force members, including 4,000 Canadian Rangers. The Canadian Forces reports that, since the beginning of peacekeeping operations, there has been a total deployment of 50,000 troops on a number of operational missions around the world. Currently the Canadian Forces has approximately 4,325 members serving in operations around the world (Department of National Defence, 2007).

This increase in troop rotation has the potential for a number of problems within the military family. Current statistics on the Canadian military family indicate 1,206 members in troop rotation are married or living common-law (King, 2008). Frequent separations and reunions can leave these families with inadequate time for adjustment, resulting in a "flip-flop" family structure whereby family roles, duties, and responsibilities are always shifting in order to meet the requirements of both the military and the family (Hunter, 1982). Although only limited research is available to understand the effect deployment has on the Canadian military family, more research has been done in the United States regarding the effects of deployment and military families.

Pincus et al.(2006) have examined the effect of deployment on the United States military and describe the military family as experiencing five stages within the deployment period: pre-deployment, deployment, sustainment, re-deployment, and finally post-deployment. Pincus, House, Christenson, and Adler, (2006) indicate that within each stage the family has to deal with a number of emotional challenges. They describe the periods of turmoil from pre-deployment to post-deployment where family members experience feelings of alienation and isolation from friends and family.

<u>Military Families</u>

A family is a complex group of individuals who are more than just people living together. According to Figley (1989), to be a family is to recognize the relationships formed amongst its members. Families give individuals an identity. They provide security and a support system for its members when life becomes too rough. Hard work and spending quality time together is a key component of what makes a family.

For the purpose of this study, the *military family* has been defined as a military member and partner who reside together and who have children. Military families, like most families, face a variety of demands on them, such as relocation or separation from family and friends. However, for military families, separation is usually related to deployment. Frequent postings are common occurrences in military life since each Canadian Forces family moves between five and fifteen times during the military member's career (Harrison, 2002). Moving to a new community can cause additional stress to any military family as they leave behind family, friends, and other supports. Frequent moves often lead to isolation, family separations, and the subservience of family needs to the military organization (Benson-Jestin, 1995).

The nature of the job held by military members has an impact on their lifestyle and their family life and may cause immense hardship within the family. Being a member of a military family means regularly facing deployment, which requires Canadian Forces members to spend time away from home for a variety of reasons and for varying lengths of time. The increased incidence of overseas deployments results in the member's absence from home to be the norm, rather than the exception. This leaves the family to deal with the stressors of separation more frequently. When examining

deployment and the Canadian military family, a trend emerges whereby separation and deployment can be seen as a common characteristic that constitutes military family life.

Figley (1989) indicates that family connectedness is important in terms of dealing with stress. He further indicates that stress disrupts a family's normal life routine in unwanted ways. This stress is seen in the difficulties faced by military families during long extended periods of separation. These stressful times reveal the struggles families face; wives often feel disconnected, isolated, and alone, while children may long for their father. Swan, Barros, Chang, Kurek, Kwon, Robbins, Wenz, Groves, Beal, MacDermid, and Weiss (2002) studied separation and deployment in relation to stress, coping, well-being, and marital satisfaction. They found that a lack of social supports and resources, along with instability in the marriage prior to separation, were shown to contribute to stress in military families during deployment.

Although much has been written in recent years about the Canadian Forces, limited theoretical and empirical research exists when it comes to the impact of deployment on Canadian military families. It should be noted that the Canadian Forces is the primary source of information for research on Canadian military families. Current policies within Canadian Forces Health Services Branch recognize that a need exists to provide support and treatment for Canadian Forces members and their families; however, this is not always feasible due to shortages of staff and resources (Department of National Defence Mental Health Service Branch, 2007). According to Harrison and Laliberte (1997), "gendered labour is a cornerstone of the military community, in that it is taken for granted that every military wife will assume 100% of the couple's domestic work and childcare responsibilities during the several months of the year her husband is away on

deployments, counteract the domestic destabilizing effects of her husband's absences by

not seeking, or awarding high priority to, her own paid employment, relinquish her own

paid employment every time her husband is posted to a new place and do most of the

unpaid work associated with each new posting" (p. 37).

Research into Stressors and Coping

Family crisis theory sees stress as a "situation in which one has an important

problem which cannot be solved immediately" (Caplan, 1959, p. 57). Stressors such as

role change, prior unresolved strains, and boundary ambiguity may all be additional

stressors the family is faced with while trying to struggle with a new stressor event

(Lavee, McCubbin, & Patterson, 1985). For military families this is often a major

component contributing to "pile-up", especially for those families recently relocated and

going through a deployment. Research done by McCubbin, Joy, Cauble, Comeau,

Patterson and Needle (1980), indicates that non-normative transitions are associated with

wars, disasters, family conflict, and long-term chronic stressors.

Family stress, then, refers to any strains, burdens, problems or conflicts that cause

some type of discomfort, tension, or frustration to the family (Tseng & Hsu, 1991). It

appears that stress is therefore defined by the response an individual has to an event.

Frequent separations and reunions may allow the family inadequate time for adjustment.

McCubbin and Patterson (1982) indicate that families' patterns of coping affect

individual perception in terms of adapting to both a normative and non-normative event.

Hunter (1982) found that marital relationships face great strain due to the prolonged

periods of separation and stress. Therefore, the nature of the job held by military

members impacts the military spouses' experience as they endure stressors related to their partners' careers, experiencing loss, separation, deprivation, and humiliation (Hunter, 1982).

Monat and Lazarus (1991) indicate that the event causing stress should be considered equally as important as the characteristics of the individual or social system experiencing stress. In a study done by Pittman and Lloyd (1988), the links between stressors, supports, and resources are significant and unique since they contribute to parental satisfaction. Swan et al. (2002) found that a lack of social supports and resources and instability in the marriage prior to separation have been shown to be contributing factors in relation to deployment-related stress and well-being in military families.

The ABC-X, the Double ABC-X and the T Double ABC-X Models

A number of attempts have been made to understand not only how military families function, but also how they manage stress. McCubbin, Cauble, and Patterson (1982) studied the role of stress and deployment and found that families who are overburdened and have limited resources may find it difficult to function.

Conceptualization of how families cope in relation to separation can be traced back to Reuben Hill's 1949 study of families where he identified a "roller-coaster" pattern of adjustment (Hill, 1949; McCubbin, 1979). Hill (1949, 1958) understood that in order to determine if a family is in crisis, three variables should considered, including the event itself, the resources the family has acquired prior to the event, and the meaning that the family associates with the event.

Hill (1958) created the ABC-X model to assist in understanding family stress management and factors related to stressors, contributing hardships, and family resources in producing a family crisis (Ward, 2002). The A component of this model involves an examination of the hardships of the event itself. Every family will experience an event differently and experience different hardships from the event (Waller & Hill, 1951). Examining family resources to meet the demands of a crisis is the B component. The C component refers to how the family defines the event. The combination of A, B and C will then produce X, the crisis.

Thus, when all these factors are present in the family, the family is perceived as having a crisis. The magnitude of the crisis determines the family's level of functioning. The ABC-X model is limited in its attempt to explain why the X, or crisis factor, varies over time (Witt, 2006). McCubbin et al. (1982) found a strong relationship exists between social support and the ability to cope, adapt, and adjust to an event. The term *adaptability* is defined as a family's ability to meet challenges and obstacles as a family unit (McCubbin & Patterson, 1983a).

The attempt to adjust to an event allows families to employ coping strategies, which could include avoidance, elimination, and assimilation (McCubbin & Patterson, 1983a). They further indicate that the adjustment of coping strategies may not provide a long-term solution to the family since increased demands are placed on them. McCubbin (1985) in Walker (1985) found that since the publication of the ABC-X model, the "major variable of family stress and coping have remained unchanged for over 30 years" (p. 827).

McCubbin and Paterson (1983b) questioned the variation in families' responses to stressors, and took the ABC-X model a step further. Using the foundation of the ABC-X model, McCubbin and Paterson created the Double ABC-X model to look at families' adaptations to crisis. This model allows for the management of multiple stressors over a longitudinal span, influencing how the family adjusts and adapts to the stressor (McCubbin et al., 1983a). The adjustment phase is the family's response to a stressor, while the adaptation phase occurs following a family crisis if adjustment is not sufficient.

The Double ABC-X model of family adaptation looks at a number of variables as they interact and relate to one another:

a) the severity of the strain associated with a crisis situation, influenced by other stressors and strains;

b) the level of adaptation the family has to the crisis situation, influenced by the pile-up of stressors and strains;

c) the availability of resources and social supports, and their influence on the pile-up of stressors and strains;

d) the availability of resources and social supports, and their influence on the severity of strain created by the pile-up demands; and

e) the level of a family's sense of coherence regarding the total situation, influencing its adaptation (Lavee, Y., McCubbin, H. I., & Patterson, J. M., 1985, p. 813).

The Double ABC-X model of family stresses confirms "severe strain associated with a stressful situation is due to the pile-up of strains that occur prior to the crisis" (p.

811). The family's ability to deal with the "pile-up" will indicate whether it can function or not during a crisis event (Walker, 1985).

These events and the pile-up of other stressors can cause the family to experience a crisis (McCubbin et al., 1983a). This new model recognizes that families are often faced with multiple stressors, including those created by the family's stage of development and from their efforts to cope with the stressor and ultimately achieve family balance. Using the foundation of the ABC-X model, a post-crisis variable was added to the model. As indicated by McCubbin and Patterson (1983b), this second variable attempts to describe several areas: first, the additional stresses and strains that influence family adaptation; second, the various resources families have gained in order to manage stress or crisis; third, the changing perspectives and meanings families ascribe to their situation in an attempt to understand it; fourth, the multiple coping strategies families utilize; and lastly, the varying results of these efforts. This new model allows for the opportunity to understand family stress management over a longitudinal span and the influence of interacting variables of multiple stressors, family resources and adaptive behaviours on family stress (McCubbin & Patterson, 1983b). As supported by the literature, it can then be argued that family adjustment and adaptation occurs following a stressful event, which requires the family to find ways to manage the stress and hardship associated with that event, along with the strains previously experienced by the family.

The Double ABC-X model evolved to the T-Double ABC-X model (Figley 1989). This model differs in that the T factor is the family typology, which explains how the family system typically appraises, operates, and behaves. The T-Double ABC-X model provides a general framework of family adjustment and adaptation. This model functions

whereby the stressor and pile-up of stressors (Aa), family vulnerability (V), family organizational type (T), family resources in meeting their demands (Bb), family appraisal (Cc) and interacting with the family's ability to problem-solve and cope with stressful situations (PSC) (Frankel, Snowden, & Nelson, 1992; Figley, 1989). The end result is the (Xx), which is the family's level of adjustment and adaptation back to the crisis. The V factor has two components. The first is how the family system is shaped by the accumulation of demands and how the family copes and solves problems. Figley (1989) refers to this as the PSC factor, the process of acquiring and allocating resources for meeting the demands of the family to adjust and adapt to situations. The second component of the V factor is "the family life-cycle with all the normative demands and variability in resources and strengths" (p. 9).

The extension of this model has provided a general framework, which has been used to study military families and their ability to cope with stress (Frankel et al., 1992). Changes that may need to occur within the family might include roles, rules, goals, and patterns of interaction. These new changes occur over time as family members work together to support the changes (McCubbin & Patterson, 1983a). During this phase of restructuring and change, the family can utilize adaptive coping strategies. Olson and McCubbin (1982) define *family adaptation* as "the ability of a marital or family system to change its power structure, role relationships, and relationship rules in response to situational and developmental stress" (p. 51).

Coping strategies include "synergizing, interfacing and compromising" (McCubbin & Patterson, 1983a, p. 23). *Synergizing* involves the family pulling together to assist one another with changes. *Interfacing* involves the family connecting with their

community, for example, work or school. Faced with difficult circumstances at times, the family will have to compromise. Therefore, all dimensions of family life must simultaneously be managed in order to create a system that "facilitates organization and unity and promotes individual growth and development" (McCubbin & Patterson, 1983a, p. 24).

Family theory maintains that the quality of a family's life and the level of social support are important factors when looking at stress and the family (McCubbin et al., 1980). The stress that military families endure during separation has been studied using various models, and includes a study by Hillenbrand (1976), who believed that the absences of the partner in a military family is often conceived as a family crisis since it challenges the family's capacity to cope.

With the modification and adaptation of new family stress models throughout the years, more systemic and contextual models have emerged that look at family types, family systems, and family supports more extensively.

Social Work Knowledge Base and the Military Family

The history of social work involvement with families can be traced back to "friendly visitors" well before the turn of the century (Wood & Scarville, 1995). The social work profession has evolved since the 19th century and has continued its commitment to improve the lives of families and individuals. Social work has laid the foundation for clinical practice with families (Wood & Scarville, 1995). Studying families during stressful life events can include those experiences of military families

during deployment. The military family's experience with stress can be linked to the increased demands placed on military members to deploy more frequently.

Social Work Practice

Social sciences stress that research has long held promise in understanding individual and family coping and adaptation (Walsh, 1996). Family-focused studies should not only consist of family behaviour, but should also encompass all dynamics of family functioning, including stress, coping, and adaptation, and should provide the foundation to enhance social work policy and practice in terms of families.

Social work values have always played an important role in the construction of professional identity and the relationship of values and actions central to social workers' ethics (Wilks, 2004). Social work is a discipline consisting of three components: the first is research, the second is education, and the third is professional practice. The aim of social work is to alleviate social problems, which can be fulfilled by using all three of these components (Mäntysaari, 2005). Social work as a profession has always included a focus on improving the lives of families; therefore it is not surprising that family and stress has been studied extensively throughout various literatures (Hartman, 1981).

Social Work Policy

Military policy and services have always been based on the career structure of a service member, usually male, rather than developed as an explicit family policy that is based on family dynamics (Kohen, 1984). Canadian Forces policies dictate the types of support military social workers can provide to members and their families. According to

Canadian Forces policy, military social workers can provide support both to service members and to couples.

As part of the Canadian Forces Health Services Branch, social workers in the military can provide a range of services to members and their partners, and this includes counselling for compassionate problems, marital breakdown, individual and family problems, family violence, and counselling services as a result of the stress of military life on members and their families (CFAO 56-15, 1985). However, these services are generally available just to the serving Canadian Forces member but when required could extend to the military family.

