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**A case study exploring the impact of
parental deployment on the wellbeing of
British Army children in the pre-school year**

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This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements of Bath Spa University for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

School of Education, Bath Spa University

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Declaration

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Abstract

This thesis explores the wellbeing of three to four-year-old British Army children experiencing a parental deployment during their pre-school year. Despite a recent increase in interest of the deployment-related experiences of school-aged service children, the deployment-related wellbeing of pre-school children has been under researched in the British context and they remain overlooked in terms of educational, social and Armed Forces policy. This study also seeks to clarify the use of the conceptually vague term *wellbeing* in the context of service children's research through a consideration of the multiple discourses of wellbeing and an exploration of the component domains of wellbeing. Drawing upon both the bioecological model of development and cultural historical theory, the study explored how individual, social and environmental factors impact upon the different domains of pre-school children's wellbeing during a parental deployment. A case study design focusing on ten children experiencing a parental deployment was employed within an Army Garrison in England. In each case, the deployed parent was the father. Interviews were conducted with the ten non-deployed mothers and fourteen pre-school practitioners working with the children. Six of the pre-school children also took part in the study via participatory research methods and interviews. Analysis of the data identified four distinct but interlinked domains of wellbeing that were impacted by the father's deployment; psychological, physical, social and cognitive. These are discussed in relation to how they are influenced by factors of the individual child, their social relationships and factors relating to their environments. The thesis concludes by discussing the implications of this research for British educational, social and Armed Forces policy and practice in terms of supporting the wellbeing of pre-school children during times of a parental deployment.

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The terms 'service' and 'military' will be used interchangeably throughout the thesis to refer to children from an Armed Forces background. When referring to a particular branch of the Armed Forces (i.e. Army, Royal Air Force, Royal Navy & Marines) this will be stated explicitly. It is also recognised that 'early years' is a contested term, with differing interpretations across literature and cultures. Within the UK context, statutory school age differs across the devolved authorities. In England this is between the ages of 5 -18, with schooling being compulsory from the school term in which the child turns 5. In Wales, the statutory school age is between 5 – 16 years, with compulsory schooling also starting in the term in which the child turns 5. In Scotland, the statutory school age is between the ages of 5 – 16, with most children starting school between the ages of 4.5 – 5.5 years. In Northern Ireland, the statutory school age is between 4 – 16 years.

The children in this study fall under the Early Years Foundation Stage Curriculum in England which applies from birth to the end of their Reception year in school. In the context of this study, the term 'pre-school children' is used to refer to children who are not yet of statutory school age in the English school system and are attending early years provision in nurseries, pre-schools (including those that form part of a school) or with childminders.

Chapter 1 - Introduction

There is a yawning hole in the British literature that urgently needs to be filled to ensure the wellbeing of young children in British military families in relation to the deployment cycle. (Nolan & Misca, 2018, p.14)

1.1 Rationale for the study

Service children from the UK and around the world are routinely subjected to separation from one or both parents in the event of military-related deployments. Deployment can be defined as the service person being away from home, either on an operational tour (not exclusive to conflict zones) or a long-term training exercise and can place a strain on family life and have an impact on the education and wellbeing of children (Ministry of Defence, 2018). The impact of deployment-related separations on the wellbeing of school-aged children has become increasingly well established within service children's research both in the UK and internationally (Huebner *et al.*, 2007; Lester *et al.*, 2010; Noret *et al.*, 2013) yet much less focus has been given to the deployment-related experiences of service children in the early years before they start school (Nolan & Misca, 2018; Osofsky & Chartrand, 2013).

Recent statistics from the MOD suggest that there are approximately 21,000 UK service children under the age of five out of a total of 135,623 UK Armed Forces children worldwide (MOD, 2019a) and yet they appear to remain almost completely overlooked in UK educational and social policy and academic literature. This is in contrast to their school-aged counterparts who have received increasing attention which has contributed to policy implementations, such as the £300 per pupil per year Service Pupil Premium (SPP) introduced in 2011 for all service children in compulsory-aged state schooling in England. This overlooked situation of the under-fives exists despite increasing international recognition that service-related factors such as deployment can have a profound impact on young service children (Barker & Berry, 2009; Osofsky & Chartrand,

2013; Riggs & Riggs, 2011; Trautmann *et al.*, 2016) alongside a worldwide recognition of the importance of early childhood experiences to later development (Belfield *et al.*, 2006; Papatheodorou & Wilson, 2016; Sylva *et al.*, 2003). This lack of British literature urgently needs to be addressed so that educational, social and Armed Forces policy and practice for these children can be better informed.

In addition to pre-school service children being overlooked in current literature, several other gaps exist within wider service children's literature that my research looks to address. First, the term *wellbeing* is increasingly being referred to in relation to the deployment-related experiences of service children in both UK and international policy and literature (Hess & Skomorovsky, 2019; MOD, 2018; Mustillo, Wadsworth & Lester, 2016; Nolan & Misca, 2018; Public Health England, 2015; Williamson *et al.*, 2018). This is a positive move in the field of service children's research as it offers a strong academic basis for such exploration. Yet wellbeing in this context is often referred to with little or no accompanying exploration of the nuances of this conceptually vague term. This can lead to a presumption that all stakeholders hold the same views about what wellbeing actually is. This is problematic, particularly as perspectives and foci arising from different disciplines influence the way in which wellbeing is conceptualised and operationalised by individuals and organisations (Axford, 2009; Ereaud & Whiting, 2008; LaPlaca, McNaught & Knight, 2013; Silberfield, 2016). Further exploration of wellbeing is therefore needed in order to use this term more effectively within my research with pre-school Army children and also within the wider field of service children's research.

A further issue seen in the discourse of service children's wellbeing is that it can often be used to negatively frame their experiences. I borrow the term *crisis narrative* from Riddell (2003) to describe this issue. Existing literature often takes a negative or deficit approach (or crisis narrative), particularly when focusing on the behavioural issues that may occur as a result of the unique circumstances that service children of all ages may face. Russo and Fallon (2015) challenge the notion of viewing children from military backgrounds with a deficit model, proposing that instead educators need to support such children - particularly the very young - in developing resilience and adaptive coping skills. Others support this view, asserting that a comprehensive approach to the wellbeing of military

children should be strengths-based and problem-focused (Cozza, 2014; Cozza & Lerner, 2013; Park, 2011; Wadsworth *et al.*, 2016). Seeking measurable behavioural responses might not be the best way to encapsulate the experiences of service children, particularly as this overlooks their strengths in the pursuit of identifying their weaknesses. As Park (2011, p.65) notes, 'as important as it is to address problems, it is just as important to recognise the strengths and assets of military children and families to promote and bolster them'. Within the UK context, Nolan and Misca (2018, p.442) similarly note 'it should be acknowledged that not all children are negatively affected by military life. The majority of families demonstrate remarkable resilience in the face of considerable challenge'. Within the study of wellbeing, it is acknowledged that a crucial task is to identify the key risk factors that are likely to have an adverse effect on children alongside the corresponding protective factors that can help to develop resilience and allow children to flourish and thrive (Pollard & Lee, 2003; Roberts, 2010). For educational practitioners and social policy makers working with young service children, it is as important that we acknowledge factors that foster positive wellbeing during a parental deployment as much as we acknowledge those factors that lead to poor wellbeing. A more balanced approach may offer practitioners and policy makers a more useful way to understand and support the needs of service children.

Another gap in service children's research is seen in the underrepresentation of pre-school service children's voices in both UK and international literature focusing on parental deployment. Research on the experiences of service children can often reflect what the adults around them perceive these to be rather than what the children themselves have expressed (Clifton, 2007), although recent years have seen a growing trend in including the perspectives of school-aged service children (Chandra *et al.*, 2010; Clifton, 2007; McCullouch, Hall & Ellis, 2018). Literature on early years service children, however, remains characterised by a reliance on parental report and objective measures such as attainment scores. Such approaches potentially tell us more about parental experiences of deployment than those of the child (Trautmann *et al.*, 2015). Accurately representing the wellbeing of young children ethically and authentically is difficult (Colliver, 2017), yet wellbeing is also a subjective experience therefore it is important that we attempt to meet the challenges of representing the subjective wellbeing of children in

the early years (Mashford-Scott *et al.*, 2012). Stites (2016) further highlights that the perspectives of professionals in early years settings are also frequently overlooked, with an over-reliance on test scores for this population. I therefore gathered a variety of perspectives to gain a more accurate picture, including the viewpoints of parents, educational professionals and, vitally, of the children themselves.