Currently there are a number of policies Canadian Forces social workers must follow as part of their mandate. These policies include the Canadian Forces Health Services Policy and Guidelines 51000-42 and DAOD 5017-0 Mental Health and Mental Health concept paper. According to these policies, it is the primary duty of the Canadian Forces social worker to support and encourage all Canadian Forces members to take an active part in maintaining their own personal health and to provide a climate that fosters positive mental health (Department of National Defence Mental Health Service Branch, 2007). Although the policy does not outline working with military families, the aim of the policy is to assist and contribute to the "achievement of a high level of morale, efficiency, and mental health in the Canadian Forces through the provision of a professional social work service to military members" (Department of National Defence, 2007, p. 1).

The family has always played an important part in research, shaping family policies that benefit both the individual and the family (Kohen, 1984). Family-focused

policy does not only examine how the policy will affect the individual, but goes further to include how it will affect the family. Hartman (1981) states that "family impact studies assess the impact of policy on the family as a system and on the transactions among its members" and has highlighted the need for the adoption of family-focused policy (p. 8).

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

<u>Purpose of Study</u>

Literature in studies looking at military family and stress has been based on United States military families, and few, if any, have looked at the Canadian military family in comparison. It is, therefore, the intent of this study to expand upon the ways in which stress, social support, and coping skills affect the quality of Canadian military family life in terms of deployment.

This study revealed the unique experiences of military spouses and the stressors related to deployment, including adjustment, adaptation, and coping strategies used when living in times of separation and deployment.

The potential outcome of this study is to bring awareness to social workers and health care professions, by addressing the unique aspects of military family life. By providing insight into some of the most difficult aspects of military family life during separation and deployment, this study will give social workers and other health care professionals best practice insight into how to support military families by meeting their unique needs.

The purpose of this study, then, is to examine the lived experiences of military female partners whose partners have been deployed, in particular, to explore how the military female partner experiences the situation within the family context. It is, therefore, important to understand the impact deployment has on military wives by exploring what stressors they face and how they cope with everyday life.

This study specifically looked at how these military wives coped with the stressors of deployment. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, the term *coping* has

been used to describe both the positive and negative ways military spouses dealt with stressors and stress during deployment. McCubbin and Patterson's (1981), definition of coping best suits this study. They define coping as a "multifaceted process wherein resources, perceptions, and behavioral responses interact as families try to achieve a balance in family functioning" (p. 10). When studying human beings, finding a methodology that captures the essence of the experience becomes important. Social science has raised the question: "What methodology is required to do this type of study" (van Manen, 1990, p. 5).

This research, therefore, is best explored within a qualitative paradigm, utilizing phenomenology. Qualitative methods require that researchers do not invent the viewpoint of the participant (Jessor, Colby, & Shweder, 1996). Through phenomenology, this research seeks an in-depth understanding of the nature and meaning of each military wife's experience. A number of researchers have looked at stress, coping, and military families, and found that variations exist in the effect deployment has had on these families based on demographics, country, and family type. However, limited descriptive research exists on Canadian military families and few studies have taken the perspective examining the lived experiences of Canadian military families in the face of deployment.

An attempt to generate new insight into how these military wives coped with the stressors of deployment and the resources available to them during such a stressful time will be addressed. Based on the central question of this study and the goal of examining the lived experiences of these military spouses, the study was therefore guide by qualitative research.

<u>Qualitative Approach</u>

Qualitative research is a good way to study everyday life situations and allows for a better understanding of those situations by providing thick, rich descriptive data. Qualitative research utilizes four designs frequently found in human and social science research: phenomenological, grounded theory, ethnographies, and case studies (Creswell, 1994). These designs can be useful to guide data collection, analysis, report writing, and the general research process, and are quite different as illustrated below:

a) Phenomenological studies, which are the human experiences and detailed descriptions of lived experience, recorded and transcribed;

b) Grounded theory, whereby the researcher attempts to derive a theory using multiple stages of data collection;

c) Ethnographies, whereby the researcher studies a culture in its natural setting for a prolonged period of time through data collection, participant observation, and interviewing. This type of research is usually flexible; and

d) Case studies, usually beginning with a detailed description of the incident, and requiring data collection through multiple sources ranging from interviews, observations, documents, and audio-visual material (Creswell, 1994).

This study sought to gain insight into the experiences of these military spouses through in-depth interviews in order to gain a deeper understanding into the realities of the experiences of military spouses who had experienced a deployment. Phenomenology provided a descriptive focus on the lived experiences of the participants.

In the data analysis stage, this study drew from grounded theory which complements the phenomenological tradition within the stage of data analysis. Grounded theory allows for categories and concepts to emerge within the data analysis stage. As the concepts and categories emerge, a researcher is able to link them to theoretical models (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). By following the phenomenological tradition of reflecting on themes and examining writing and rewriting of the descriptions, as well as grounded theory's identification of categories and concepts, a deeper insight into the realities of the lived experiences of these military women and their experience was discovered.

Phenomenology Approach

The history of phenomenology started with the German mathematician, Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), who emphasized that phenomenology is the "search for the central underlying meaning of experiences that contained both the outward appearance and inward consciousness based on memory, image and meaning" (Creswell, 1994, p. 52). Phenomenology has developed into the study of human meanings as constructed by consciousness, the study of the life-world or lived experience. Within phenomenology the conscious is understood as being intentional and as such it is recognized as creating meanings that subsequently inhere in the world as experienced (von Eckartsberg, 1998). This study focused on the lived experience and the meanings these women ascribed, to their experiences. Van Manen (1990) states that "no single interpretative of human experience will ever exhaust the possibility of yet another complementary, or even potentially richer or deeper description" (p. 31).

"Phenomenological research aims at establishing a renewed contract with original experiences," therefore seeking insightful descriptions of the phenomenon and by recognizing the importance of the meanings as constructed by the participants (van Manen, 1990, p. 31). By utilizing phenomenology, this study was able to capture the essence and experiential meaning these women had to the experience of a deployment. The researcher asked a number of questions to explore what the experience had been like for military wives during deployment [*Appendix B*]. This provided an opportunity for them to clearly define what they perceived caused them hardship. The experiences of these women were deemed crucial in the interview process.

Research Questions

Qualitative research allows for a holistic view of the situation being studied, giving participants a voice in sharing their stories and experiences. According to phenomenology, the following line of questioning allowed the researcher to explore what the experience has been like for the military wife to the fullest (Van Manen, 1990). Within these broad questions specific areas of interest emerged that allowed the participant to define the stressor they experienced.

a) *What has been stressful in terms of the deployment for you, and what strategies have you used to adapt and cope with it?*

By identifying the stressors, military wives were able to elaborate on the coping methods they used to help them adapt to the stressor event. These questions provided participants with a voice to clearly define what they perceived had caused them hardship by identifying the major stressors they experienced during the separation period. This is relevant to the study since it addressed a wife's feelings with regard to the challenges she

faced, feelings of isolation and alienation, and personal identification with regard to family problems that arise during the deployment period.

The unique contribution of Hill's (1949) ABC-X model is that it served as the foundation for helping understand family stress and how the family copes and adapts. By using this line of questioning, the researcher was able understand the relationship between stressor (A), family resources (B), perception of the event that defines a crisis for the family (C), and the crisis (X), and how the family was able to adapt to overcome this stressful event.

In family function, the allocation and accountability of roles become an important aspect of family functioning. A shift emerges in the family roles when the family is separated. The military wife tends to takes over the reins and is forced into an independent single-parent role (Hunter et al, 1978). One of the most important factors is the wife's personal adaptability and flexibility, along with previous exposure to family separation. It is relevant to question the family's roles and responsibilities and how they have changed over time as a result of the family member's development. The responses to this question assist in better understanding how role allocation and role accountability within the family changed during deployment.

b)   Has there been a shift in the roles and responsibilities within the family?

There are a number of stressors affecting military families where the father's absence is expected; as a result these changes challenge the family situation. The absence of the father, especially during combat, is believed to be very stressful for children. This following question was important in that it helped identify how the military wife's relationship with her children changed due to the absence of her partner.

c)   How has the deployment affected your family life, and what were some of the challenges you faced?

d)   What significant change emerged in the way your children communicate with you during the deployment?

The purpose of these questions was to find out what the family had done in terms of seeking out or receiving support from both formal and informal systems. This line of questioning looked at what had been helpful to the family in terms of support given during the deployment stage. Hobfoll (1986) indicates that social support has a positive effect on mental and physical health and also that women may require more social support because of the type of role they adapt to in the family.

e)   What support systems did you have during the deployment?

f)   How supportive have your friends and family been, and what has that been like for you?

g)   How supportive have military resources been with regard to your partner's deployment?

h)   Have you found a lack of social support to affect stress in the family and how?

As indicated by Lavee et al. (1980), social support has a direct effect on the family's ability to adapt to stressors and strains. The Military Family Resource Centre is one of the main resources that provide support to military wives and children. Therefore, the answers to these questions provided insight into whether different forms of support had been beneficial or not to military wives and their families in their ability to cope with the stressors they experienced during the deployment period.

Although these questions guided the study, additional questions emerged during interviews that allowed these women to elaborate on their experience. An example of this was when participants were asked what was stressful in terms of the deployment,

they talked about the stressors they experienced within the cycle of deployment. During the pre-deployment which allowed these women to voice their experience and identify the stressors they faced during this time. This type of research also gave participants a voice in sharing their stories by providing thick, rich descriptive information about their experiences.

Research Participants

The target population for this study consisted of non-serving female spouses. Since the researcher is both a military member and military spouse, military ethics determined that the researcher could not interview any member currently serving in the Canadian Forces unless prior approval was sought from the Department of National Defence Ethics Board.

Participants consisted of military wives who were married to or in a common-law relationship with a Canadian Forces military member for at least one year. Nine military spouses were initially recruited for the interviews, as well as an additional participant for the pre-test. The participants required for pre-testing were informed that the interview was part of a pre-test for interviews that were to follow. A total of nine military spouses were recruited and data was transcribed and interpreted based on these interviews. This study was limited to military families who had experienced a deployment of six months and whose partners had returned from deployment of no less than six months.

Although it is recognized that there are currently both men and women serving with the Canadian Forces, the study specifically focused on the female military spouse and her ability to adapt and cope with separation due to a deployment. This study also

recognized that the level of risk of each military deployment varies and might have different effects on the military family. However, the goal was to have participants with as much similarity in their experiences as possible. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, participants were required to have experienced a deployment between 2002 and 2006. As well, with a smaller window of five years, participants were able to recall their experiences more accurately.

For the purpose of this research, both purposive sampling and snowball sampling were used to recruit participants. The researcher sought potential participants who had experienced a deployment who could provide thick rich descriptive information. This type of recruitment allowed potential participants with similar experiences to participate. Recruitment was done through general advertising, which included posters and information packages to 17 Wing Winnipeg Military Base social work departments, the pastoral care department and the Military Family Resource Centre. Several posters were emailed to military spouses who contacted the researcher directly indicating their interest in participating in this study.

A pre-screening telephone interview was conducted to inform participants of the nature of the research, as well as the role of the participant and the information they would be providing. The interview sample consisted of nine spouses of military members who volunteered to participate in an hour to two hour in-depth interviews. All ethical considerations were taken into account during this screening interview. To minimize the risk of harm, the purpose of this study, as well as the types of questions to be asked, were explained to participants.

Participants were asked to respond about their ability to answer questions related to deployment and to indicate whether they felt they could manage the potential stress which might emerge as a result of these questions. If participants felt they could not answer questions without experiencing high levels of stress, or felt they could not manage reflecting back on their experience, they were told that they would be excluded from this study.

All participants who had experienced non-normative stressors such as death, serious injury, divorce, separation, or where there had been a diagnosis of an Operational Stress Injury (OSI), were also excluded. According to Veterans Affairs Canada (2006), an Operational Stress Injury is defined as any persistent psychological difficulty resulting from operational duties performed while serving in the Canadian military. It is used to describe a broad range of problems which include "diagnosed medical conditions such as anxiety disorders, depression and post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), as well as other conditions that may be less severe, but still interfere with daily functioning" (p.12).

Participants were asked directly and sensitively whether they were currently in an abusive relationship. Given the social vulnerability and potential isolation of military partners, it was important that these women were provided with information and resources about family violence. However, none of the women who volunteered to be interviewed for this study disclosed that they were in an abusive relationship or at risk for abuse.

Roles and Responsibilities of the Researcher and Research Participants

One of the main roles of a researcher is to ensure that all participants are clearly informed about the role of both researcher and participant. Participants were informed during the pre-screening that the researcher is a military member and the wife of a military member. During the pre-screening interview, participants were informed verbally and in writing of the nature of the research, the role of the participant, and the kind of information they would be providing.

Participants were informed at the same time that the questions in the research interview would be personal in nature and that there was the potential of harm, which included reflecting and reliving stressful memories related to the deployment. Information with regard to confidentiality and measures taken to assure confidentiality were provided to each participant.

All material pertaining to this study was kept in a locked cabinet in a secure location in the home of the researcher. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the research at any point during the study. A list of resources and supports was provided to each participant during the interview should participants experience stress or discomfort from the study. Participants were also informed that they would have access to the final copy of the research.

Researcher Bias

It is important that a researcher has a good understanding of her biases and how past experiences will influence this type of research. Having an open mind is critical so as not to hinder the emergence of the real experiences of participants. According to

phenomenology, the fundamental problem in terms of inquiry about the topic is that the researcher either knows too little about the phenomena or too much (van Manen, 1990).

In order to avoid any biases, Husserl, in Van Manen (1990) used the term *bracketing* to describe how "one must take hold of the phenomena and place it outside of one knows about the phenomenon" (pp. 33-42). Bracketing her knowledge about the phenomena allowed the researcher to become more aware of any biases by trying to avoid what is already known (van Manen, 1990). To alleviate any biases that the researcher may have had within this study and to properly follow the phenomenological approach, a researcher sketch has been provided.

Researcher Sketch

My main interest in the area of stressors as they relate to separation and deployment stems from my own position. I am currently in the Canadian Forces and I am the spouse of a military member who has experienced six deployments since being married. I initially experienced a deployment upon my arrival in Canada in 1990. Being a newlywed and posted to a new location, I did not know what types of supports were available to me. This caused considerable stress in my life, and since English is my second language, I found it very difficult to adjust and adapt to the military lifestyle.

Although I have been part of the military system for eleven years, and a military spouse for eighteen years, as the researcher in this study, I took the position of one learning how to improve the system to make it better for military wives and children. I took the stance described by qualitative research as "not knowing" rather than that of "the knower."

Most families go through stressful events or have a number of different stressors at different times in their lives. It is, therefore, important to have resources that families can draw upon during those times. Since there are a number of different stressors unique to military families, having supports in place might help eliminate some of the stressors faced by military families during a deployment period.

It is my belief that participants are the true experts of their own experiences and I looked to them to share their experiences and knowledge about how deployment had affected them. The knowledge gained will hopefully shed some light on the lives of military families and, as well, how an organization such as the Department of National Defence might find ways to better accommodate military families by revamping its current policies and practices.

For social workers interested in working with military families, this research could potentially provide better insight and understanding into the life of the military family. In particular, there is a need to address the unique situation that military families encounter during the deployment and separation period.

Data Collection

The data collection method used in this study was consistent with that of a phenomenological approach. Creswell (1998) indicates that "for a phenomenological study, the process of data collecting involves primarily in-depth interviews", which last as long as two hours (p. 122). In this research, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather detailed descriptions of participants' experiences of deployment of their spouses.

All of the interviews took place at locations determined by both the participant and the researcher. Of the nine interviews, three were conducted, with little distraction, at the Military Family Resource Centre. Three interviews were conducted inside 17 Wing Winnipeg Building 90 gymnasium since these participants felt this was the best location with little distraction. Three participants were interviewed at their residences, since they felt more comfortable being interviewed at home. No children or spouses were present during the interviews.

All interviews were audio-taped and transcribed by the researcher. Anonymity of participants remained a priority throughout this study; therefore, pseudonyms were assigned to each participant. The saturation point of this study determined the final number of participants. Interviews were approximately one-and-a-half to two hours in duration. Although an interview guide was utilized, participants raised additional questions which were then incorporated into the discussion. These questions emerged as participants elaborated on their experiences. Throughout the interviews, the researcher reviewed the interview guide to ensure that all questions were addressed. Interviews play an important role in phenomenology and can have two very specific purposes: (a) they may be used as a means for exploring and gathering experiential narrative material that may serve as a resource for developing a richer and deeper understanding of a human phenomenon and (b) the interview may be used as a vehicle to develop a conversational relation with a partner (interviewee) about the meaning of an experience (Van Manen, 1990, p.66).

<u>Data Analysis</u>

The data analysis process consisted of multiple steps from both the phenomenological and grounded theory traditions. "Data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the mass of collected data. It is a messy, ambiguous, time-consuming, creative, and fascinating process. It does not proceed in a linear fashion; it is not neat. Qualitative data analysis is a search for general statements about relationships among categories of data" (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p.111).

Analytical categories to describe and explain social phenomena are used in qualitative research. There are several components that comprise the plan for analyzing data that require the researcher to be comfortable with developing categories and noting comparisons and contrasts (Creswell, 1994). Van Manen (1990) states that researchers gain insight into the phenomena by using a number of strategies, which include tracing etymological sources, researching idiomatic phrases, obtaining experiential description from participants, observing and reflecting further on the phenomenological literature, writing, and rewriting.

Reflecting on lived experiences becomes the reflective analyzing or thematic aspect of that experience (van Manen, 1990). "By analyzing a phenomenon, we are trying to determine what the themes are, the experiential structures that make up that experience" (van Manen 1990, p. 79). The researcher sets aside all prejudgments, "bracketing" his or her experiences and relies on intuition, imagination, and universal structures to obtain a picture of the experience.

Thus, the data analysis process in this study consisted of multiple steps from both the phenomenological and grounded theory traditions. Data gathering and analysis were

done in a careful manner. The researcher transcribed the interviews using Word format. Transcribed interviews were reviewed a number of times, and selected words and phrases that described a particular aspect of the lived experience of these women were identified. These were words or phrases that appeared to describe an experience, emotion or phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). After two weeks, the researcher reviewed the data and began to cluster and label these phrases into groups, by colour-coding and recording them onto a Microsoft Excel document.

The first step in the data analysis was taken from the phenomenological tradition and involved the researcher developing a full description of the subject's experience with the phenomenon. Van Manen (1997) indicates that "phenomenological themes may be understood as structures of experience" (p. 79). This was accomplished through the researcher reflecting after each interview. The researcher put into Word format her reflections of the interview, including the process, and observations of the participant's emotions that emerged during the interview.

The second step in the data analysis process was taken from the phenomenological tradition and involved the process of "horizontalization of the data," that is, looking within each interview and listing the significant statements that are contained about the experience (Van Manen, p. 147).

The third step also taken from the phenomenological tradition required the statements to be grouped together. Verbatim quotes and multiple quotes were utilized to provide the researcher with a full sense of the experiences and meanings as experienced by the participants. This provided a fuller sense of the experience of each participant by identifying themes and highlighting material in the interview that spoke of each person's

experience as fully as possible. According to phenomenology, reflecting on lived experiences becomes the reflectively analyzing or thematic aspect of that experience (Creswell, 1990).

The fourth step involved the creation of categories from the terms participants used during the interviews. The researcher, following a general question guide during the interviews, facilitated the process of identification of themes. Participants focused their comments on question areas and these developed into the themes; however other themes also emerged and were identified. Therefore, for simplicity and clarity, similar categories were combined and labelled with a general term.

The next step required the researcher to construct an overall "description of the meaning and the essence of the experience" (p.150). At this point themes merged and led to the development of patterns. The grounded theory step of comparing categories and linking them to theoretical models occurred (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). The technique used was "to compare and contrast themes and concepts. When, why, and under what conditions do these themes occur in the text?" (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p. 279).

The final step in the grounded theory data analysis was to display the findings in a manner that presented "segments of text – verbatim quotes from the informants – as examples of concepts and theories" (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p. 280). This complemented the phenomenological tradition of providing an overall description of the lived experience.

Several steps were taken to ensure that data would not be compromised in order to avoid any possible errors during the data analysis process. To avoid any unclear or

misleading data from emerging, the researcher transcribed all interviews. This was also done because of the unique terminology used specific to the military family, such as "HLTA", "outside the wire", "Qs", "roto", and "tour". Morse and Richards (2002) indicate "labels for codes are taken directly from the language that participants themselves use" (p. 180). Through a phenomenological reflection, the research tries to grasp the essential meaning of something as it relates to the lived experience (van Manen, 1990).

Another important step in the data analysis process is *reflexivity*; being aware of one's owns biases, personal beliefs, and any previous experience is crucial. It was, therefore, important for the researcher to check biases throughout the data analysis process. This type of reflexivity increases the validity of the research. Validity also occurs through the process of "member checking" whereby the researcher asks participants to verify that data was gathered and interpreted accurately (Gerdes & Conn, 2001).

Interviews were reviewed for accuracy and e-mailed to participants to ensure all transcribed data were accurately interpreted. Throughout each interview, the researcher listened whether any experiences from the participants emerged that related to categories and themes from earlier interviews. If no categories emerged, probing questions were asked which were balanced so that no leading or directing of participants would occur. For example, when participants were asked about financial issues, the researcher asked questions like: "Finances can often be very stressful, and although this may not apply to you, some families found that during deployment this can cause some stress. Have you experienced any stressors related to financial difficulties during the deployment?" If

participants felt that they could relate to other women in the study concerning stress with finances, they were likely more open in talking about that experience.

The search for themes and categories required data be reviewed several times and identified themes and categories were then marked. These themes were then clustered together. The researcher then used Microsoft Excel 2003 to pull out all the meaning units in each transcribed document, making it easy to move text back and forth between documents and ensuring accuracy of data. Using the "copy and paste" feature was used to move data from Word to Excel. Each emerging category in Excel was colour-coded and labelled. Each participant's data was then copied and pasted into Excel so that it could be traced back to Word for accuracy.

Categories were saturated when no apparent new data emerged from the transcribed data. Although Creswell (1998) recommends that only two of the eight methods of verification be used in research, four methods were incorporated into this study. These were "peer review", "clarifying researcher bias", "member checking", and "rich, thick description".

As part of this research, the researcher met frequently with her advisor to discuss issues that emerged from the data. Throughout the research process, guidance was sought from the researcher's advisor, as well as from members of the peer review team. This step was particularly important since the researcher is a military wife, a member of the military community, and a member of the Canadian Forces. The researcher could identify with participants in aspects that were both positive and negative and felt that it was important to have the opportunity to meet and discuss any issues that emerged during the research with the peer review team and the research advisor.

As stated previously, four methods of verification were identified and incorporated in this research. *Peer review* or *debriefing* provided an external check of the research process. The role of the peer review was to ask questions about the research being carried out, i.e., the methods, meanings, and interpretations. The reviewers for this research were members of the research committee as well as Ms. Haley Schroeder, (MSW), social worker at the Military Family Resource Centre, who is on the researcher's peer review team. *Clarifying research bias* involved the researcher describing her past experiences, values, beliefs, and potential biases that could potentially influence the research. The researcher provided a "researcher sketch" that outlined all potential biases, values, and personal beliefs that could potentially pose as influences. *Member checking,* according to Lincoln and Guba (1985), is a step that is considered "the most critical technique for establishing credibility" (p. 314). A total of nine interviews were transcribed and four participants requested that their interviews be emailed to them. The researcher provided each participant with a copy of her own transcribed interview for review to determine clarity, but none of the participants returned their transcribed interviews. *Rich, thick description* allowed the researcher to describe in detail the participants under study (Creswell, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The goal was to provide as much detail as possible within all areas of the research.

Strengths of this Study

This study had a number of strengths and has the potential to provide important information related to social work policy and practice. Family separation has a tremendous impact on the family system, and although a number of studies have been

done on the military family, few have looked at the effect a deployment has on the Canadian military family. This study will hopefully provide insight to those who currently work with Canadian military families. Identifying the unique stressors experienced by military families could potentially be a stepping stone for future research into the experiences of Canadian military families and deployment.

The methodological strength is that it is qualitative using a phenomenological framework. Using phenomenology as the framework of the study allowed the researcher to conduct in-depth interviews, which would capture the essence of the lived experiences of these military spouses as they described the demands placed on them and on their families in being part of a military environment and lifestyle. Phenomenology allowed these military wives to share their experiences, providing insight into the stressors they faced during a deployment period. Thick, rich descriptive information was gathered from participants since they were the experts in this study.

Although similar studies have looked at deployment and military families, findings indicate the stressors experienced by Canadian military families are unique in comparison to those families in the United States military. Other Canadian researchers have not yet explored how the Canadian military family copes with stressors specifically related to deployment.

Limitations of this Study

The criteria to participate in this study were very specific, and, as such, only a small number of participants could take part.

Not all the participants shared the same number of spousal deployments; eight of the nine participants had experienced more than one deployment, while one participant had experienced only one spousal deployment.

The locations where partners were deployed varied, which caused stress levels based on deployment to vary.

Since English was the language in which this study was conducted, the experiences of Francophone spouses lacking adequate English skills were excluded.

Based on the theoretical framework, findings could not be generalized to the larger population to include all military spouses. Using a phenomenology approach, participants were asked to be retrospective. This meant that some participants had to recall past experiences with a deployment, meaning that these experiences had the potential of susceptibility to distortion.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

The following chapter examines the findings of the study, including who the participants were. The study utilized phenomenology with the intent of discovering the lived experiences of these women. A phenomenology approach indicates that emerging themes are not objects or generalizations; they are knots into the webs of our experiences (van Manen, 1990). Van Manen (1990) indicates that phenomenology does not attempt to offer effective theory to explain the world, but "rather it offers us the possibility of plausible insight that brings us in more direct contact with the world" (p. 9). To gain insight into the lived experiences of these women, *themes* emerged through the writing process. The ultimate goal of qualitative research is to identify any relationship that exists between the major themes. Data was therefore analyzed to reflect the range of responses and the dominant themes and categories within the data. Themes were identified as those important similarities connecting the women in this study; seven major themes were revealed from the data.

These emerging themes were employment of participants during deployment, stress at home, stressors related to deployment, situational stress, coping, and informal and formal support systems. Themes emerged based on the interview questionnaires and the women's willingness to share and speak freely about any other topic they thought created stress for them during deployment. In addition to the themes, categories emerged that linked and illustrated these women's experiences. The categories emerged from the questions asked during the interview process, reflecting the critical events that were identified by the participants during the research related to their stories. These categories included: employment, preparing children for deployment, single parenthood, feelings of

being alone, relationship with children, communication with partner, anticipating partners return, maintaining routines, relationship detachment, anticipation and apprehension about homecoming, readjustment period, loss of independence, changes in parenting and children, and changes in roles and responsibilities. Qualitative research allowed for a holistic view of the individual experiences allowing participants to share their stories by giving a voice to the "voiceless".

Table 1 reflects the demographics of the participants, as well as the number of children between the two partners, and does not distinguish between children from previous marriages or relationships. Eight of the participants resided within the city of Winnipeg and one resided in Brandon. Each woman had been in her current location between 2 and 15 years. Two participants indicated their families had been relocated to the Winnipeg area within the last two years. There was variation in the women's education levels. Of the nine participants, five had completed high school, one had completed a Masters degree, one had completed an undergraduate degree, and two were currently completing undergraduate degrees.

Table 2 illustrates the themes and corresponding categories related to the deployment, and identifies the stressors and the ways these women coped during a deployment, including what supports were available to them during the deployment. Their perspectives regarding the stressors related to deployment surfaced during the semi-structured interviews.

Throughout the research, participants provided thick rich description of their experiences and direct quotes from each participant have been used whenever possible. The quotes describe identified stressors and coping mechanisms.

<u>Participants</u>

Nine military spouses participated in this study; all participants were married to military members and had experienced a deployment between 2002 and 2006. The length of time each woman's husband had been in the military, since their relationship began, ranged from 10 to 35 years. The number of deployments experienced by each woman ranged from 2 to 4 over the time period the partner had been in the Canadian Forces. Although all the women, with the exception of one, had previously experienced a deployment, each deployment was described as different. The general consensus among the women was that they felt the last deployment was the most stressful of all they had experienced to date.

The women were asked what their partners' "element" and "component" were. All elements of the military were represented in this study: Army, Air Force and Navy. Five of the women were married to Army members, three were married to Air Force members, and one was married to a Navy member.