A final issue in research and policy surrounding both service children and wellbeing is that it often takes an individualistic approach. Whilst the child should be central to such discussions, the impact of wider social and environmental influences should not be overlooked. A standpoint has arisen, particularly from American research, of a frequent lack of detailed discussion of the experiences of service children as defined not only by their service status, but also by the context of the schools and military communities that they inhabit (Benbenishty & Astor, 2014). Both international and UK-focused research has commented on the need for research to move beyond the clinical models that focus on service children as individuals, instead recognising that they are embedded in many interacting systems, such as families, schools and the military itself (Clifton, 2007; Kudler & Porter, 2013; Lester & Flake, 2013, McCullouch, Hall & Ellis, 2018). The wellbeing of pre-school service children should not be considered outside of the familial, social, cultural and historical contexts that shape their everyday lives. This study therefore draws upon the bioecological model of development (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994) and cultural-historical theory (Hedegaard, 2008; Vygotsky, 1998, see Chapter 4) which afford an exploration of the individual, familial, social and wider contextual factors that help shape the wellbeing of pre-school children during a parental deployment.

1.2 Aims of the study

The central aim of this case study is to explore the impact of a parental deployment on the wellbeing of a specific cohort of British early years children from an Army background; those aged three to four years and in the year before they start school (the pre-school year). The intention of my research is to inform future educational, social and

Armed Forces policy and practice for these children. The questions that my research looks to address are:

- How do environmental and contextual factors impact upon different domains of pre-school children's wellbeing during a parental deployment?

This question will be explored to analyse how factors within the children's environments influence their domains of wellbeing during a parental deployment. Individual factors of the child will also be considered within the context of their environments.

- How do social relationships impact upon different domains of pre-school children's wellbeing during a parental deployment?

This question will be explored to analyse how children's social relationships lead to factors of both resilience and risk and how this then acts upon the emerging domains of pre-school children's wellbeing. Individual factors of the child will also be considered within the context of these social relationships.

1.3 Origins of the study

This case study emerges from my long-standing interest in services children's education that first arose during my studies to become a primary school teacher in 2009. I had already been an Army spouse for two years by the time I embarked on my teacher training and later went on to become a mother to two of my own service children. Yet it was not simply my position as a service spouse and mother that set the course of my trajectory into the field of research on service children's education. My interest had first been ignited through working alongside Army children when I was placed as a trainee teacher in a school within a township that had a large population of Army personnel and their families. In 2009, the UK Armed Forces were engaged in the largest major combat

operations seen since the First Gulf War¹. In that one year alone, 99 Army personnel were killed as a result of hostile action on operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Media reports at the time were awash with reports of casualties, fatalities and images of Union Jack-draped coffins as the dead were repatriated through the streets of the now Royal Wootton Bassett.

I was a trainee teacher in a school where the local infantry regiment had recently returned home from combat operations in Afghanistan. They, like many regiments at the time, had sustained combat-related losses. Many of the children I was working alongside had experienced a parent being deployed to this warzone as a result of this deployment. This situation caused me to question what we as educational practitioners knew about the experiences of Army children during such deployments and what was being done to support them. I discovered that at this time there was surprisingly little information available and this went on to form the theme of the final project of my teacher training studies. As part of that project, I had the opportunity to talk with some of the 10-year-old children I was working alongside about their experiences. I found their perspectives to be most profound. They were both acutely aware of the dangers their parents faced and yet simultaneously often showed remarkable resilience in the face of situations unimaginable to most 10-year olds. This experience inspired my passion for the subject which went on to form the focus of my Masters degree thesis on the educational needs of Army children in Key Stage 1, and now informs the focus of my PhD studies exploring the wellbeing of Army children experiencing parental deployment in the pre-school year.

It was through my contact and engagement with the Ministry of Defence's (MOD) Directorate of Children and Young People (DCYP) in the very early stages of my PhD thesis that I was first alerted to the lack of literature in the field of British early years service children. Despite progress in policy and literature surrounding school-aged service children, British service children in the early years remain almost completely overlooked. This case study on the impact of deployment on the wellbeing of pre-school children from an Army background looks to close some of the gap in understanding.

¹ Operation GRANBY, Iraq 1991

1.4 Structure of the Thesis

Chapter 1 introduces the reader to the rationale of the study, outlining the key arguments and aims of the thesis. The two questions that my research looks to address are presented. The origins of the study are then considered followed by an outline of the structure of the thesis. Finally, a summary of the contributions of this thesis to new knowledge are presented.

Chapter 2 reviews existing literature relating to pre-school service children. It argues that a clear gap exists in our current understanding of the wellbeing of British pre-school service children during a parental deployment. This chapter further highlights that much of our understanding of pre-school service children originates from international sources which, whilst insightful, have limited generalisability in the context of the British Armed Forces. Responding to this argument, the current cultural context of British pre-school Army children is discussed. This is followed by a critical review of existing international research on pre-school service children. This review highlights that a crisis narrative exists within certain sections of existing literature, particularly in that which pursues measurable behavioural problems in the absence of the recognition of pre-school children's sources of strength and resilience during a parental deployment. The chapter then considers the importance of attachment relationships during a parental deployment. It concludes that the wellbeing of pre-school service children should not be considered in isolation of the social relationships and environments that they inhabit.

Chapter 3 reviews existing literature relating to the concept of wellbeing. It argues that wellbeing is a useful concept through which to explore the deployment-related experiences of young children but should not be used without an accompanying examination of this conceptually vague term. Four discourses of wellbeing are discussed and the nature of overlap between these are acknowledged. This chapter argues that these different discourses have potentially important insights to offer in order to capture pre-school children's deployment-related wellbeing. This chapter goes on to argue that whilst wellbeing is a holistic and entangled entity, an exploration of its domains can lead

to a clearer focus when researching the wellbeing of pre-school Army children. The importance of using subjective measures of wellbeing alongside objective measures are then discussed which is linked to the methodological choice of representing the pre-school children's own views of their wellbeing. This chapter concludes with a consideration of the relational nature of wellbeing. It highlights that wellbeing is a state which is shaped by individual, social and wider environmental factors and that these should be considered within my research on the deployment-related wellbeing of service children.

Chapter 4 introduces the reader to two theoretical approaches that influence my research on the wellbeing of pre-school Army children during a parental deployment; the bioecological model of development (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994) and cultural historical theory (Hedegaard, 2008; Vygotsky, 1998). Both theories emphasise how a child's development does not occur in a vacuum but rather is the result of individual and social processes. They afford an exploration of the wholeness of the pre-school service children's situations beyond that which is occurring individually or solely within their educational settings. Significantly, they give emphasis to the interplay of individual, familial, social and wider contextual factors. This chapter discusses how aspects of both of these theories are taken forward within my own research.

Chapter 5 explores the methodology of my study. The rationale for an interpretivist approach and case study design is presented. This is followed by details of the sample profile and sampling techniques employed within the study. Methods for data generation with both the adult and child participants are then critically explored, with a particular focus on participatory research methods when researching with young pre-school children. Details of the steps of data analysis are then presented followed by an exploration of ethical considerations. This chapter concludes with a reflexive account of my own position within the research.

Chapter 6 is the first of three chapters to present my data analysis and findings. It addresses the research question *How do environmental and contextual factors impact upon different domains of pre-school children's wellbeing during a parental deployment?*

It discusses how the Army culture/community and the pre-school settings are key environmental and contextual factors influencing the pre-school children's psychological, physical, social and cognitive domains of wellbeing during a parental deployment.

Chapter 7 addresses the research question *How do social relationships impact upon different domains of pre-school children's wellbeing during a parental deployment?* The data analysed in this chapter reveals that the most influential relationship on the pre-school children's domains of wellbeing during their fathers' deployment is that between the child and the at-home mother. Three domains of wellbeing are identified within the data: psychological wellbeing, physical wellbeing and social wellbeing, with the psychological domain being considerably the largest to emerge. The relationship between the mother and child is discussed in terms of it being dyadic in nature, the wellbeing of one impacting on the wellbeing of the other during a period of deployment.

Chapter 8 explores the impact of other key relationships on the pre-school children's wellbeing. In similarity to Chapter 7, this chapter addresses the research question *How do social relationships impact upon different domains of pre-school children's wellbeing during a parental deployment?* This chapter discusses how the pre-school children's social relationships with their fathers, friends, siblings and pre-school practitioners are found to influence their psychological, physical and social domains of wellbeing during a parental deployment.