Both Regular and Reserve Force components of the Canadian Forces were represented in this study. Reservists (part-time Canadian Forces members who can be on contract for three years or longer) are not normally posted, while Department of National Defence posts Regular Force members as frequently as required. Department of National Defence has indicated that both Regular and Reserve Force members are required to be deployable. Reservists retain the choice to deploy or not, while Regular Force members must go when required. Two of participants' husbands in this study were in the Reserve Force while seven of the men were in the Regular Force.

TABLE 1: DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF NINE MILITARY

WIVES AND THEIR FAMILIES

* RESPONDENT'S NAME	AGE OF RESPONDENT	LENGTH OF RELATIONSHIP	CHILDREN IN FAMILY	NUMBER OF YEARS SPOUSE HAS BEEN IN THE MILITARY
Angela	50 yrs	33 years	3	27
Calista	42 yrs	18 years	2	35
Lindsay	42 yrs	15 years	2	16
Demi	52 yrs	19 years	2	22
Cameron	46 yrs	18 years	3	22
Katie	37 yrs	10 years	2	23
Goldie	37 yrs	10 years	4	20
Faith	46 yrs	20 years	2	21
Jennifer	43 yrs	15 years	2	14

*Names have been changed

TABLE 2: THEMES AND CATEGORIES

THEMES	CATEGORIES	
Employment of participants during deployment	Employed	Full time/part time Full time/part time student
Stress at home	Routines Children Military environment	
Stressors related to deployment	**Pre-deployment**	Preparing children for deployment
	Deployment	Single parenthood Feeling of being alone Relationship with children Communication with partner
	HLTA	Anticipating partner's return Maintaining routines Relationship detachment
	Re-deployment	Anticipation and apprehension about homecoming
	Post-deployment	Readjustment period Loss of independence Changes in parenting and children Changes in roles and responsibilities
Situational stress	Children Husband	
Coping		
Informal Supports	Family and In-laws Friends and Neighbours	
Formal Supports	Procedures/Policy Availability of supports/Access to supports Military supports Military Family Resource Centre support	

Employment of Participants during Deployment

Participants fell into three employment categories: working full-time, working full-time while being a part-time student, or being a full-time student. Seven of the women in this study worked full-time. One of the women studied part-time while working full-time. Another woman described herself as a full-time student. The general consensus among the women was they all had very busy lives regardless of full-time/part-time employment or being a full time student. Calista, a full-time working mom, describes her experience as follows:

> *You get up at 0530, get breakfast going, clean up the kitchen, um, do the dishes, get ready for work, and get the kids ready for school, um, get the youngest off to daycare because she was in daycare still at the time. Then going to work, working till 4, getting off work, going home, um, making supper, feeding the cats, doing yard work, um, supper, dishes, the kids' baths, getting them into bed ... and that is not including the days where you have dental appointments or doctors' appointments.*

Katie, on the other hand, described herself as a full time student and did not see her day as any less busy or stressful than the women who work full time:

> *I don't know how, like, it is just you do everything, you get up in the morning, you put the dog out, you take care of the kids, you get them up, get them ready for school, pick them up at the end of school, get their homework done, make supper, clean up, clean them, you know, it is just by eight o'clock at night I am exhausted, and then it is my turn to study. You know, put them to bed, and then I have to study, but you are almost doing it like clockwork because it has to be done and you almost put yourself outside of your body, like just to get through the day you can't even think about things, you just have to do it routine.*

These women were asked what stressors were challenging and how they coped with the stress during the deployment. They described the stress at home as different from the stress they felt when thinking about their husbands' situations and the deployment stressors they were faced with. They described how the demands placed on

families during deployment required them to adapt to a changing environment quickly, which led to feelings of isolation, being misunderstood, and feeling unsupported at times.

Stress at Home

In general, the women in this study identified three types of stressors related to a deployment. The first was the stress at home and being in a military environment; the second was the stress of the deployment, which included the cycle of deployment as identified by these women; and the third were stressors they termed as "situational stress" which included the normative as well as deployment-specific stressors. One of the themes that emerged during this study was the pronounced change in roles and responsibilities within the family during a deployment. Respondents talked in great detail about their ability to establish new routines and finding ways to cope with the "hole" left by their partner. All the women had experienced both short-term and long-term absences from their husbands, and agreed that the absence of their partner during longer periods is stressful in terms of the increase in the wife's responsibilities. The relationship between stressors, family resources, adaptation, and adjustment has been identified throughout the literature in relation to a family's ability to cope. McCubbin, Dahl, Lester, Benson and Robertson (1976) have written on the coping repertoires of families adapting to prolonged war-induced separations, while other researchers, such as Frankel et al. (1992) have looked at wives' adjustment to military deployment.

Calista described how the stress at home affected her:

...the kids and the house and you have to do everything, you have to do the grocery shopping, keep the house clean look after the kids, look after the animals do all the yard work etc. It is almost mind boggling ... you just do it.

Goldie described how she felt that the tension of others outside the military environment created additional stress for her and became difficult to deal with at times:

> *The looks, as soon as someone, as soon as someone would hear on the news or um, they would hear, or seeing a paper, a soldier killed … they would think, you know, they would think, oh God, … you could feel the looks, you could see the looks, you could feel their tension … that was hard to cope with.*

For some of the women in this study, having to be a full-time parent meant finding a balance was often a challenge:

> *I guess just having to be the mom and the dad … doing all the different planning and stuff like that … just being there constantly … not being able to say, you know what? I am just going to the store. Just watch the kids um, not sort of having any individuality … when you factor in everything you know, with the kids and the house, you know, vehicles and working full time, and, and you know, trying to keep everything together, it really plays on you after awhile.*

The researcher asked these women whether they could identify the stressors they experienced during the pre-deployment phase and how those stressors affected the family. They described this period as stressful for themselves and for their children and reflected on their preparation for deployment long before the military member leaves. They reported that the stress starts when they discover that they are going to experience a deployment. The women talked about the stress as it related to the deployment cycle which included the pre-deployment, deployment, Home Leave Travel Assistance, re-deployment (a termed used by Department Of National Defence to describe the preparation for members' homecoming) and post-deployment periods. The general consensus among the women was they felt their emotions started to run high when a deployment was about to occur. It is during this time that they felt the separation period starts and emotional cycle begins.

<u>Stressors Related to Deployment</u>

<u>Pre-Deployment</u>

During the pre-deployment period two of the women described a need to create some quality family time. Angela described how the pre-deployment period affected her family and the need for them to create family memories and to have some quality family time together before the deployment:

> *I think we also tried to focus in on making sure we had a good time. We made a point of taking a road trip ....we made a point of, you know, creating some sort of family history, some adventure, some time together.*

All the women in this study reflected on how the deployment affected their family and how they had to find ways to cope and adjust.

Jennifer described her experience as follows:

> *We talked about it for so long like it wasn't just that, okay, I am going away, like it wasn't anything that that we thought about this and thought okay, well in the long run are we going to be okay.*

Angela described the stress of deployment as starting when the family finds out that the deployment is about to happen and feels that families are not always ready. She described the period from the onset notice of deployment as very stressful and felt that a certain level of stress emerged within the family. She expressed her concern and apprehension during this period as follows:

> *I think that there is a certain element of, uh, stress that starts from the time you realize that there is deployment coming. I think it creates stress for the member and the family simply because you are not sure that you will get everything done. My husband advised me well ahead of time that he was going to be deploying but, um, his deployment came much earlier than either of us expected ... I think it creates stress for the member and the family simply because you are not sure that you will get everything done.*

The women also expressed how important it was for them to communicate with their partners prior to the deployment. Katie indicated that she felt less stress when the deployment was a few months away:

Pre-deployment, when it is far away from the time that he is going, you know, if it is a long time away, it isn't so bad because you don't really think about it.

Cameron described her experiences during the pre-deployment period as being very stressful:

We always argue before he leaves ... my greatest defect when he goes away, like that he'll usually, I'll usually get so ticked off at him before he leaves and I am so angry with him by the time he's gone, I am like, thank God he is gone, and that feeling lasts for about the first month.

Demi described her experience of not knowing where her spouse was deployed during the pre-deployment period:

When he left here, he had no idea what country he was going to. He did not know and I did not know and he didn't actually ... find out until the plane was actually airborne... So, for several days there I did not know what country he was even going to be in ... that was really tough.

In general, the women in this study identified a roller-coaster of mixed emotions that emerged at the pre-deployment stage. In anticipation of deployment, the military wives described the stressors that emerged, which they found made it difficult at the time to cope with. They described how their emotions varied based on the location of their partners' deployment. Goldie described how she did not want to experience this emotional roller-coaster and that she wanted to see it as just another deployment. She found it difficult at times and that pre-deployment events forced her to experience emotions that she did not want to experience:

His parents wanted to come and see him, so for me it was very stressful ... they were coming because they were thinking, okay, if he goes he may not come back,

and it may be the last time that they will ever see him, so that was very stressful ...
I knew what they were thinking and I did not even want to go in that direction.

Preparing Children for Deployment

The women in this study described how the pre-deployment stress affected their

children. One of the women described how her children became closer to her and were

fearful that she would also leave. Although the stress children experienced varied, based

on the age of the child(ren), most of the women with younger children felt that they

needed to spend time with their children preparing them for the deployment. These

women also felt that during the deployment their children did not always fully understand

why one of their parents had left, and trying to explain it to them was difficult at times.

Katie described her children as very bright, but still she found it difficult to come up with

a reason why their father was away and that other children's fathers were home.

The researcher grouped the children in categories based on each child's age and

labelled these categories as: younger children aged 3 to 8, middle children aged 9 to 15,

and older children aged 16 to 21. Wives were asked how their children had coped with

pre-deployment stress. Each woman was asked how she had approached her children to

explain to them that their father was about to deploy.

Jennifer, a mom of two young children described her pre-deployment experience

of having to explain to her children that their father was leaving. She felt it was

important for the couple to both talk to the children about the deployment and what they

could expect:

> *We sat them down and talked to them about it and made sure that they understood*
> *what was happening.*

Goldie explained:

> *This time it was hard on her* [referring to her daughter] *you know, she cried quite a bit ... she was smart enough to know what Afghanistan was and what was going on there, ... she was the most stressed, I think, of everybody.*

According to these women, their children's responses to deployment varied depending on their developmental ages. Some of the behaviours identified ranged from children "acting out" their feelings, to children crying and being very emotional throughout the deployment. Katie explained that pre-deployment was a very stressful time for her daughter and that her daughter's behavioural changes created extra levels of stress within the family:

> *The month before he goes away she is usually very difficult, she's more emotional, and she is angry.*

Goldie expressed how aware her teenagers were of the deployment and their level of understanding about the associated danger. She felt that her oldest daughter worried more than usual during the last deployment. She could see it on her face and sensed it every time they talked. The women felt it was important for them to talk to their children, not only prior to, but also during, the deployment. As well, talking with their children as a couple before the deployment, they felt, would provide the children with a chance to ask questions and help them understand what was going on.

Demi described what she felt was important for military wives to remember during a deployment. She indicated that for her it was important not to show her emotions and to keep them to herself. According to Demi, her outward behaviour could potentially influence the reaction her children might express towards the deployment, which she felt would only create unnecessary worry and stress. Demi reflected on what she felt happens when parents show too much emotion during a deployment:

I think they feed off the parent. If the parent is, um, acting like they are worried, then the kids become worried and I usually kept that to myself.

Deployment

Deployment, according to these women, affects the family in a number of ways which includes the family's time spent together, adjustment of roles, and setting up routines. The women in this study described how they felt family cohesiveness helped the family pull together during the deployment. They reflected on their ability to adjust to different roles and how they established routines. They also indicated that once their husbands left, establishing routines was one way to maintain some "normalcy" within the family. Routines provided stability and continuity, which they found critical in order to get everything done that needed to get done in a day. Cameron reflected on her experience:

> *There are more routines when he is away, yeah. Our lives become more of a routine because I know what I have to do and I know what I have to accomplish ... there is no second-guessing things.*

All the women agreed that, although there are various stressors that emerge during a deployment, one of the most stressful aspects is the increased responsibility of having to take care of the house and car because these were things that they did not normally do. The period following deployment also allowed them to assign new responsibilities to everyone in the family to ensure tasks were completed. All the women agreed that the children, regardless of age, were given and take on extra responsibilities during the deployment. Although the children's responsibilities varied by age, they included things like cleaning their rooms, shoveling snow in the winter, doing dishes, or helping with laundry. Katie described her experience:

When he is away, they do, they step in and they help and they do what they can do ... they step in and they help and everybody does a little bit of something.

The women indicated that how the tasks were completed was not as important as knowing that the tasks were getting done. Faith reflected on her experience:

I would say to my boys, you know, shoveling has got to be done, garbage needs to be taken out, you know. I give them chores. I give them responsibilities. I say I want the dishwasher emptied ... I don't care if it takes you now until midnight, just make sure you get it done because the next person that has to load it isn't going to be very happy with you.

Katie described herself as very emotional at times and felt she needed to stay strong for the children. She felt that the increased responsibilities and her husband's place of duty affected the level of stress within the family:

The situation there, because Afghanistan is such a hostile deployment ... all those 'near misses' that happen, you know, in the military with the tours ... people would hear about that but they don't know about the near misses. All they know is when somebody gets hurt ... and thinking about his safety.

Angela felt that what balanced her family was their ability to pull together, keeping them grounded. She indicated that her presence within the family, and making sure that the family understood that things were going to continue as per usual, allowed them to continue on as normal as possible during this time:

We tend to be, mmm, fairly independent of the people around us because we support each other ... They realized that they had Mom. Dad might be away, but Mom is still there.

One of the women described how they as a family maintained their Sunday morning routine, established prior to her husband's deployments. She felt that keeping this routine allowed the family to stay connected to him even though he was not physically present.

Communication and family cohesion become important for family functioning. Although these women saw deployments as stressful and demanding, they felt that the deployment period gave them an opportunity to grow as individuals. They felt that this time allowed them to get to know their children better and give them an opportunity to become more independent.

Single Parenthood

With a deployment, a shift in the role as a parent emerges for military wives. When their partners are gone, these women find themselves in the single-parent role, having to take on all the responsibilities that they once shared with their partners. They identified being a single parent as a major adjustment, and described themselves as having to make a significant effort to adjust to the demands the deployment placed on them. Lindsay and Jennifer reflected on their experiences:

> *I think a deployment is stressful, regardless, because there are so many unknowns coming from a two parent family to a single parent family. That is hard too, because I never want to be a single parent.*

> *Having to be the mom and the dad and, um, you know having to be the person who's the good guy and the bad guy ... It is so mind draining at work that by the time I got home it's like I did not really want to have to deal with the kids but I have to because they are there, they are mine.*

Demi found that being a single parent was the most difficult aspect of the deployment for her:

> *It was just the constant always having to be there; always being the one that had to answer questions and everything started with 'Mommy' ... I got so tired of it. Please just walk into the room and just talk to me because there was no point in saying 'Mommy'.*

Although these women identified certain stressors related to the deployment, they also felt that the changes they saw in their children often helped their children feel less stress. Three of the women indicated their children tended to relax more when there was only one parent present. Cameron and Angela reflected on their experiences:

When he is away, they relax a little bit more so, so that changes for them.

My older children would comment that they kind of liked it when Dad goes away because they only had to deal with one parent.

Cameron and Lindsay described how their parenting skills were more relaxed than those of their partners, and that during the deployment they saw themselves as less authoritative than their husbands:

I am more relaxed than what he is ... he is just; he is just more hard line.

I am not as strict with them ... they will push the button and I will let them do what they want ... it is sometimes just easier for me to give in than argue, it is less stressful.

Other stressors some of the women identified were what they termed "outsiders' views".

Although being a single parent was stressful for these women, they found that it gave them a chance to form closer relationships with their children and to spend more quality time with their children. The general consensus among them, though, was that their tendency to be more relaxed with the children during the deployment often resulted in conflict when their partners returned from deployment.

Feelings of Being Alone

Although there was no consensus among the women about feeling lonely or sad during their husbands' deployments, they all agreed that they missed having their

husbands present at certain times. A number of women described missing the adult

conversation and their partner's support. The researcher asked the women to describe

how they dealt with the sadness or lonely moments that they experienced. Demi

described her experience:

> *I deal with the sadness. I guess I probably read books ... I would just sort of say, wow, this is kind of too bad ... he is missing this or I am missing him ... and you let those feelings wash over you for awhile and you experience them, you go okay, enough of that ... I have stuff to do.*

Relationship with Children

Maintaining a good relationship with their children during the deployment was an

important aspect for these women. Although there were some differences in how these

women maintained the relationship with their children, they all found that it was

important to stay connected. The extra time spent with their children created a chance for

these mothers to not only get to know their children better, but also provided their

children with an opportunity to ask questions. Cameron reflected on how she maintained

the connection with her children during the deployment:

> *I try to make a lot of nights, too, when he is gone, that we, you know, pizza and hang out and rent movies.*

Angela felt that at certain times during the deployment her children let her know

that they needed her and wanted to spend time with her:

> *We would go get a movie and watch a movie together, or, you know, can we go do such and such, and you realize that they needed some time with you.*

Being able to spend time with the kids and do family things made it easier for the

women to know what was going on with their children and how the deployment was

affecting them. The women described this time as important since it allowed their

children to express their feelings and concerns easily. Cameron reflected on her experience:

> *I talk a lot to the kids whether they want me to or not ... they do spend more time talking to me.*

Although not all the women felt that they had formed close relationships with their children, they agreed that they had established good communication with them. They also felt that it was important for the children to stay connected to their absent fathers during the deployment. Although there were variations in how long and when the children spoke to their fathers, the women made a point of keeping the family connected.

Angela felt the importance of keeping her husband involved in family issues during the deployment:

> *If there are things going on at home that my husband has no control over, I try to keep him informed ... I think it is important to let them* [referring to her husband] *know that, you know, I have a problem, give them* [referring to her husband] *the opportunity to be part of it.*

Demi, on the other hand, felt that it was not fair to involve her husband in all the details of what was happening at home. She described her experience as:

> *I did not want to stress him with things that were going on here ... I did not want to take away from his mind what he was doing and worry about us.*

Communication with Partner

The women in this study agreed that communication and keeping their husbands involved in daily routines and decisions was important. Communication with their partners involved telephone conversations and email.

On average, these women received more emails from their husbands than phone calls. The typical phone call described occurred two and sometimes three times a week

and lasted no more than five to ten minutes. The women indicated that the reason for short telephone conversations was because their husbands were given calling cards that had no more than thirty minutes on them. They indicated that since their husbands had access to computers and email, it was easier to email each other. These military spouses found that the use of email was the best way to pass on information, and they felt they could say more and talk daily to their partners versus only a few minutes if they spoke by phone to each other. Cameron described her experience:

> *Email conversations were a lot better, like you could say more ... the phone calls were too short to really get into anything.*

Faith and Cameron also felt that the phone calls were less personal and reminded them of the distance and a sense of disconnect that existed between them and their husbands:

> *That was his world there and this was my world kind of here ... it was like he was in a totally different world.*

> *We are fine when we used email, but for some reason, when I hear his voice and the distance and the detachment that was there from the whole situation, like he did not really fully ... I did not think he fully understood everything that I was going though.*

Lindsay felt that not keeping her husband involved in everyday family decisions resulted in him feeling left out:

> *He gets upset and he feels like he is not part of the family.*

Although technology and the use of email provided a great opportunity for these women to stay connected to their partners, a number of the women felt that it was not the most reliable method of communication. Katie indicated that although she emailed her husband daily, there were times when communication was difficult because of the location of her husband's deployment:

So, emails are usually on a regular basis ... I don't hear from him, then I know that maybe the weather is bad or that communications are down.

Although the women used both phone calls and email as means of communicating with their partners, they felt that this was not as satisfying an experience as talking to their partners in person. Cameron reflected on this experience:

The biggest things you miss usually are that adult interaction between you and your husband and the conversation.

Home Leave Travel Assistance

In some cases, extra stress occurred during the Home Leave Travel Assistance period when husbands came home. The Home Leave Travel Assistance (HLTA) program allows Canadian Forces members to visit their families' mid-tour. The primary intent of HLTA is to provide transportation assistance to allow members to reunite with their next of kin when granted mission leave out of the post or mission area. HLTA must be taken during the deployment at the discretion of the member's Commanding Officer (MacDonald, 2005).

Home Leave Travel Assistance provides an opportunity for military members to travel home or to another location determined by the member and his or her family. HLTA can also be taken in reverse, whereby authorization is given for a Canadian Forces member's next-of-kin to travel to a place determined by the Canadian Forces member and his or her spouse (in lieu of the member) (MacDonald, 2005). The HLTA period is two to three weeks in duration and the period when the member is scheduled to take it is determined by both the member and his or her family, and priority is given to families with children.

Although the military spouses in this study felt that the Home Leave Travel Assistance period can be very disruptive, six of the military spouses indicated that they thought it would be best for their husbands to come home during this period. Two of the women preferred their husbands not to come home at all and felt that they should complete the six-month tour before they returned home. Jennifer felt that it would be better for her to meet her husband overseas. She decided to take advantage of this period and described it as having a "honeymoon". There was no consensus among the women whether the HLTA was a benefit or not for the family.

Anticipating Partner's Return

Eight of the women in this study had previously experienced Home Leave Travel Assistance and therefore felt they were better prepared to deal with the stress that accompanied this period. The women also felt that the longer the family had established their routines during the deployment, the better prepared they were for their partners' return during the HLTA period. Another important period identified by the women was the period of time when their husbands would to come home for the two or three week "holiday".

Determining how this period would affect the family and the established routines became a critical aspect during Home Leave Travel Assistance preparation. Discussing the period of HLTA with their partners provided these women with time to prepare the children for the homecoming, even if it was only for a short period of time. Katie reflected on her experience:

We usually set up his vacation right in the middle somewhere, if not more towards the time when he is to come home because it is easier for us to be in a routine longer.

Faith indicated that she took time off from work and treated the Home Leave Travel Assistance period as a family holiday. Although there was no consensus on how these women prepared for the return of their partners for the HLTA period, they all found that this period reassured them that their partners were safe.

Clearly the women in this study prepared for and treated the HLTA period to best meet the needs of their family. Although there were various stressors related to this period, these women have found ways to cope with those stressors by maintaining as many of the family routines as possible.

Maintaining Routines

For some families the Home Leave Travel Assistance created stress rather than relieving it. One of the challenges was to maintain the routines that they had established when their husbands initially deployed. Angela felt her husband respected the routines she had established while he was away. She described how during the Home Leave Travel Assistance period the children would often try to "play the system" a little to get what they wanted. To avoid any disruption in the decision-making routines established by her:

When the kids would ask him for decisions on things, he would send them to me.

Calista felt that having her husband home during the Home Leave Travel Assistance period pushed her schedule off track which then resulted in them arguing at times:

Like when you are used to being up and vacuuming at nine o'clock, then you can't because he is sleeping in, that screws up your whole schedule ... they [referring to her partner] *were not doing any chores and stuff. It was not really affecting them* [referring to her partner] *too much; I guess we have the occasional argument.*

Demi reflected on her experience and described it as a struggle trying to maintain the routine. She felt that she had to remind her husband while he was home for this time period to respect what she had done, and to follow the routine she had established:

Don't let the kids stay up just because you are home. They still have to get to bed. They still have to do their homework.

Lindsay felt it was good to have her independence making decisions and maintaining the established routines:

It is sort of like you have to get used to him being home again and then, instead of making a decision on your own, you have to not sort of ask him, but get into a discussion with him.

Relationship Detachment

Although the majority of the women in the study enjoyed the time they had with their husbands during the Home Leave Travel Assistance period, they felt a sense of detachment. Angela described this period as having a "fourth child at home". Angela felt that there was a distance created between her partner and her because of the readjustment the family had to make. She jokingly described the distance as:

I had a fourth child, you know, and it was, you know, a teenager who likes to play video games and stay up late at night and kind of be off routine ... I go to bed early and I wake up early, so you are almost, you end up being almost in opposite, opposite rotations.

Demi found the long period of separation (deployment) created a distance between her husband and her. She felt that she could not allow him "back in her heart" and felt that she needed time to adjust. She described her experience as feeling the need

to maintain the distance because she knew that after only a short time at home he had to leave again:

> *Well, one of the biggest things is when they come back, um, you can't really let them back into your life again or your heart or whatever because you have to let them go again … you still just holding them at arm's length, even though you, um, love them and have to have sex with them and all that, but it is just, um, it's not really loving … you have to keep that distance because you know that you have to let them go again … it is hard when they come back. You are really glad to see them, but you know, five days before they leave again, you are already starting to let them go. How am I going to have sex with this man when I don't really remember? I know who he is, but you got to just get to know each other again and they always expect to just have sex the moment they get home. That is a tough one.*

Some of the women felt that their husbands were also maintaining that distance by not becoming too involved in the family routines. Cameron reflected on her experience:

> *When they come home for the two weeks, they know they are only there for a short time, so they don't try to interfere and they don't try to parent. They are just there.*

Two of the women felt that having their husbands' home during the Home Leave Travel Assistance period gave them a break. They felt that having them home took a load off their shoulders and alleviated some of the stress of constantly having to do everything.

Cameron, on the other hand, felt that the stress she felt during the HLTA period was related to her husband coming home and not being very supportive:

> *Then they* [referring to her husband] *come home and then they* [referring to her husband] *just irritate you because they* [referring to her husband] *are tired and they* [referring to her husband] *are not really getting involved they* [referring to her husband] *are not really doing anything they* [referring to her husband] *are kind of another kid … you are expecting work, you are expecting miracles, you are expecting fireworks you are expecting it all and they're* [referring to her partner] *not giving you nothing so you are angry when they* [referring to her partner] *leave again.*

Not all the women in the study enjoyed the Home Leave Travel Assistance

period. Some found it to be very disruptive to the family routines. Goldie explained:

> *I said that to him many times, you know, I love you but I honestly, honestly,
> honestly wish that you just stay where you're at because you, you do a lot of
> mental preparation when they leave, to get ready to be a single parent, or to do
> things on your own, um, and then you work at it and you do it for so, for so long,
> and then all of a sudden they are back and it is so wonderful to see them again,
> and it is wonderful to have them there, um, but I mean two weeks is just basics for
> an adjustment period, you know, and then you are gearing yourself up again for
> them to go. I hate the HLTA ... the girls and I always prepare for that, for when
> he comes home, you know we talk about it. We talk about the way things are
> going to be and Dad's coming home, so let's make sure that the house is the way
> he likes it.*

Re-Deployment

Anticipation and Apprehension about Homecoming

The women described re-deployment as the period of anticipation and preparation

for the return home of their husbands. They described how both the return and departure

of the member disrupts the family balance, often creating conflicting emotions within the

family. This period starts several days or even weeks prior to the military member's

homecoming.

The military wives described how the family once again experienced an

emotional cycle, which now consisted of excitement in anticipation of the return of the

family member. However, the women also described feelings of apprehension.

Apprehension was in the questions the return raised: Were the efforts they made in

establishing routines and changes going to be accepted by their partner? Were they were

going to be expected to give up their independence?

Another question raised was how the family structure would change once their husbands returned home. The researcher asked the women to describe what the family goes through in terms of waiting for the family member to return from a six-month deployment. The military wives were also asked whether this period was stressful and what aspects of the re-deployment had been the most stressful for them.

Angela described what some of her thoughts were during the re-deployment period:

> *There is a certain level of emotion associated with the member coming back. You are very happy and then you are kind of worried about, oh I wonder what is going to happen now, because you know that there is an adjustment period.*

The women in this study identified that during the re-deployment phase, family emotions once again ran high in anticipation of what changes were about to surface. Goldie described how they, as a family, prepared for the return of the member and described how the atmosphere in the house changed. She reflected on this experience, indicating that the girls had to toe the line again. She described how the family cleaned the house and that it was a way to make the returning member feel comfortable coming home:

> *When he* [referring to her husband] *comes home, um, making things as comfortable as possible when he comes home and, um, understanding that ... I think that is very important as a family that you understand what it is that person needs when they come home.*

Post-Deployment

Readjustment Period

Post-deployment is the last period of deployment these women identified – the member's "homecoming". Although families would be once again together, these

women felt that there was a need for emotional adjustment to occur. They described this adjustment period as starting the moment they picked their husbands up at the airport.

Demi reflected on how her family handled her husband's homecoming and the reintegration period:

All of a sudden you belong to everyone again, you belong to your children and you belong to your husband and you don't have that independence.