Chapter 9 is the conclusion. In this chapter, the two research questions are revisited and the key findings are summarised. This chapter details the four domains of wellbeing to emerge from the data analysis; psychological, physical, social and cognitive wellbeing. Acknowledging the holistic nature of wellbeing, it discusses how these four domains are interlinked and contribute to the children's overall wellbeing. This chapter details how these domains are found to be influenced by the pre-school children's social relationships, particular that with their at-home mothers but also with their deployed fathers, friends, siblings and pre-school practitioners. This chapter discusses how these four domains of wellbeing are also influenced by environmental factors within the local Army community and the pre-schools that they attend. The contributions of the thesis

are then presented alongside recommendations for both supporting and researching with pre-school service children during a parental deployment. Limitations of the study are explored followed by recommendations for future research.

1.5 Summary of the contributions of this thesis

(See section 9.4 for a more detailed discussion)

This thesis contributes to two areas of new knowledge:

- 1) It finds that the wellbeing of British pre-school children aged three to four years can be significantly impacted by an Army-related parental deployment. Until now, the deployment related wellbeing of British pre-school children aged three to four years has been overlooked in research. The absence of such research has been problematic in terms of accurately informing British educational, social and Armed Forces policy and practice for these children. My research makes an important contribution to this literature by highlighting how four different but interrelated domains of pre-school children's wellbeing can be impacted by an Army-related parental deployment.
- 2) This research has drawn upon four interlinked factors in order to use the term *wellbeing* more effectively when exploring the deployment-related experiences of pre-school service children. These are represented in the following model which could be applied to future research on the wellbeing of pre-school service children from an Air Force or Naval background, those from wider age groups and those in the international context:



Fig. 1 - A model of four factors for the exploration of pre-school service children's deployment-related wellbeing

These four factors will now be briefly discussed (see section 9.4.2 for further discussion):

- i) **Social relationships and cultural environments.** This study explored the variety of individual, social and environmental factors that can influence pre-school children's wellbeing during a parental deployment. Drawing upon the bioecological model of development (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994) and cultural historical theory (Hedegaard, 2008; Vygotsky, 1998), this research highlights how social relationships and environmental factors play a key role alongside individual factors in influencing pre-school children's domains of wellbeing during a parental deployment. This approach further affords an exploration of the specific context of current deployments in the British Army, the culture of the British Army community and the impact of pre-schools within the English educational system. This is done alongside a consideration of the significance of social relationships and individual factors occurring within these contexts.
- ii) **Multiple discourses (understandings) of wellbeing.** This study draws upon three discourses of wellbeing in order to view this concept through a variety of lenses. Wellbeing is increasingly being used to refer to the deployment-related

experiences of service children in both the British and international context, yet it is often done so in the absence of an exploration of this conceptually vague term. My research drew on the philosophical, psychological and medical/health discourses of wellbeing and future research may wish to expand from this base. Drawing upon multiple discourses helped to avoid the potential for siloed thinking, rejecting the stance seen in existing literature where pre-school children's wellbeing is defined only in terms of the presence or absence of observable problematised behaviours, thus feeding into a crisis narrative surrounding such children.

- iii) **Multiple domains (types) of wellbeing.** This research explored how four different domains of wellbeing - psychological, physical, social and cognitive - are impacted by a parental deployment. This affords the opportunity for such domains to be effectively targeted within educational, social and Armed Forces policy and practice. Exploring the specific aspects of wellbeing that can lead to resilience as well as risk also affords a balanced approach and avoids the potential for a crisis narrative surrounding pre-school service children.
- iv) **Subjective views and objective measures of wellbeing.** This study represented the children's subjective views of their own wellbeing alongside the views of their at-home parent and pre-school practitioners. This is important, as young children's perspectives of their own wellbeing are underrepresented within both British and international service children's literature as well as in wider literature on young children's wellbeing. The wellbeing of young children is often represented by objective measures, such as test scores and parental report, in the absence of their own subjective views. Such approaches remain important but potentially tell us more about parental experiences of deployment than those of the child (Trautmann *et al.*, 2015). Including the perspectives of pre-school children themselves, alongside those of their parents and their early years practitioners, can help to move away from measures of problematic behaviours that can feed into a crisis narrative surrounding these children.

Chapter 2 – Pre-school service children: Context and literature

2.1 Introduction

Chapter 1 introduced the gap that currently exists in our understanding of the wellbeing of pre-school service children during a parental deployment. In the UK context, service children can be defined as those who have a parent or parents serving in the regular military units of all Her Majesty's Armed Forces and exercising parental care and responsibility (Ofsted, 2011). It has become increasingly well documented in both UK and international literature that service children experience two particular circumstances that can cause them to have additional wellbeing needs to that of their non-service counterparts: heightened moves either within their home country or worldwide (often referred to as mobility) and/or regular parental separation due to deployments on active service or training (Alfano *et al.*, 2016; Benbenishty & Astor, 2014; Chartrand, Frank, White & Shope, 2008; De Pedro, *et al.*, 2011; Gilreath *et al.*, 2014; Hogg, Hart & Collins, 2014; Jagger & Lederer, 2014; Lester, *et al.*, 2013; McCullouch & Hall, 2016; Ministry of Defence, 2019; Osofsky & Chartrand, 2013; Wadsworth, 2013). Whilst all children and families can face challenges in their lives, it is these two experiences in particular that service families worldwide can face more in comparison to the general population (Applewhite & Mays, 1996; Barbee, Correa & Baughan, 2016; Coulthard, 2011; Trautmann *et al.*, 2015). There has, however, been little focus on understanding or supporting the impact of these experiences on service children in the early years just before they start school. Even within international studies it is acknowledged that research focusing on young service children is 'thin' (Osofsky & Chartrand, 2013, p.62) and much more needs to be done to understand their experiences.

This case study focuses on the wellbeing of a specific cohort of children aged three to four years experiencing separation from a parent due to an Army deployment in the year before they start school, therefore literature considered in this chapter will focus exclusively on that relating to deployment. It should be noted, however, that service life can be characterised by the regular and even simultaneous occurrence of both mobility

and parental deployment (Alfano *et al.*, 2016). Others have commented on the cumulative effect that this may have (Engel, Gallagher & Lyle, 2010; Lester & Flake, 2013) and it is important to remember that many service children will experience repeated exposure to both mobility and parental deployment throughout the course of their childhoods.

This chapter begins by giving an outline of the cultural context of British pre-school Army children to familiarise the reader with the context of my case study. It will then move on to an exploration of early years service children within existing literature. This will firstly consider literature from the international context and will then consider literature which highlights the significance of attachment relationships to the wellbeing of early years children during a parental deployment.

2.2. The cultural context of pre-school Army children

Chapter 1 introduced the argument that the wellbeing of pre-school service children should not be considered in isolation of the families, societies, communities and wider culture that they inhabit. In this study, situating pre-school children's experiences within both the unique culture of the British Armed Forces and current military operational commitments forms an important component of this argument. Much of our understanding of service children of all ages hails from international literature (particularly the USA, e.g. Barker & Berry, 2009; Osofsky & Chartrand, 2013; Trautmann *et al.*, 2015), yet cultural and contextual differences between American and British Armed Forces can lead to the limited generalisability of such findings (Nolan & Misca, 2018; White *et al.*, 2011). As Nolan and Misca (2018, p.442) note, 'it is time for researchers to assess the impact of military life on children living in British military families'. It must further be recognised that operational commitments constantly change to reflect the global political landscape at any one time and we can not be overly-reliant on literature from a past era. As Canadian researchers reporting on a NATO task-group on service child wellbeing recently noted, 'military families face unique challenges that differ from their earlier cohorts, suggesting that previous research may have limited relevance to this

population' (Hess & Skomorovsky, 2019 p.141). Understanding the unique and current cultural context of the UK Armed Forces is therefore vital in terms of supporting the experiences of today's British service children.

Separation from a parent is a feature of service life that is not exclusive to the military. Many service children are, however, routinely subjected to separation in the absence of a parent or parents who are deployed on active duty or training (Hogg, Hart & Collins, 2014). The nature of the Armed Forces in both the British and international context means that the deployment of a serving member can occur repeatedly, can happen with very little notice and frequently lacks choice in terms of the destination or length of that deployment. In the UK context, the Army Readiness Order (MOD, 2014) requires all Army personnel to be at an individual state of readiness. This is 10 days notice to move for deployable units and 30 days for non-deployable units (MOD, 2014). More notice (around 6 months) is usually given to planned deployments, although wide variations are seen depending on the commitments of each branch of the Armed Forces at any particular time. Separation, when combined with the heightened danger of wartime military service, is unique to service children (Lester & Flake, 2013), although one must be careful not to assume that issues for service children only ever exist in the context of war. The USA still maintain some combat-related deployments to locations such as Afghanistan² (Department of Defense, 2019) and this continues to strongly influence the American-facing research which dominates the field of service children's literature today. Whilst literature from the USA is undoubtedly useful, caution should be given to not assume that the findings of USA-focused research will be mirrored within the UK. There is also little acknowledgement that even within the British Armed Forces the experiences of a service child may differ based on the status and responsibility of the serving parent/s. The differences between the branches of the services (Army, Royal Air Force, Royal Navy) mean that the experiences of children from military families can and do differ and they should not be referred to as a homogenous group (McCullough & Hall, 2016). Deployments between the different branches of British Armed Forces vary at any one time and a child from an Army family may have a qualitatively different experience of

² 'Operation Freedom's Sentinel'

deployment compared to a child with a parent deployed with the Royal Air Force or the Royal Navy.

The British Army has not been involved in large-scale combat deployments since the withdrawal of fighting forces in Afghanistan in 2014³ but continues the large-scale deployment of troops on new and existing worldwide commitments⁴. As such, it is imperative that service children's research should clearly identify the cultural context and commitments of a particular branch of the Armed Forces at that time to avoid the presumption that a) service children are a homogenous group or b) only wartime deployments can have a significant impact on service children. The remainder of this section is intended to familiarise the reader with the cultural context of the wider UK Armed Forces that forms the backdrop to my research, with a more specific focus on the British Army (further details of the Army Garrison in which my case study is situated are provided in section 5.2.2).

The role of all members of the UK Armed Forces is deeply rooted in tradition and in the service to Queen and country. To *serve* is to arguably go beyond the usual requirements of a civilian job, particularly in the levels of choice that a member may have in their career (such as locations of jobs and/or being sent away on lengthy deployments), the danger that the role may involve and the impact that service life can have on the wider family unit. Service personnel across all three branches of the UK Armed Forces (Army, Royal Air Force, Royal Navy) can be regularly moved or *posted* to jobs in new geographical locations (both UK and worldwide). Personnel can submit a list of their preferred jobs but are not guaranteed to get their first choice, often leaving little or no choice as to where they are sent. This can happen as regularly as every two years or less, depending on the demands of the branch of the Armed Forces in which they serve as well as on other factors such as promotion.

³ In 2019 the RAF were, however, involved in combat operations in Syria and Iraq.

⁴ The British Army lists its deployments at any one time at <https://www.army.mod.uk/deployments/>

Traditionally, the Armed Forces have encouraged accompanied service where families follow the service member geographically, with many families living in Service Family Accommodation (SFA). In its current form, SFA is available at reduced rates to married personnel which frequently takes the forms of purpose-built estates or *patches* that are separate to civilian housing. Within the patches, there is usually a separation of other ranks (private – sergeant) and officer's accommodation, potentially reinforcing any social and economic divide. Some Armed Forces families choose to settle in their own accommodation and live separately from the service member. In the UK, this is more prevalent within the Royal Navy (House of Commons, 2017) although also occurs across the Army and Royal Air Force. In 2015, the MOD's Strategic Defence and Security Review saw changes announced to the current accommodation model with a greater emphasis on home ownership. This *Future Accommodation Model* is currently in development and it is expected that this will lead to significant changes in the housing and communities of Armed Forces families in the next few years (MOD, 2019b).

In terms of influences on wider family identity, Clifton (2007, p.194) refers to a 'stoical outlook' as being an engrained aspect of British Army life. This may penetrate through the wider family system and is important to consider when researching with service families. Similarly, in a study of 50 UK military wives and their spouses, Dandeker *et al.* (2006) reported that the majority sought informal support (from family and other military wives) over formal support (from the Regiment or other military sources) during periods of spousal deployment. The small-scale study of Verey & Fossey (2013) may offer some reasoning for this, finding issues related to stigma in accessing formal support from Unit Welfare Officers (UWOs) partly due to fears around the impact that this could have on their partner's career and perceptions around a lack of confidentiality. Verey & Fossey (2013) also reported that service families who had chosen to move out of Service Family Accommodation (SFA) into their own housing could feel isolated from the shared experiences of the military community, suggesting that there is potential benefit to be gained by living together in service communities. This is supported by statistics from an Army Families Federation survey, with three-quarters of respondents stating that they liked living close to other service families and being part of the community (Army Families Federation, 2016). It must, however, be recognised that this is not a hard and fast rule

and each service member and their family will experience different factors that influence where they would choose to live, and if this is indeed a choice. Research on pre-school service children needs to be mindful of how such familial, social and wider environmental influences may either directly or indirectly impact upon the deployment experiences and wellbeing of such children. This will be considered in more detail in section 2.3 below.

An issue seen in the existing literature on service children is that much of it originates from the USA and has focused on deployment in the context of war or combat. Between 2002 and 2014 the UK Armed Forces were similarly involved in combat operations in Iraq (Operation Telic, 2003 – 2011) and Afghanistan (Operation Herrick, 2002 – 2014). 179 UK service personnel lost their lives during operations in Iraq whilst 454 lost their lives during operations in Afghanistan (MOD, 2015). The British Army continue to maintain commitments in Iraq and Afghanistan, although since the drawdown of fighting forces in 2014 the focus of such deployments has been primarily in a training or support capacity. My research is set within the context of deployment within the British Army in the 2018/2019 period. As outlined above, the British Army has not been involved in wartime or combat deployments since withdrawing its final troops from Afghanistan in 2014. Whilst deployments now take a different role, the presence of terrorist organisations such as the Taliban and ISIS/ISIL/Daesh in some locations continue to cause a significant level of risk on certain deployments. The British Army define their current role in the following way:

The British Army is actively engaged in operational duties across the globe. The work we do ranges from peacekeeping to providing humanitarian aid, from enforcing anti-terrorism measures to helping combat the international drugs trade. (MOD, 2019c, p.1)

The British Army currently deploy personnel to a wide range of locations, including Estonia, Afghanistan, Africa, Iraq and the Falklands. The wide variations seen across the Army in terms of lengths and locations means it can be difficult to accurately define a deployment for the purposes of research with pre-school Army children. The MOD's Directorate of Children and Young People (DCYP) note that 'deployment may be defined

as the service person being away from home, either on an operation (not exclusive to conflict zones) or a long-term training exercise' (MOD, 2018, p.3). They further note that 'deployments can be anything from a month to up to 12 months and can place a strain on family life and have an impact on the education and wellbeing of children' (MOD, 2018, p.3). Drawing on this, within my study *deployment* will be taken to refer to the serving parent being away either on operations or on a long-term training exercise for a minimum of one month.

This section has aimed to highlight that the unique culture UK service children inhabit and the current context of British Army deployments will shape the experiences of pre-school Army children that form the focus of this case study. Consideration will now be given to literature on service children in the early years.

2.3 Early years service children's literature

A gap currently exists in understanding the impact of parental deployment on the wellbeing of British service children in the early years. Both international and UK literature is often limited to school-aged service children and, in many cases, older school children - particularly those aged eight years and above (Chandra *et al.*, 2009; Mancini *et al.*, 2015; Morris & Age, 2009). Unlike the UK, literature in the USA has seen some interest in the experiences and wellbeing of younger service children (Barker & Berry, 2009; DeVoe *et al.*, 2018; Louie & Cromer, 2014; Osofsky & Chartrand, 2013; Paris *et al.*, 2010; Trautmann *et al.*, 2015; Wadsworth *et al.*, 2016). Such studies frequently reference the fact that children under five make up 40% of the overall total of American service children - the largest proportion across the age groups - yet remain the least researched group. They are also the least researched age group of service children in the British context. Whilst no definitive statistics exist, the MOD recently indicated that there are approximately 21,000 UK service children under the age of five out of a total of 135,623 UK Armed Forces children worldwide (MOD, 2019a). This sizeable group of children appear to remain almost completely overlooked in UK policy and literature (Nolan & Miska, 2018). Much more needs to be done to understand the deployment-related

experiences of service children in the pre-school years, particularly in the UK context. The current understanding of pre-school service children's experiences is consequently limited to that which can be found in international literature.