Angela saw this as a difficult period for both the family members and the returning member. In her experience, it took a long time to re-establish the connections they once had. She explained that finding ways to get to know each other again was merely a starting point to a process that would take several months to master:

We made an appointment, a date, time to be doing the same things at the same time ... you have to get used to the person again and they have to get used to you.

Cameron indicated that she felt as a family they had grown during the deployment. She described that the most difficult part of the readjustment as her husband's unwillingness to see her and her children so independent.

Having to adjust to new routines can often be a very difficult time for the returning member. Another important adjustment may be accepting that one's family has grown and moved on, and that the family is no longer as dependent on the returning member as they once were. The consensus among the women was that changes within the family over the previous six months make the readjustment difficult for the returning family member. Cameron and Jennifer described their experiences:

I find that the hardest time for us is when they come back and that is ... they want in ... they are still there six months ago, but we have grown six months' worth of time.

He had a different life and now he had to come back in and remember that you are not dealing with your military buddies, you know, you are dealing with your family.

The women identified that communication was an important aspect of reintegration and adjustment, but at the same time finding ways to communicate with each other was often a challenge. Angela indicated the importance for her children to adjust and re-establish communications with the returning parent:

We had far better communication and spent more time talking when he was on deployment than when he was at home (post-deployment).

In Cameron's opinion, the readjustment period and the return of her husband had an affect on the children. She indicated that since the return of her husband, she had lost the connection with her children. As a result, they were doing fewer things together than during the deployment:

There are some things we do that we don't do anymore because he is here.

Jennifer described how the adjustment time period changed her children. They needed time to transition into having a two-parent family again:

The children are so different when he came back and that was the hardest part.

Demi described the deployment and adjustment period in terms of "childbirth":

It is almost a loss of memory; maybe it is like, um, childbirth. It is so painful that you try to forget it.

The military spouses indicated that readjustment was very difficult. They identified a number of factors that made this reintegration time very stressful. Factors such as getting used to the member again, the reassignment of roles and responsibilities, giving up their independence and getting to know their partners again were all areas that posed some challenges.

For Angela, the readjustment period took a long time. She described the difficulties the family had in terms of re-establishing communication skills and finding time to "get to know" each other again. She described her experience of readjustment as a period that required patience, and indicated that it took her family a long time before they were back on track:

> *I think now, a year later, we are back on track. I personally think we are stronger.*

While Cameron felt that the adjustment period took her family a few years before they were truly back on track, she described the adjustment period as an important time for the family to get to know each other again:

> *When they* [referring to her partner] *come back, it is like, oh, okay, you know, you start over and it takes a few years.*

Loss of Independence

The military spouses felt that being part of a military lifestyle had made them strong and independent. They described the military lifestyle as constantly changing. A number of the women felt that there is a constant requirement for the military family to be ready to adapt and adjust which included being ready for unexpected news that often accompanies deployments.

Lindsay felt that her husband's homecoming took away her independence and she felt that he did not appreciate what she had been doing over the past six months and only wanted to "march" in and take over again:

> *Him* [referring to her husband] *wanting to be the boss again … complains that I did not do it right instead of being happy that it was done.*

Calista also felt that her ability to parent the children was questioned when her husband returned, since she no longer was doing things the same way she had done them prior to him leaving.

The women in this study reported feeling a loss of their independence during the post-deployment period. They described themselves as dependable, independent women who took care of the house, the car, the children, and paying bills, without getting recognition for the job they had done. Upon the return of their husbands, they saw themselves as having less independence.

Surrendering power gained, along with their independence, had been a struggle with the return of their partners. These women felt that hanging onto their independence and maintaining some of the decision-making was important. A few women indicated that they were still very much in control of everyday decisions. Cameron reflected on her experience:

> *We are struggling for power. I have been in charge for the last six or seven months and who are you* [referring to her partner] *to suddenly come in and start barking orders?*

The military spouses in this study also felt that standing their ground in maintaining the routines they had established during the deployment allowed them to hang onto their independence to some extent. Cameron continued:

> *When they* [referring to her partner] *come home at the end of the tour is when the trying time is because they* [referring to her partner] *want to come in and they* [referring to her partner] *wanna ... I am in charge and we're going to change the way we're doing things... Wait a minute, we have our routine, or the kids have grown up while you were gone, and yes, we never used to allow them to do that, but I, you know, we talked about it, I think they are okay to do that so this is what they do.*

The negotiation of household chores and routines was yet another area these women felt changed with the return of the member. Having some control over what the new rules of the household were allowed these military spouses to maintain some level of independence. Jennifer described it this way:

> *Like there is a certain rule or structure in the house, don't mess with us, that was, I think, the biggest thing and him* [referring to her partner] *integrating back into the family, um, and back into our routine ... it is the way I am dealing with the children and not the way we were dealing with the kids before ... so there has to be that adjustment period again where you say okay, this is my responsibility, this is your responsibility this is our responsibility and you have to meet me here, you have to see me eye to eye on this.*

Changes in Parenting and Children

Although there were some differences among the women as to their parenting styles, they felt in general they were more laid back than their partners. Jennifer reflected on her parenting experience during the deployment, describing herself as not always having the energy, after working a full day, to be strict with the children. She felt that her parenting was not authoritative, and she often allowed the children to get away with stuff:

> *Coming home, it sort of, you know things that maybe, yeah, I got a little lax but being a single parent you can't be on your kids all the time.*

Cameron indicated that with the return of her husband, a number of changes almost immediately began to emerge within the family:

> *When they* [referring to her partner] *come back home, because they* [referring to her partner] *want to step back into the role, they* [referring to her partner] *had before they* [referring to her partner] *left off being in charge, they* [referring to her partner] *don't even want to ease into it. They're like, okay, I am home now, what are you doing, you can't do that ... I am more relaxed than what he is ... he is just, he is just more hard line.*

Demi felt that her children did not listen to her husband as much as they did to her, because she thought he was away too much and when he is home he expected too much from the children:

> *I think that they* [the children] *don't listen to my husband as much as they* [the children] *listen to me because I was the one that was always there ... he is more barking, he is demanding where I am kind of laid back ... he has a little more of a temper about things so when the kids and I am here alone and they* [the children] *do something stupid, you think, don't do that, but my husband is more likely to get angry at them and stuff.*

Changes in Roles and Responsibilities

The women in this study described the return of the member as yet another adjustment in the roles and responsibilities of the family members. The military wives described how they took on several instrumental tasks in order to perform the dual role of both mother and father during the deployment period. They described how the transition of roles, responsibilities, and rules within the family, after the return of their partners, contributed to stress in the family. They described how the changes created unnecessary and additional stress.

The military wives offered their perceptions of how their partners took on different roles and responsibilities upon their return, as opposed to the responsibilities they held prior to the deployment.

Angela described her experience:

> *I found, when he came back, it was sort of interesting because some of the responsibilities that, um, he took on when he came back, were not the ones that he gave away.*

Goldie felt that it was nice to have her husband back to take back some of the responsibilities and to help her out around the house:

When he got home, it was really nice to have someone that could take some of that load off.

Faith felt that there was really no change in the parental roles and responsibilities after her husband returned. She described herself as having full control over all the routines that she established, although she indicated that they did share decision-making:

Definitely it's never changed. When he comes home, like, I kind of run things.

With the return of the family member, children need time to adjust and often feel confused wondering if the returning parent will be departing again. With the re-sharing of responsibilities, children may not know who they should go to. Angela described how her children tended to use this reintegration period as a means to test the roles and responsibilities of each parent:

Sometimes they were being kids and were trying to work the system a little bit too, and, well, if Dad is here, maybe I can get this out of him even though Mom said no... children recognize my frustration when, you know, you try to do something ... because you express those things, um, sometimes there is anger in the sense that the other person does not realize what they are doing.

Angela felt that the adjustment time was a good time for the family to rebuild and establish communication skills. She described this period as critical to achieving a good relationship. She felt that having two parents making the decisions required the need for good communication skills; however, she did feel that this was one of the most difficult aspects of adjustment, and took her husband and her a long time to master. She described how they would communicate and solve disagreements better by using the email system:

Ironically, when we had a disagreement about something, we went to work when we were angry with each other ... and ironically my husband obviously went, oh click, he send me an email and I send him an email, and by the time we went to go home at the end of the day, we did not have to get back into the same vehicle still being angry from the morning because we had solved it, by simply communicating by another means. It worked ... it is like putting something in between.

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Jennifer felt that she needed to stick to her decisions, and although she recognized the difficulty her husband had with the reintegration period, and changes in roles, rules, and responsibilities, she felt that her partner had to make the effort to readjust to the new routines:

> *For him, adjusting to our routine and me having to stick to my guns and say this is what we going to do ... then there's the, you know, sort of the stress between the two of you because now it is the way I am dealing with the children and not the way we were dealing with the kids before he left.*

Situational Stress

The women indicated that the nature of the deployment and the role of their partner while deployed had a significant impact on them as a family. They talked about this added stress as "situational stressors" and included both normative and non-normative events. This stress, for example, included dealing with a death in the family, problems with the house, car, having to deal with a teenager's pregnancy, and dealing with the deployment specific stressors. Katie reflected on what she described as a situational stress and how it affected her

> *There was a couple of weeks where there were suicide bombers I guess* (long pause) *were walking around so they* [officer in charge] *cancelled the convoy* (long pause and tears) *the convoy my husband was suppose to be on ... was the biggest* [tears and a pause] *stress the last deployment.*

Cameron described the stressful situations at home as creating a distance that left her feeling disconnected from her husband. As a single parent, she felt frustrated at times since she was not getting the support she needed from him:

> *He was already gone when we found out she* [her daughter] *was pregnant ... I guess you are looking for the part of the reassurance, the something from them and they are just not giving it ... and something like that, you kind of really would be nice to have him to have the support.*

<u>Coping</u>

The military wives were asked how they dealt with the stressors and anxiety they often felt during the deployment and what they found to work in helping them cope. Angela explained:

> *When my husband goes away, if I have a way of dealing with anxiety, I eat ... I think it is a soothing mechanism ... I don't like my stomach being in a knot and I've always dealt with it by eating something and it fills it up.*

Calista, on the other hand, felt stress and anxiety was part of the military lifestyle:

> *I think a lot of times not thinking about everything you had to do. You just did as much as you could ... you try not to worry about it ... we would do different things to count down the days.*

Eight of the women in this study were employed during the deployment and many indicated that finding time to relax was always a challenge. Not having time for self-care affected them in terms of how they dealt with everyday stress. Demi and Goldie found that what helped them cope with the stress was to treat themselves by allowing someone else to take care of them:

> *That was always really relaxing to me, someone else get the food and I didn't have to worry about cooking ... that break, just let somebody else take over for a little while ... let somebody else care for me.*

> *Every second Saturday I would go and get my nails done, and that would be my time, you know ... it was not a vanity thing or anything else. It was that I recognized it as it was, my time to go sit down in a place where nobody knew who I was. I could just sit and relax.*

Another tactic these women felt helped them cope with deployment stress was to avoid any media that focused on the situation overseas. Three of the women in the study indicated that they made an agreement with their husbands prior to the deployment that there would be no news on in the house during their absence. According to Cameron, a mother of two young children:

We had agreed, um, both of us had agreed that there would be no news at the house. We would not turn the news on ... you're always hearing about a death or something happening and that would just open the door to worry, stress.

Faith, a woman who had experienced a number of deployments, felt that the latest deployment had been the worst one she had experienced. She reflected on how she dealt with the stressors at home and the stressors related to the deployment. Faith felt that not listening to the news was a good way for her to cope and manage some of her stress. During the deployment, she often worried about the future, which left her feeling overwhelmed. Not having the support of her partner was difficult to deal with at times. She felt that having a very good support system helped her cope during this difficult time:

I had nights that I came home from work and went into my room and laid in my room and cried for hours ... We [referring to her friends] would go for supper. We'd go do something and then you feel a little bit lighter, it is a little okay, I can do this, you know, you get the encouragement.

Katie, a parent of two young children, had also experienced a number of deployments. The military had recently relocated her family to Winnipeg, which she found very stressful. Shortly after their arrival, her husband was deployed. Katie felt that she did not even have time to settle in when she found out her husband was being deployed, and having no friends or family around made it even more difficult.

She described herself as an "emotional wreck" and indicated that she did not really have a "coping way". She indicated that her children sought comfort from other people although she felt it was her responsibility to provide them with comfort and support. She felt that during the deployment she was not emotionally ready to help and found it difficult at times to cope:

I feel guilty because I don't think they [referring to her children] should be going to other people about it. They should feel good enough to come to me ... I am not always going to be an emotional wreck about things so I don't know, it kind of

makes me feel like the bad mom not being there for my kids ...because I do not
physically do anything to get rid of the stress... I just sit there and cry.

Although, all the women in this study indicated that they were strong and

independent, the stress they experienced during the deployment forced them to find ways

to cope, adapt, and adjust. Faith indicated that she felt that being a military wife meant:

> *...you have to come to the realization that ultimately in the end you have yourself*
> *to rely upon, nobody else...You can't look at it* [military lifestyle] *and say, well, I*
> *have this or this. You have to look at it and say, I have me ...* [as a military wife]
> *find your own inner strength.*

Informal Supports

Family and In-laws

The researcher asked the military wives in this study to reflect upon the support

systems they had had available during the deployment. One support system that the

researcher explored with the women was that of immediate family and in-laws. Five of

the women indicated that they had immediate family, in-laws, or both living in and

around the city of Winnipeg. Both Angela and Faith indicated that their in-laws lived in

the city and that they could rely upon them for support when needed. When asked how

they viewed their relationship with their in-laws, both women indicated that they

considered themselves to have good relationships with them.

Angela also felt that she had a good relationship with her parents, and although

they lived out of province, she phoned them on a regular basis. Faith, on the other hand,

described her relationship with her parents as one that was not close. Lindsay, Calista,

and Jennifer stated that both their immediate family and their in-laws lived in or near the

city of Winnipeg. These women felt that they depended mostly on their immediate

family for support during the deployment. Both Calista and Jennifer indicated that they had good relationships with their in-laws. Lindsay, however, indicated that she did not have a good relationship with her in-laws and avoided them as much as possible. She felt that deployment was stressful, and having to deal with her in-laws would only create additional unnecessary stress for her and the children.

Although Cameron's parents lived outside the province, she indicated that she had a sister living in Manitoba and felt that she could rely on her for emotional and mental support. In general, the women felt that the support of their families, in addition to other supports, provided them with more than enough support and, as such, they did not have to draw on supports provided by the military.