2.3.1 International literature on early years service children

International literature - particularly from the USA - has seen some focus on the experiences and wellbeing of service children experiencing deployment in the early years. Despite the limited generalisability of non-UK focused literature, such research provides useful insight into the deployment related experiences of these children. Where international literature remains limited however, is in its preference for parental perspectives and outcome measures (such as test results and scores) in the absence of children's subjective views of their own wellbeing. Such approaches can tend to seek measurable behavioural responses, particularly those that indicate a problem relating to the emotional wellbeing of the child. This can then lead to a *crisis narrative*, whereby the positive factors influencing early years service children's wellbeing during a deployment are somewhat downplayed or overlooked. I argue that a more balanced approach is needed as it is as important to understand what factors support children's wellbeing during a parental deployment as much as those that put it at risk.

One insightful but limited study of service children in the early years is that of Barker and Berry (2009). In a study of 57 American service families, Barker and Berry (2009) found that young children (aged 0 - 4 years) with a deployed parent showed increased behaviour problems during deployment (such as needing more attention, increased clinginess, increased temper tantrums, defiance and sleep problems) and increased attachment behaviours at reunion (including preferring the non-deployed parent, not wanting to sleep in their own bed, not wanting to be separated from the returning parent or not letting returning parent comfort them). These observations were in comparison to a sample of service children who had not recently experienced parental deployment. Barker & Berry (2009) report that the behaviour problems reported by parents were attachment behaviours, yet unfortunately do not fully expand on this point. They did,

however, note that their findings provided additional support to the argument that interference with attachment to a deployed parent is one of the features that may make deployment stressful for young children (see section 2.3.2 for further discussion of attachment relationships during a parental deployment). In their sample, older toddlers and pre-schoolers were more prone to behaviour problems than infants although, again, potential reasons for this are unfortunately not fully explored. Interestingly, they reported that family factors such as parental stress appeared to be related to child behaviour during a deployment. They also discuss that on the other side of this parent-child dyad is that of child temperament or behaviour history, reporting an association between difficult or anxious child temperament and increased behaviour problems during deployment. Longer durations of deployment were also associated with greater behaviour problems in young children, yet this was discussed more in terms of the observable attachment behaviours rather than an analysis of the potential processes behind this.

Whilst this is undoubtedly an insightful study into the behavioural changes that may occur in a young child during a parental deployment, I find it significant that these behavioural responses of the child were categorised as problem behaviours rather than as the expressions of young children faced with the lengthy separation from one or both of their parents. This somewhat deficit view is likely reflective of the fact that the study relied exclusively on parental views and did not attempt to represent the subjective views of the children themselves or of educational practitioners working alongside these children. A strength coming out of this research, however, was the acknowledgment by the authors that some military families and children seem to show fewer detrimental effects than others in response to parental deployment. They suggest that we need better recognition of the concentric rings of individual, family and community support that may buffer against such potential stress. Doing so would indeed lead to a more balanced approach which frames the deployment-related behaviours of young children as being inextricably linked to their wider familial and social environments. This perspective is explored in greater detail in section 2.3.2 below.

Similar to the research of Barker and Berry (2009), Chartrand *et al.* (2008) framed their explorations of early years service children in terms of observable and measurable problematised behaviours. Chartrand *et al.* (2008) administered the Child Behavior Checklist (Achenbach & Rescorla, 2000) to the parents and childcare providers of 169 service children, 55 of whom had a deployed parent and 114 of whom did not have a deployed parent. They found that children between the ages of three and five with a deployed parent had increased internalised behavioural symptoms (emotional reactivity, anxiousness/depression, somatic complaints or withdrawal) and increased externalised behavioural symptoms (attention difficulties and aggression) compared to same-aged children without a deployed parent. Interestingly, their findings were significant even after controlling for the remaining caregiver's stress and depressive symptoms, suggesting that the wellbeing of young children can be impacted directly by a deployment and is not wholly mediated by the impact of the deployment on the at-home parent/caregiver. They reported that children younger than three years did not have significantly increased behavioural symptoms regardless of the deployment status of their parents. In terms of these age-related differences, the researchers hypothesised that children aged three and over are possibly more aware of the absence of their deployed parent and draw similarities to findings in research with children over the age of five (see, for example, Lester *et al.*, 2010). Such findings offer important insight into the deployment related experiences of this age group, suggesting that parental separation through deployment can indeed have a direct impact on the wellbeing of pre-school aged children. Where it is more limited, however, is in the pursuit of quantifiable observable problem behaviours over an exploration of the factors that may be leading to these observations or of factors that may be leading to resilience in such children or their families. As with the study of Barker and Berry (2009) it also fails to represent the young children's subjective views of their own experiences during the deployment.

Further American research has used standardised quantifiable measurements of the developmental impact of deployment on young children or has framed their experiences in terms of problematised behaviours. Nguyen *et al.* (2014) compared scores on the developmental screening Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ-3, administered between six months to five years of age) between service children who had experienced parental

deployment in their lifetime and those who had not. They found that children of deployed parents were at least twice as likely to fail the ASQ-3 than children who did not have a deployed parent. Mustillo, Wadsworth and Lester (2016) found that experiencing a recent long deployment (over 30 days in the past three months) was associated with higher levels of generalised anxiety in children aged three to five years. They also found the total percentage of life exposure to deployment was associated with higher levels of generalised anxiety in the same age group. Other recent studies have similarly considered the developmental implications of parental deployment but are often characterised by wide age ranges. In a systematic review of 42 studies on the effects of deployment and reintegration on children and parenting, Creech, Hadley and Borsari (2014) highlighted the pervasive and negative impact of deployment and reintegration on children's mental health across all age groups. In a further study focusing on early years service children, Waliski *et al.* (2012) found that parental deployment was associated with regression in toileting, inconsistent sleep patterns, clinginess to the at-home parent, withdrawal and excessive crying in a sample of seven American military families with pre-school children. During deployment, the serving parent in their sample reported support and stability, whilst conversely the at home parent and children experienced greater stress and instability. The at home parent reported that there was less structure than when there were two parents in the family unit. More recently, DeVoe *et al.* (2018) reported an association between service member post-traumatic stress symptoms and parental reports of child behaviour problems. Such literature further reinforces the argument for considering pre-school children's familial and wider social environments during a period of parental deployment.

Whilst approaches measuring problem behaviours provide important insight, this is not the only way to encapsulate the deployment-related experiences of early years service children. This deficit approach overlooks their strengths and capabilities in the pursuit of identifying their weaknesses. Whilst it must be recognised that parental deployment can be immensely stressful and can have a negative impact on aspects of pre-school children's wellbeing, it must also be recognised that children may possess protective factors that can lead to resilience during such times. Identifying those factors that facilitate positive wellbeing in pre-school children during parental deployments are as

important to identify as those that have a negative impact so that we can foster and promote them. This is particularly significant in terms of informing future educational, social and Armed Forces policy and practice for these children which should look to promote what works in terms of nurturing resilience as much as addressing those factors that may lead to risk.

Additional literature from the USA has started to provide further insight behind such measures and test scores which potentially paves the way for a more positive approach. In a review of literature on the impact of deployment on developmental risk, Alfano *et al.* (2016) discuss how children in the three to five age group may be more aware of parental absences but have limited resources for understanding and coping with such a significant stressor. They draw upon research in developmental neuropsychology (e.g. Carlson, 2005) to posit that pre-schoolers may lack the ability to formulate appropriate questions about their parent's absence and have greater difficulty inhibiting or altering their emotional responses. A child's understanding of the deployment can have major implications for how they then experience that deployment, particularly where they attribute the departure of the parent as being their own fault (Laser & Stephens, 2011). Involving these young children in preparations prior to the actual deployment can facilitate a more accurate understanding in those children, yet this potential benefit can be hindered when parents avoid this in the belief that their children are too young to understand (Louie & Cromer, 2014). Summarising their findings relating to pre-school children in particular, Louie and Cromer (2014, p.500) note that 'out of sight is not out of mind for these young children and failing to adequately prepare them for parental separation may leave them sad, confused and incorrectly blaming themselves for the separation'. A lack of early years focused research in this area consequently means that neither parents nor educational practitioners may be equipped to prepare their children for a parental deployment in the first instance.