Demi, Goldie, and Katie indicated that they did not have the support of family in Winnipeg. However, both Demi and Goldie felt they had established good support systems since moving to Winnipeg several years previously. These women felt that the support systems they had established through time provided them with the help they needed during the deployment.

Katie, a young mother of two and recently relocated to Winnipeg, felt that she did not have a support system in place when her husband deployed. Not having family around to provide her with support created additional stress for her. She described being new to Winnipeg and not knowing where to go for help was overwhelming at times and difficult to deal with:

> *I call people, but it is usually family, and people that are far away, nobody that can physically reach out and help.*

According to Larson, Goltz, and Munro (2000), families with fewer resources can potentially face more difficulties during a deployment than those with adequate resources

and supports. Social support has been found to be the strongest predictor of successful problem-solving for a family and its members (Larson et al., 2000).

Friends and Neighbours

The lack of resources and social supports during a separation has been found to be one of the biggest contributors to isolation, health complications, financial troubles, and individual problems, such as poor problem-solving abilities (Drummet, Coleman and Cable, 2003). The researcher explored what informal support systems (i.e., friends or neighbours) that these women had available to them during the deployment. All the women in the study, with the exception of Katie, indicated that they had their own networks of friends and neighbours that they relied upon during the deployment.

Katie stated that her babysitter helped her out on occasion with the children, preparing meals and taking the children out. However, she indicated feeling isolated and alone. She felt that the only support she had was her children:

> *No support, yeah that is right. I have to be their support* [referring to her children] *and they have to be my support.*

Other women in this study indicated that their support networks consisted of friends, neighbours, and colleagues were not related to the military. They were people from work and the community, as well as neighbourhood friends. Cameron described her experience:

> *I became involved in the community and stuff ... I had my friends ... That made a big difference ... I had my friends and like, civilian friends, not, not dealing military.*
> *Most of my friends here* [Winnipeg] *are not military. They have nothing to do with military environment.*

Jennifer, on the other hand, saw herself and her family as a "non-military family" since her husband is a Reservist, and she felt that not living on the base qualified her family to be a "civilian family". She reflected on her perception of how she saw her support from neighbours and friends:

> *I did not have any military support because we are technically a civilian family ... We don't live on base. We don't live around anyone who's military ... I have two neighbours. I have one that lives across the street from me and the other one that lives beside me, and during the time when my husband was gone, they were very, very supportive ... She* [referring to her neighbour across the street] *was my blessing because there were times when, you know, I was having difficulty with the kids or something, she would come in and say, you know what, I'll take the kids.*

Formal Supports

Military and Military Family Resource Centre

Support which is provided to military families through the Military Family Resource Centre is meant to act as a "buffer". The social support and resources available to military wives through the Centre is a way to provide families with the skills to adapt to, and cope with, prolonged periods of separation. The Military Family Resource Centre has programs available where military wives can meet other military wives who are experiencing similar deployment stressors.

The general consensus among the women in the study was that they were too busy working and taking care of the house and the children to sit around and chat with other military wives about their deployment stress. The women did not establish any relationships with other military wives who were either going through or had gone through a similar experience. Cameron stated that she did not want to form any relationships with other military wives because she did not want to sit around and drink

tea and listen to their "sob stories". She felt that she was having a difficult time herself and did not see the point in listening to other people having tough times too.

The military also has a "rear party" in place, made available to military wives whose husbands are deployed. The rear party usually consists of military members who stay behind when the majority of their unit deploys. The rear party provides support and help when needed. This support can include shoveling driveways during the winter, helping with home or car maintenance, cutting grass during the summer, or any other practical support required. The researcher explored whether the military wives had had any support from the rear party or the Military Family Resource Centre during the deployment and whether the support had been helpful.

The women in the study indicated that the support they received from the rear party was usually from someone their partners had worked with and they would periodically check up on them to find out how things were going. Demi and Cameron reflected on their experience with the rear party:

> *I used to get phone calls from the base, from the rear party, um, once a month. They would phone up and ask me how things were … friends from my husband's work that would phone up and ask me how things were.*

> *That is non-existent, never, I, twenty years of living this. It is non-existent; no, you hear nothing from them.* [Military rear party] *You are on your own.*

Katie, on the other hand, felt that the support she received from the rear party only created more stress for her. She felt that when she needed someone, it was difficult to contact him or her:

> *I've got a sponsor here on base that calls every now and then, but his schedule and my schedule does not really mesh, so we never really make contact … I mean, the sponsor is usually, it is somebody, you know, that my husband gets along with at work, somebody that knows the situation … they don't do anything.*

Katie described how she felt she needed to talk to someone during her husband's last deployment, and that when she called the 1-800 Mission Information Line, provided as a support for families who are currently experiencing a deployment, no one even answered.

Frustration with the lack of support from the military and the Military Family Resource Centre, and the disorganization of the military support system, was a general consensus among the women. They felt it was better not to rely on supports from the military system. A number of the women reflected on their experience in terms of the military support they received during the deployment:

> *I did not have any military support ... I know, you know there were things that I could have asked that if I needed to I could ... I did not feel given the supports that I did have in my life, I didn't figure that I needed them* [military supports]... *I never had anyone call me at all from the military while my husband was away, not once.*

Lindsay felt frustrated with the lack of support she received from the military. Although she did not want anything to do with the military support system, she felt that they could have at least contacted her to see whether she wanted the support or not.

> *I never heard from the battalion. I never heard from MFRC... which was the way I preferred it anyway, less stress on me. But there was no contact not even for me to say, thanks for calling but I really don't need anything ....*

Angela and Faith described their frustration with the disorganization of the military support system:

> *Military as a whole deployment support system, and they have booklets and they have information and my husband deployed in January and I received this very nice package in the mail, um, in the middle of June, which detailed all the contact things and stuff for the deployment, but the deployment he was on was largely centered from Kingston and the whole package had Kingston telephone numbers ... It was very late in coming, but it was not an appropriate package to send to Winnipeg. It was kind of strange. It had some materials, but it was largely oriented to the wrong target population.*

There is no support ... I did not know about any because people here [referring to Winnipeg Military Family Resource Centre and 17 Wing] *did not get in contact with me and people from Kingston, there was no support there really because we are here* [Winnipeg] *and they are there* [Kingston].

Katie reflected on her experience and indicated that, although she had gone through a number of deployments, those deployments were during a time when she was living close to family. She described her experience during this last deployment in a new location as frustrating; she was not sure who she could contact on base for support. Jennifer was not sure of any supports available to her while her husband was deployed.

I never had anyone call me at all from the military while my husband was away, not once, yeah, I mean, like I said, I don't know if it is because we are civilian family.

Not all the women in the study felt that they had no support from the Military Family Resource Centre. Although Angela's husband was deployed out of another province, she felt that the Military Family Resource Centre was very helpful during the deployment:

I was able to tap into the Family Resource Centre here [Winnipeg]. *They* [staff at Military Family Resource Centre] *were friendly faces and they were always very welcoming and you sort of knew if you needed help it was there.*

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Summary of Findings

Through the interviews, it was revealed that the respondents were able to develop several strategies in order to cope with the stress they experienced during the deployment of their spouses. The women were able to articulate what events brought on stress for them, and they all coped in different ways. While these women described themselves as strong and independent, one could draw the conclusion that they had all found ways to protect themselves. These military spouses appeared to be very committed to their families. During a deployment, these women's family roles and responsibilities increased, and they became responsible for the management of the home as well as their children. Their priority was to meet the needs of their children and provide as normal a family life as they could, despite the challenges they faced during a deployment. Being involved with their children was seen as a positive way to cope with the stress. It was felt that having family time and not being as strict with the children alleviated unnecessary stress and many described this as a positive coping mechanism.

These women have sacrificed themselves in many ways to be part of the military life. Some of the sacrifices they have made can be seen during a deployment when they move from a two parent to a single parent family. Despite what these women are faced with during a deployment, they have continued to find ways to cope. They have described this as part of being a military wife. The stressors these military spouses encounter during a deployment are ongoing and continue to be a daily challenge for these women.

The findings also revealed that although there were military spouses who felt unsupported by the military system, a few did feel supported even though at times they described their experience of seeking help as frustrating and discouraging. Other women felt that they wanted nothing to do with the military environment and found support from family and friends adequate. A shared comment from the women, though, was that even though friends often commented on the ability of the wives to accomplish so much, it was not felt by them that friends and family fully understood what they were going through.

ABC-X Theoretical Model

Using Hill's ABC-X model is a simplistic view of looking at how military spouses manage the demands of a military lifestyle. This model has shed some light on how stressors can impact family life and has been cited in a number of studies that have examined the issue of military families and stress. How the stressors of deployment interact and affect the military family clearly depends on both the internal (how the family functions) and external, (formal and informal) resources.

In this study, the Double ABC-X model is useful in understanding how multiple stressors have affected the military spouses. The military wives in this study described additional stressors they had to deal with that were beyond the deployment stress they had encountered. These stressors had significant consequences that affected the family. For example, being a single parent and having to deal with a teenage pregnancy, or dealing with a child diagnosed with ADHD, or dealing with the death of a parent, in addition to changes in roles and responsibilities and loss of family relationships and support due to postings, were additional stressors these women faced.

The Double ABC-X model acknowledges that families can face multiple stressors and this is termed as *stressor pile-up*. Stressor pile-up does appear to have been a reality for a number of the participants in this study. The Double ABC-X model also looks at the resources and supports that families gain to assist them. For the participants in this study, having resources and supports was a critical component of the deployment. Participants in this study described their sources of support to consist mainly of family, friends, neighbours, and the community they were living in. The women were able to articulate a number of coping strategies they found helpful. Finding coping strategies during stressful events are a key component of the ABC-X model.

Using the ABC-X model as the framework for discussion could help answer the questions posed by the researcher. The following questions were asked of the participants.

1. What has been stressful for you in terms of the deployment?

2. What strategies have you used to help reduce the stress?

3. How supportive have your friends and family been and what has that been like for you?

4. How were you able to cope with the stress?

The first question addresses the (A) factor in the ABC-X model, the *stressor event*. Although the military wives in this study all identified the notice of deployment as stressful, they did not identify it as extremely difficult. They stated that this experience is being part of military life, but they felt that the *timing* of deployment was what created hardship within the family. Having to take on more responsibilities and manage all the household tasks, as well as adjusting from a two parent to a single parent family, was

stressful. It appeared that the stressors experienced by these military wives were related to their ability to adapt and adjust to the event, rather than the event itself.

The (B) factor in the ABC-X model, *family adaptive resource*, looked at the family's resources and support which helped them during this stressful time. The women in this study expressed their sense of independence and organization as the means to manage the stress. They identified family cohesion as another important characteristic in managing stress. These internal means, or organization and cohesion within the family, helped these military wives manage their daily stress. External supports were viewed as supportive and helpful; however, although some of these women received help from the rear party, they indicated that their external supports consisted mostly of non-military supports. When external support did include military supports, a number of the women identified their dissatisfaction and frustration, stating this only created an increased in stress level, and therefore they preferred to avoid any military supports.

The women in this study used external sources to cope with the stressors they faced. They relied mainly on informal support systems, friends, family, and neighbours. The general perception was that they intentionally sought out supports that were not related to the military in an attempt to avoid any additional stress that the military environment might impinge upon them.

The third factor (C) is the *meaning given to the situation* by these women as they lived it. This part of the model is very important since it looked at the stress within the family and the supports available to the family in their ability to adjust and cope with the stressors. Antonovsky (1987) describes this as a dynamic feeling of confidence within the family that involves both their external and internal environments. McCubbin and

Patterson (1983a and 1983b) indicate that coherence is dynamically influenced by the experiences of the family through the internal and external environments. Positive or negative experiences within these environments shape the meaning the family gives to the crisis.

The final variable in this model factor, (X), is *the amount of stress and the family's ability to adjust and cope with the stress.* According to the ABC-X model, the ABC variables are the determining factors that predict the X factor and the family's ability to adjust and cope. When a crisis in the family occurs, the family's inability to appraise such a situation as positive can leave the family feeling overwhelmed. This appeared to happen at times when the military wives felt overwhelmed by events occurring during the deployment and their external resources were not adequate in providing support. They were unable to adjust or cope to such stressful demands because they did not fully understand the situation.

Findings from this study indicate that a lack of pertinent information passed on to these military wives, as well as the period of having no communication with their partners due to them being "outside the wire", often resulted in compounded stress. This type of systemic approach demonstrates what happens when military wives feel overwhelmed with the stressors of deployment along with having a lack of supports and resources.

Canadian Military Families and Deployment Stress

The military spouses in this study reflected on what they saw as important in terms of their ability to develop strengths to protect themselves from stressors when in

crisis. It could be argued that the challenges and changes these military families undergo during deployment can only prove that some level of stability does exist in their ability to overcome crisis situations. The participants in this study felt that being part of the military environment requires family cohesiveness, which they felt challenging at times for their family.

This study found that participants relied on a number of informal resources and supports to help them cope with the most difficult and stressful times during the deployment. Several of the military spouses in this study commented on the importance of being independent and strong in order to make it in such a demanding military environment and felt that only the strongest survive this lifestyle.

Although there was a distinction in how these military wives viewed themselves in terms of being part of their husband's military life, they also welcomed the challenge of such a demanding environment. It could be argued that one of the most important elements is the family's ability to be flexible. Although there is no book, guidelines, or set agenda to prepare someone to become a military wife or a military family, Angela, one of the study's subjects, felt that this study may shed some light on what it is like to be a military wife and the stressors wives are faced with in the demanding military lifestyle.

It could be argued that only those families who are willing to adapt and adjust to the demands the Canadian Forces places on the family are the ones that continue to thrive in the military. There were certain aspects the women felt were important in terms of being a military spouse, including flexibility which remains a critical component for these military spouses. They described the importance of coming to the realization that ultimately you have only yourself to rely upon in the end.

<u>Policy</u>

A number of the participants in this study indicated that they were not aware of services available to them during the deployment. Therefore, Canadian Forces policy should focus on raising awareness of what resources and services are available to military families.

Although no current policy exists in the Canadian Forces that addresses support services available to military spouses and their children, the Department of National Defence Mental Health Model indicates that "there is a moral obligation on the part of the Government of Canada to provide treatment and support to family members for conditions resulting directly from military service" (Department of National Defence, 2007). It is understood that the lack of available family support care, as opposed to member only care, is due to a shortage of resources within the Canadian Forces.