Such findings also highlight that there may be a tendency to assume that younger service children are not capable of understanding their situation and are viewed more as *human becomings* than *human beings*, an issue highlighted within wider research on children's rights and wellbeing (James, Jenks & Prout, 1998; Quennerstedt & Quennerstedt, 2014;

Roberts, 2010). Emerging in the 1980s and 1990s, the new sociology of childhood arose as a reaction against the traditional view within developmental psychology and sociology that children are no more than adults in the making, that is, when they are seen incompetent human *becomings* and not competent human *beings* (James, Jenks & Prout, 1998). The new sociology of childhood views children as active, creative social agents who are both shaped by and shape their circumstances and the society that they are part of (James, Jenks & Prout, 1998). Arising within the same era as the worldwide implementation process of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989), this new social theorising of childhood and the advocating of human rights for children formed parts of the same movement in which children's status as human beings were reconsidered (Quennerstedt & Quennerstedt, 2014). Adopting this perspective, including children's perspectives of their own wellbeing is therefore important. Furthermore, it is important to recognise that young children may display behavioural responses but that these are not necessarily problematic. Research with service children has supported the notion that a child's developmental stage is likely to be a determinant of the effects/impact of their parents' deployment (Kelley, 1994). As such, children in the younger age range may exhibit behavioural problems which reflect underlying feelings of confusion or anxiety stemming from the normative expectation of a parent's physical and emotional presence. Clearly it is important to view young children as capable human beings so that their voices on their own subjective experiences may be heard on the reasons behind this. My research will, therefore, include the subjective voices of the pre-school children on their own experiences of a parental deployment.

In exploring the pathways by which a parent's deployment affects young children's development, the work of Lieberman and Horn (2008; 2013) offers an alternative approach to the pursuit of perceived measurable behavioural problems. They refer to a child's healthy developmental course as being affected when social resources and family resources are burdened by trauma (Lieberman & Horn, 2013). Lieberman and Horn (2008) describe a stress-trauma continuum that ranges from the normative strains associated with everyday life to the extreme burdens on physiological and emotional balance resulting from catastrophic experience. Mild to moderate, developmentally acceptable stress can enable a child to develop and practice strategies to tolerate such displeasure,

anger, pain or fear in order to recover from emotional dysregulation, and to repair interpersonal conflict and manage frustration in the course of exploration and learning (Lieberman & Horn, 2013; Vygotsky, 1998). For young children who have a deployed parent, separation anxiety becomes a major risk to emotional wellbeing (Lieberman and Horn, 2013). Viewing young children as capable citizens, Lieberman and Horn (2013) suggest that helping the child to anticipate and prepare for separation and to say goodbye is important in preparing the child for a parent's deployment. Drawing upon their clinical work with young children who have experienced trauma, Lieberman and Horn (2008) posit that telling a difficult truth is the first step towards healing: children respond with increased connectedness and a decrease in anxiety when they hear something that they know or suspect to be true from a trusted adult. They suggest that *moments of quiet togetherness* offer an opportunity to use age appropriate language to tell a young child what will happen; 'Daddy has to go far away because it's part of my job' (Lieberman & Horn, 2013, p.288), a sentiment that could equally be extended to the impending deployment of a serving mother. They further advocate that describing the impending separation in the form of a story can help children to form concrete pictures in their minds and give them tools to anticipate and cope with the departure. Lieberman and Horn (2013) also emphasise the importance of the predictability of routines for young children during a period of deployment, highlighting the significance of this for a healthy developmental course. Established and predictable patterns of family routines have also been identified as a protective factor for young children whose parent returns from a deployment injured or with trauma (Cozza *et al.*, 2010). Such approaches move us away from the deficit view of pre-school children and start to frame them as capable of not only perceiving the situation of a parental deployment but also being capable of potentially influencing their own wellbeing during this time. Importantly, in order to do this, pre-school children need the support of the significant adults around them and this will now be considered in more detail.

2.3.2 The significance of attachment relationships to the wellbeing of pre-school children experiencing deployment

The wellbeing of pre-school service children (and indeed service children of any age) should not be considered outside of the familial, social, cultural and historical contexts that shape their everyday lives. Recent years, particularly in American literature, have seen a shift away from viewing the child as a stand-alone individual towards recognising that the wider systems that they inhabit (especially the immediate family) can have a profound impact on how they experience service life (Benbenishty & Astor, 2014; Clifton, 2007; Kudler & Porter, 2013; Lester & Flake, 2013; Lieberman & Horn, 2013; Paley, Lester & Mogil, 2013; Park, 2011; Riggs & Riggs, 2011; Wadsworth *et al.*, 2013). Wider research on wellbeing further supports the significance of considering pre-school children as being embedded in both educational and home environments. Roberts (2010, p.5) points out the significance of the latter of these environments, remarking that ‘the tip of the iceberg that we see represents children’s hours in day care, whilst the invisible critical mass represents their hours at home’. The literature considered in this section is predominantly international, yet the insights gained further strengthen my argument that educational, social and Armed Forces research, policy and practice surrounding British pre-school service children should include considerations of both their educational and home environments and the relationships that occur within these. My research will, therefore, include the perspectives of the at-home parent and pre-school practitioners in addition to the perspectives of the children themselves.

The experiences of service families do not occur in a vacuum but rather are shaped by, and often shape, the context in which these families are embedded (Paley, Lester & Mogil, 2013). Benbenishty & Astor (2014) draw upon work with non-service children to highlight that a child’s normative setting (e.g. home and school), if structured properly, can promote resilience and wellbeing in children. They argue that this conceptual perspective could spur new strategies for service families that focus on home and educational settings and call for the variation amongst service families and the contexts in which they are embedded in to be better articulated and researched. Acknowledging the

interconnected nature of child and wider family wellbeing, Lieberman & Horn (2013, p291) note:

Addressing the emotional needs of young children should become a standard component of best practice in providing support and services to families in the military both for the children's sake and because the wellbeing of young children is a barometer for how well the family is coping with the adversities of deployment and its sequelae.

In the USA, there has been a growing interest in family-centred approaches in response to increasingly well-established findings that the wellbeing of service members and their families are inextricably linked (Paley, Lester & Mogil, 2013; Wadsworth *et al.*, 2013). The high numbers of service children under the age of five highlights the centrality of young children in the lives of many military families and frames the service members' wellbeing in the context of its implications for the wellbeing of their children (Lieberman & Horn, 2013). This view is supported by Park (2011, p.68) who states 'If we care about military children's wellbeing, it is imperative to ensure family wellbeing because they are so closely connected'.

Early relationships are fundamental to children's wellbeing (Ainsworth, 1969; Bowlby, 1969; Roberts, 2012) and attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969) offers much to the exploration of pre-school service children's wellbeing during a parental deployment. Attachment theory highlights how consistent relationships with at least one caregiver are essential to children's social and emotional growth. This approach asserts that warm and responsive early relationships are likely to support healthy development whereas unresponsive or inconsistent relationships are likely to have a negative impact on development. When young children face significant challenges in their lives, those who lack supportive caregivers may then be more vulnerable. Equally, however, strong attachment relationships with at least one significant other may provide a protective factor against such challenges. Whilst there has been some discussion on attachment relationships within early years service children's literature in the USA (Lieberman and Horn, 2013; Osofsky & Chartrand, 2013; Paris *et al.*, 2010; Posada *et al.*, 2015; Riggs &

Riggs, 2011), Alfano *et al.* (2016) argue that it still remains largely unexplored in relation to parental deployment. In the UK context, Nolan and Misca (2018) point out that it is not possible to be certain how attachments in under-fives are affected by parental deployment until more appropriate studies have been carried out.

Within the USA, Lieberman and Horn (2013) argue that infants and young children of parents in the Armed Forces deserve attention as the first years of life are pivotal in establishing trusting attachment relationships based on the developmental expectation that parents will be reliably available and protective both physically and emotionally. Young children are dependent on their parents' physical and emotional availability for establishing and maintaining a sense of safety and have limited ability to understand a parent's lengthy absence due to their developmental stage (Chartrand *et al.*, 2008). Osofsky and Chartrand (2013, p.64) list three important principles of attachment theory that can help us to understand how separation and loss in military families may affect young children, all of which have important implications for research with this age group:

- Human relationships are essential to children's wellbeing and development.
- Infants have a fundamental need for consistent caretaking.
- Young children and adults perceive the world very differently.

In their paper exploring service children from birth to five years, the American researchers Osofsky and Chartrand (2013) note that during a period of deployment, military children are separated from at least one parent and may experience changes in the caregiver or in their environment. Many children may be resilient and cope well, especially when in receipt of support from their caregiver/s and community. For others, disruptions in their primary relationships and support systems can hamper social and emotional development. They list four risk factors that are likely to affect young children's development: 1) stressful events that change daily routines, 2) stressful events that take place often, 3) stressful events that take place over a long period of time and 4) the emotional availability of the parents or caregivers (p.65). Osofsky and Chartrand (2013, p.65) assert that:

The ability of infants and young children to manage a parent's deployment successfully is highly contingent on the available parent's ability to cope with the additional stress and to negotiate changes in roles and responsibilities.

Deployment may disrupt the attachment relationship unless at-home caregivers can maintain some semblance of daily routines, protect children from stress, maintain their own mental health and, if possible, communicate with the deployed service member.

Supporting this view, Nolan and Misca (2018, p.443) note that 'it may be that these children are less affected by the absence of a parent than by the fluctuation in the parenting capacity of the home-front parent, usually the mother, owing to the strain of separation'. The myriad of stressors associated with separation, prolonged absence and reintegration can challenge the ability of both parents to respond sensitively to their children throughout the deployment cycle (DeVoe & Ross, 2012). Studies have shown that children who experience understanding and empathy from their caregivers are less likely to exhibit problems behaviours or require mental health services during deployment (Barker & Berry, 2009; Chandra *et al.*, 2009; Nelson, Baker & Weston, 2016). Higher levels of parental reflective functioning have been associated with adaptive self-regulation and healthy attachment in both parents and children (Slade *et al.*, 2005). Parental reflective function (Fonagy *et al.*, 1991) is conceptualised as parents' ability to be mindful of and to respond to their own emotional states and those of their children and as such is a mechanism through which parents maintain sensitivity towards their child. In contrast, parents with lower reflective function may respond less sensitively as they have distorted internal representations of their own and their child's underlying emotions. Parents who are experiencing anxiety, depression or post-traumatic stress in the context of deployment may experience a breakdown in this reflective process (DeVoe *et al.*, 2016).

In a recent qualitative study, Strong and Lee (2017) explored the deployment and reintegration (post-deployment) experiences of the at-home parent in 19 US Marine Corps families with young children. They found the deployment phase to be characterised by social isolation, mental health challenges and issues of self-care (attending to one's

own needs), particularly when managing significant life events. They also found reduced communication with the deployed service member, lone parenting and concerns for managing children's behaviour to be sources of stress. The authors note how the at-home parent is expected to manage greater family and household responsibilities at a time when they may be less equipped to do so – more tired, more stressed and having difficulties in caring for themselves. Strong and Lee (2017) further refer to the hierarchical culture of the military that may promote a reluctance to appear weak or in need and how this can extend to the family members.

Such literature from the USA suggests that the hypothesis surrounding the impact of the wellbeing of the at-home parent is indeed a plausible one, but it is important to maintain a balanced approach to avoid feeding into a different potential crisis narrative; that relating to the at-home parent during a deployment. Deployment is undoubtedly a time of stress, but negative reactions of the at-home parent and the impact of this on their children should not be seen as a foregone conclusion. Individual and familial responses to deployment should be seen to exist upon a spectrum and again it is important to maintain a balanced approach and avoid the temptation of viewing relationships during deployments only through a deficit lens. Through a more positive lens, for example, Lester *et al.* (2016) found that primary-caregiver parental sensitivity during deployment was associated with decreased risk of impairment in social and emotional development in children aged birth to five. My research will therefore explore the factors that promote resilience alongside those that might lead to risk.

A further issue arises when the focus is on the coping of the at-home parent (frequently the mother) on the wellbeing of a child during a period of deployment-related separation; relationships are not a uni-directional process. Such focus on the at home parent fails to recognise the influences of the individual child on that attachment relationship. By virtue of individual, social and environmental differences, the impact of deployment will not be the same for each child. Lieberman and Horn (2013) posit that the reactions of different children to separations and reunions will be mediated by the proclivity of their temperament to distress versus resilience, whether the deployed parent was the primary attachment figure, the impact of the deployment on the remaining caregiver and family

cohesiveness, the predictability of daily routines in the course of separations and reunions and the quality of environmental supports. Barker and Berry (2009) similarly identify three factors that ameliorate (or, when absent, may accentuate) the impact of stress in children: personality dispositions, parent support (parent warmth and family cohesion) and community support (associations that strengthen a child's coping). They found the more stressors the parents reported, the more behaviour and attachment problems they described in their children. Riggs and Riggs (2011) further highlight the importance of individual child differences noting that this will be related to their developmental level, their attachment bonds with the deploying and non-deploying parents and the overall psychological and behaviour functioning of the at-home parent. Such findings strongly imply the need to triangulate such data using a variety of perspectives (including those of the children themselves, their parents and educational practitioners) when exploring the impact of deployment on service children of any age. As such, my research will gather the perspectives of parents, educational practitioners and pre-school children.

A number of studies have further explored this dyadic nature of attachment in the context of deployment. Paley, Lester and Mogil (2013) refer to the reciprocal nature of both parents' and children's contributions to the wellbeing of the family during a period of parental deployment, whilst Palmer (2008) notes that stronger parent-child relationships may decrease risk and increase resilience for military children. Paley, Lester and Mogil (2013) highlight how literature tends to focus on how parents influence their children's experiences of deployment yet posit that the temperament and behaviours of the child will also affect the parent's experience of deployment. They note that more behaviourally challenging children, whether by virtue of temperament or function of developmental difficulties, are likely to create more stress in any family. Such literature has led to a growing call for family-centred approaches in response to increasingly well-established findings that the wellbeing of service members and their families are inextricably linked (Paley, Lester & Mogil, 2013; Wadsworth *et al.*, 2013). This is also supported by research on trauma originating from outside of the field of military deployment. Reviewing existing literature on trauma, Charuvastra and Cloitre (2008) argue that the most robust protective factors to various adversities are supportive family

and/or other social networks among adults and sensitive and responsive parenting among children. There are clear implications that the study of pre-school children's wellbeing during a parental deployment needs to take into account both the fact that they are individuals in their own right but are also embedded within wider social relationships and environmental systems, particularly that of their immediate family. My research will therefore explore the influence of individual factors, social relationships and environmental factors in the context of a deployment.

A family systems perspective proposes that much of the impact of deployment experiences on parental and child wellbeing is likely mediated through relationships within the family; the couple's relationship (in two-parent families), the co-parenting relationship and the parent-child relationship (Paley, Lester & Mogil, 2013; Riggs & Riggs, 2011). Where older children's reactions to deployment stress may be more independent of their caregivers, the reactions of younger children are more closely attuned to the adults around them (Paris *et al.*, 2010). Parental deployment may, therefore, disrupt attachment relationships via two pathways (Lieberman & Horn, 2013; Paris *et al.*, 2010; Posada *et al.*, 2015). Firstly, separating a child and a parent for prolonged periods of time may be stressful for the child as well as the deployed parent. Secondly, the demands of the deployment on the at-home parent can in turn affect the quality and responsiveness of their parenting. Thus, disruption to attachment should not simply be seen as resulting from the physical distance between the parent and the child. Attachment in early childhood is a dyadic process between a child and parent/carer which determines how well children can regulate their behaviour and emotions (Bowlby, 1982). It is also important to keep in mind that a pre-school child may have other siblings and the reactions of each child are likely to impact on the responses of the other members of the family (Paley, Lester & Mogil, 2013).

Drawing upon a family systems and attachment perspective, Riggs and Riggs (2011) propose a family attachment network model of military families during a military deployment which goes some way to accounting for the differences in deployment experienced across families. They propose that the attachment system of the non-deploying parent is vital to a family's overall experience of deployment as that parent

assumes sole responsibility for raising the children and maintaining the household during a deployment. This attachment system, they explain, is the dynamic mental representation of self and others formed in early childhood (Bowlby, 1980; Riggs & Riggs, 2011). From this perspective, secure individuals are seen to have positive internal working models of both self and others which are associated with adaptive coping and psychological wellbeing. In contrast, individuals with insecure attachment systems have negative internal working models of self and others which can translate into attachment anxiety, maladaptive coping and poor psychological wellbeing. Riggs and Riggs (2011) further emphasise the importance of a stable family structure and secure attachment relationships between the at-home parent and child to adaptive family coping during a period of deployment, noting 'the impact of the deploying parent's departure will be mitigated if children feel securely bonded to a non-deploying parent who copes effectively and maintains relatively stable parenting practices' (Riggs and Riggs, 2011, p.679). They go on to hypothesise that insecure attachment styles within the primary caregiver creates a vulnerability for dysfunction within the context of a military deployment and argue that support from third parties should focus on enhancing processes that strengthen family resilience.