Given that no policy currently exists within the Canadian Forces that provides support to military families, new policy could lead to support being offered to families in terms of critical care during deployments when it required. It became apparent from the data that the majority of the respondents in the study did not feel supported by the military. Participants indicated that they felt left out and disconnected from the military system, a system that required them to be supportive and understanding during deployment.

Based on the data and the researcher's experience as a military spouse, it is recommended that access to resources and support continues to be made, and that military families are invited to attend information sessions regarding deployment. This would allow families to ask questions and seek additional resources should any be

required. In addition, having adequate resources and support available would make the transition less overwhelming and stressful.

Practice

The findings from this study suggest that the military wives functioned well in terms of the stressors they faced during the deployment. Throughout the study, they demonstrated their ability to cope with the stressors of deployment and the stressors related to the military environment. With diminished resources and increased demands placed on the military family, the result is in the military family often "taking the back seat".

A military social worker working with Canadian Forces members must create and support a climate that fosters positive mental health. The Canadian Forces does recognize that family members are a necessary and appropriate part of the management of a Canadian Forces member's health; however, legislative and jurisdictional limitations on the Canadian Forces obligation and capabilities to treat the Canadian Forces family exist (CFHS, 2007). According to the Department of National Defence, the uniformed military social worker's function is to promote the mission, vision, and values of the Canadian Forces, assessing the Canadian Forces member, and, where applicable, their families in order to achieve an optimal level of social functioning (Department of National Defence, 2007).

The lack of clarity regarding resources and support available to military families could potentially leave these military wives feeling more frustrated and discouraged in terms of using the formal military support system. One of the major challenges this study

revealed is the lack of connection between military spouses and their families to the existing military resources and supports. This may continue to be one of the biggest challenges for both military social workers and other professionals who work to support the military family. Accessing existing resources and providing social work services to military families during a deployment will remain a challenge.

It should be noted that just because these military families are not calling on a daily basis for support, it does not mean there is no requirement for resources and supports. Participants in this study, although frustrated at times, indicated that they wished to know what assistance is available to them and their children and how they can access it. Providing military wives with information about the supports available to them could potentially increase the likelihood that they receive the best possible service.

It is therefore recommended that military families be made aware of all available resources and support during the pre-deployment screening. This would provide an opportunity for families to state what support(s) they may need, and clarity as to the type of supports these families can expect. Pre-screening meetings could also serve as an opportunity to provide families with information on any upcoming deployment briefings. This could also potentially eliminate any ambiguity as to what resources and support are available to military families.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that family members be provided with accurate information on what they can expect during a deployment and where they can turn for help. It is further recommended that increased after hours support groups be made available, specifically to those military wives who do not live close to the base. One of the biggest challenges for these women has been that services are only offered

during certain hours which may not be convenient for them if they are working or going to school. Also, all newcomers to the area should be provided with an information package of what services are available, and no distinction should be made between services available to Regular and Reserve Force families. Information should also be provided to families whose partners are deployed outside their home units. The intent is to find ways to narrow the current gap that exists between military supports and military families.

One final area that needs to be explored is the availability of counselling services for the military family, provided by the military, during the post-deployment period. Many adjustments need to be made by all members of the family upon the return of the military member. Spouses need to adapt to each other again after an extended period apart, and even the relationship between parent and child(ren) may change dramatically after a deployment, depending on the age of the child(ren) and the length of deployment. Even discipline of children by each parent may vary greatly after deployment, to the extent where one parent's approach might be quite different from that of the other spouse. There is great potential for family conflict to occur during post-deployment. Counselling services should be made available to families that require assistance in this area. Again, the availability of support services should be provided by the military and families should be well aware that these services are readily available to them.

Future Research and Recommendations

This study explored the stressors and coping strategies of military spouses who had experienced a deployment. It examined the stressors these military wives faced and

how they coped with those stressors in terms of the current supports and resources available to them.

A number of areas for future research could be addressed. With the increase in numbers of deployments to Afghanistan, there is a greater need for military families to be provided with services that extend beyond supports related to regular deployment stress. Potential research could take a closer look at the mental health of military families in terms of stressors they are faced with due to the increase in combat-related deployments. Future supports need to consider the reality of the death of a serving member and the family's ability to deal with the loss, since few services apply to military families with this experience. Questions as to why military families struggle to find adequate support should be addressed.

If families must struggle to find adequate supports when faced with deployments that are non-combat related, what supports can they be expected to receive for combat-related deployments? Future research needs to take a closer look at how families are able to sustain family cohesion in such a highly demanding environment. Future research could also take a closer look at how to bridge currently available military supports and services to military families. One way this can be done is to consider establishing a program whereby a deployed member's unit contacts his/her military family and passes on information regarding supports and resources frequently.

Although some of the women in this study were aware of the Military Family Resource Centre, there were military spouses who were unaware of the services the Centre provides. It is, therefore, this study's recommendation that the Military Family Resource Centre provide a listing of resources and available supports to all military

families. Efforts need to be made to families newly posted to the area to ensure that those military families are informed of all services and supports available in order to avoid any potential isolation.

Another recommendation is to provide families with frequent deployment information sessions; this will allow any updates and new information to be passed on to military families on a more regular and frequent basis. In addition, there needs to be more educational awareness in the community regarding military families and deployments. Providing awareness, as well as adequate programming in the local community where military families reside, could be a step towards getting the local community involved, generating more communal and public support for the military community.

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Appendix A

Informed Consent to Participant in Research

Pre Screening Telephone Interview

Interviewee: _____

Date: _____

Direct contact can be made by potential participants with the researcher via phone or email as advertised on the posters provided. Return email addresses or phone numbers provided by potential participants will indicate consent to the researcher that the researcher can communicate with them.

Thank you for your interest in participating in this study. Do you have about 10-15 minutes for me to speak to you about the study?

If Yes: The researcher will proceed with the telephone interview.

If No: The researcher will ask if there is an alternative time to contact the potential participants.

I am a graduate student at the University of Manitoba participating in the Masters of Social Work program and this study is part of my thesis. This study is being carried out to determine the effects of deployment on Canadian military families. In particular, its purpose is to examine how the Canadian military female partner has experienced the effects of deployment within the context of the family. Participants are required to be a female partner, either married or common-law, to a Canadian military member who has been deployed. This study is limited to families who have experienced a deployment of six months and whose partner, has been home for at least six months. This study is also limited to families who have children. As a registered Social Worker, in accordance with the Government of Manitoba child welfare policy act, I am obligated to report all child abuse to the appropriate authorities. In addition, if your partner has been diagnosed with Operational Stress Injury (OSI), this study will not be suitable for you. Study participants must be fluent in English.

Do you meet these requirements?

If No: Unfortunately this study is limited to those who meet these criteria. Do you have any questions or can I provide you with any information related to supports/resources? Thank you for your interest in participating.

If Yes: If you choose to participate in this study your role will include participating in a one and a half to two hour interview. The questions that will be asked of you will be

personal in nature. You will be questioned about the general demographics of your family, stresses and coping, family roles and responsibilities, marital relationship and supports. Some of the questions may require you to reflect back on stressful times which may or may not cause you some degree of stress. Do you feel that you would be able to manage any stresses that may occur from participating in the interview?

If No: I would not want this study to cause you any stress that you don't feel you could manage. For ethical reasons, research should do you no harm; therefore you will not be able to participate. Do you have any questions or can I provide you with any information related to supports/resources? Thank you for your interest in participating.

If Yes: Participation is completely voluntary, and declining to participate will in no way affect the services that you may be receiving now or may receive in the future. Do you have any questions about this study that I have not yet answered?
Do you think that this study is something that you would be interested in participating in?

If No: Thank you for your interest in this study, do you have any other questions or can I provide you with any supports/resources?

If Yes: Several ethical considerations need to be taken when doing research. One of the most important considerations is that the research will not cause you any harm that you would not normally encounter. Can you tell me if you are currently in an abusive relationship and feel that the abuse may escalate as a result of your participation?

If Yes: I would not want your participation in this study to cause you harm. For ethical reasons, research should do you no harm; therefore you will not be able to participate. However, would you mind if I ask you a few more questions relating to your current situation? The researcher will do an imminent risk assessment to determine if there is any potential for abuse as a result of the study or whether anyone is currently in an abusive relationship. All appropriate steps will be taken to intervene if required. As a precautionary measure all participants will be provided with a resource list of services provided for family violence. Do you have any questions or can I provide you with any other information? Thank you for your interest in participating.

If No: If you are still interested in participating, your participation would be welcome. Can I answer any questions for you? Can we set up a time and location to meet for your interview? (At this point a time and location would be decided).

If you have any questions before the interview or need to cancel or reschedule, please feel free to contact me at 793-9773 (cellular phone). Thank you for your interest in this study and I look forward to meeting you on _____ at _____.

Appendix B

Interview Consent Form

<u>Research Project Title</u>: The effect of deployment on Canadian military families: A phenomenological study:

<u>Researcher</u>: Elna Roberts, Graduate Student of the University of Manitoba. This researcher is the final component of my thesis for the Master of Social Work Program being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Harvy Frankel.

Principal Researcher: Elna Roberts 793-9773 (cellular phone)
umrobere@cc.umanitoba.ca

Supervisor: Dr. Harvy Frankel, University of Manitoba 474-8378.
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Committee members: Dr. Jennifer Laforce 831-3425. JLaforce@deerlodge.mb.ca
Dr. Michael Baffoe 474-9682. baffoe@cc.umanitoba.ca

Member of the peer review team: Ms Haley Schroeder, MSW 489-7003 ext. 4512.
Schroeder.h@forces.gc.ca

This consent form, a copy that will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

The purpose of this study is to examine the lived experiences of military female partners whose partners have been deployed. In particular, to explore how the military female partner experiences the stressor within the family context. The central research question of this study is stated as: From the perspective of the military female partner how has the deployment affected their family?

You are being asked to participate in one interview approximately two hours in length. The interview will consist of multiple questions related to what your experiences have been in having a family member deployed. Questions will include the areas of stress and coping; family roles and responsibilities; relationships and supports.

It is important to note that some participants may experience some stress and/or anxiety as a result of participating in this study. The questions that will be asked are personal in nature and may require you to recall memories and events that are stress inducing. Participants are reminded that if they are not comfortable with some questions they are able to decline answering them.

To assist in the data collection process all interviews will be taped and transcribed. The interviewer will also take notes throughout the interviews. Confidentiality will be maintained. Multiple steps will be taken to maximize confidentiality. All interview materials will be stored at the researcher home in a locked location with access only to the researcher. All interviews will be numbered with the master sheet of participant name and corresponding number stored in a separate locked location in the researcher's home. This sheet will only be accessible to the principal researcher.

Ms. Haley Schroeder will be part of the peer review team for this research. Her role will be to provide feedback on the data analysis component of the research. She has signed a confidentiality agreement form and adheres to the confidentiality guidelines of this study. The transcriptions of the interviews will be used for the sole purpose of assisting in the analysis of data and creating the final documentation. Access to the completed transcriptions will be limited to the primary researcher, the advising committee members and Ms Haley Schroeder, MSW as part of the peer review team. No identifying information will be offered in the final documentation.

Once the interviews have been transcribed participants will be given an opportunity to review the interview transcript for accuracy. All participants are entitled to a summary of the final report that will be made available no later than August 2008.

_____ Yes, please send me a copy of the transcript for revision of accuracy.

_____ Yes, please send me a summary of the final report. It can be mailed to me at:

Name: _____

Address: _____

Please include your email address if you prefer to have the summary emailed:

_____

_____ No, I would not like a summary of the final report.

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this wave your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and/or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Consent is voluntary and declining to participate will not affect any services you may be receiving now or may receive in the future. Your continued participation should be as informed as

our initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

Principal Researcher: Elna Roberts 793-9773 (cellular phone).
umrobere@cc.umanitoba.ca

Supervisor: Harvy Frankel, University of Manitoba 474-8378.
frankel@cc.umanitoba.ca

This research has been approved by the Psychology and Sociology Research Ethics Board of the University of Manitoba. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Secretariat at 474-7122, or e-mail margaret_bowman@umanitoba.ca. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

_____   _____
        Participant's Signature   Date

_____   _____
        Researcher's Signature   Date

Appendix C

Interview Guide

You are free to decline answering any question or terminate the interview at any time without explanation.

Name

Age

Where were you born or consider home?

What is your marital status?

Length of relationship (Marriage/Common-Law)?

How long has your partner been in the Canadian Forces?

What is his current rank?

What element is he?

What trade is he?

Do you have a driver's license?

Do you have access to a vehicle?

How many children do you have?

Their ages?

Where does your immediate family live?

Do you have any relatives in Winnipeg or surrounding area?

Is this your first experience with a deployment? If no, what other deployments has your partner been on?

INTERVIEW GUIDE

The impact deployment has on the military family: A Qualitative study on the perception of military female partners who have experienced a deployment. These questions are tools and guidelines in this study to seek out your personal experience of separation and deployment. Any information that you feel you would like to share that is not addressed in the questions please do so. You are free to decline answering any question or terminate the interview at any time without explanation.

Research questions

Stress and Coping

Interview Question	Probing Questions
1. What has been stressful in terms of the deployment for you?	• Describe what a typical day in the family's life looked like and how is that different from before the deployment?
2. What strategies have you tried to reduce the stress and how were you able to cope?	• What challenges did you have to overcome during the deployment and how were you able to cope with the stress?

Family Roles and Responsibilities

Interview Question	Probing Questions
1. How has the deployment affected your family life and what were some of the most difficult challenges you have faced?	• Can you give an example of challenges you have had to overcome?

2. Has there been a shift in the responsibilities within the family and how has your parental role changed?

Relationships

Interview Question	Probing Questions
1. What significant changes emerged in the way your children communicate with you during a deployment? Can you give some examples?	• What has been significant in terms of your relationship with your children, can you give an example?
2. Do you feel the children coped with the absence of their father and what have you seen as their biggest challenges?	

Support

Interview Question	Probing Questions
1. What support systems did you have during the deployment and what support did they provide/or not, that you found helpful/ or not?	• Can you give me an example of what support looked like?

2. Did you find your family and friends to be supportive during the deployment? How were they able to support you? What type of support did they provide you with?

- How were your friends and family able to provide support to you during the deployment?

Appendix D

Certificate of Ethical Acceptability