Gewirtz *et al.* (2011) concur that strategies to support service families need to build on the resilience of those families, addressing family stress within the context of the deployment cycle and offering strategies to enhance emotional regulation as a key to effective parenting. Based on the interventions suggested by Gewirtz *et al.* (2011), a team of UK Educational Psychologists (Hogg, Hart & Collins, 2014) implemented a similar small-scale intervention aimed at providing emotional tools to strengthen parental skills and enhance their resilience in order to support the service child's overall wellbeing and adjustment to both deployment and mobility. Parents in their sample reported an increase in confidence and a decrease in concern, supporting similar research from the USA which indicates positive outcomes for service children via supporting the at home parent (Gewirtz *et al.*, 2011). Hogg *et al.* (2014) discuss this in terms of parents being equipped with new information to help them understand the impact on their children as well as providing the opportunity to meet with new people in a similar situation to them. They suggest such group interventions may be particularly beneficial during times of high

need, such as spousal deployments. There are, however, several limitations of the study. Hogg *et al.* (2014) are not explicit as to the age of the children of the participants in their sample, therefore the impact of children's age on parental stress in times of mobility and deployment is not considered. Themselves recognising the limitations of their small sample size, Hogg *et al.* (2014) call for additional UK-focused research in this area.

Interestingly, the length of deployment may also have a significant impact on the attachment bond of the child and at home parent. In a review of 26 American studies focusing on military children under the age of six, Trautmann *et al.* (2015) found that the frequency and length of a parental deployment was consistently associated with greater parenting stress amongst both the serving member and the at-home parent. In a study of school-aged children, Lowe *et al.* (2012) found that the relational attachment between the at home parent and child is negatively impacted by a greater length of deployment. Lowe *et al.* (2012) discuss their findings in terms of the attachment bond becoming weakened when parental figures (both deployed or at home) become unavailable or unresponsive due to the stresses of maintaining the household in the absence of the other parent. In a large sample (N = 307) of US military children aged 5 – 17 years, Mansfield *et al.* (2011) found that children's mental health diagnoses associated with parental deployment increased with total months of parental deployment and were greatest for acute stress reaction/adjustment, depressive and paediatric behavioural disorders. Lester *et al.* (2016) similarly found that greater deployment exposure was related to impaired family functioning and marital instability in families with children aged from birth to ten years. Lester *et al.* (2016) also found that deployment exposure was not independently associated with primary caregiving parents' behavioural health, parental sensitivity or substance use, but that greater deployment exposure (i.e. longer and/or repeated wartime deployment) was associated with impaired family functioning, such as less healthy communication, reduced affective involvement and less effective problem-solving skills. These core processes have been identified as critical to supporting family resilience and child wellbeing in military families as well as to force preservation and readiness (Saltzman *et al.*, 2011). In a somewhat dated but insightful study, McCubbin *et al.* (1975) found that families who maintained the deployed service member's psychological presence within the family exhibited more flexibility and

adaptability when difficulties occur. Such findings are particularly important for those sections of the UK Armed forces who deploy for long periods of time or even shorter periods of time on a repeated basis, including the Army. This further strengthens the argument for a greater understanding of the types and durations of parental deployments and the impact that this can have on pre-school service children.

2.4 Summary

This chapter has highlighted that a clear gap exists in our current understanding of the wellbeing of British pre-school children during a parental deployment. The first section considered the current cultural context of pre-school Army children in order to familiarise the reader with the wider context of my research. This was in response to an argument introduced in Chapter 1, that the wellbeing of pre-school service children should not be considered in isolation of the families, societies, communities and wider culture that they inhabit. It further addresses the issue that much of the current pre-school children's literature originates from international sources which leads to limited generalisability to the UK context. Existing international literature on pre-school service children highlights that a crisis narrative exists within certain sections of the literature, particularly in that which pursues measurable behavioural problems in the absence of the recognition of the children's sources of strength and resilience. I argue that it is equally important to identify the factors that facilitate positive wellbeing in pre-school children during parental deployments so that we can both foster these and promote them. This is particularly significant in terms of informing future educational and social policy and practice with these children. My research will take a balanced approach; acknowledging the factors that foster positive wellbeing in pre-school children during a parental deployment alongside those that can lead to poor wellbeing.

This chapter finally explored the significance of attachment relationships during a period of parental deployment. Attachment relationships are essential to the healthy developmental course of young children. Existing international literature has explored how attachment relationships can be disrupted in two ways during a parental

deployment, firstly through the physical separation from one parent and secondly, through changes in the remaining at-home parent or caregiver. This, however, should not feed into a new crisis-narrative surrounding parenting (particularly the non-deployed parent) and it is as equally important to consider the role of the child's personality within those family relationships. The wellbeing of pre-school service children should be researched with a consideration of both the individual characteristics of the child and the wider context of the families and communities that they inhabit. My research will explore the influence of social relationships, environmental factors and the individual characteristics of the child and how these impact upon children's wellbeing in the context of a parental deployment.

Chapter 3 – The Nature of Wellbeing

3.1 Introduction

Chapter 1 introduced a central argument running throughout this thesis: the concept of wellbeing needs to be better explored and understood in the discussion of the deployment-related experiences of pre-school service children. In this chapter I will consider the literature surrounding wellbeing which is influential to my study of pre-school service children during a parental deployment. The chapter does not therefore aim to provide the reader with a comprehensive account of all literature relating to the concept of wellbeing; this would be an impossible task given the extensive nature of the subject. This chapter discusses the nebulous nature of wellbeing and implications for research with pre-school service children. Brief consideration is then given to four of the dominant discourses of wellbeing in order to highlight some of the different origins of this concept and the lenses through which it may be viewed. Following this, the different types or *domains* of wellbeing are explored to consider how the concept of wellbeing is sometimes broken down into component parts. The objective and subjective dimensions that inform attempts to measure wellbeing are then considered. The chapter concludes with a consideration of the relational nature of wellbeing and implications for research with pre-school children during a parental deployment.

3.2 The nebulous nature of wellbeing and implications for service children's research

The term *wellbeing* is increasingly being referred to in relation to the deployment-related experiences of service children in both UK and international policy and literature (Hess & Skomorovsky, 2019; MOD, 2018; Mustillo, Wadsworth & Lester, 2016; Nolan & Misca, 2018; Public Health England, 2015; Williamson *et al.*, 2018). This is a positive move in the field of service children's literature due to the academic foundations that it potentially provides. However, wellbeing is often referred to in this context with little or no

accompanying exploration of the nuances of this conceptually vague term. This can lead to a presumption that all stakeholders hold the same views about what wellbeing actually is. This is problematic, particularly as perspectives and foci arising from different disciplines influence the way in which wellbeing is conceptualised and operationalised by individuals and organisations (Axford, 2009; Ereaut & Whiting, 2008; LaPlaca, McNaught & Knight, 2013; Silberfield, 2016). I will therefore explore the concept of wellbeing further in order to use this term more effectively within my research.

The issues surrounding wellbeing in relation to service children's literature potentially arise from the fact that it remains a somewhat contested term in wider literature and policy. *Wellbeing* is a term familiar to many in modern day society, particularly as it attracts interest across the life course and is a key feature of much policy within the UK, especially that relating to health and education (Ereaut & Whiting, 2008; La Placa, McNaught & Knight, 2013). On both a national and international level, wellbeing has been embraced in major policy frameworks regarding the quality of young children's lives. In the English education system, this has most notably been seen in the 2003 Every Child Matters agenda and, tacitly but not explicitly, in the first statutory early years curriculum in England, the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) implemented in 2008. There is, however, significant ambiguity around the definition, usage and function of the word wellbeing in the realm of public policy and in the wider world (Ereaut & Whiting, 2009).

It is widely acknowledged that wellbeing remains conceptually vague despite a considerable increase in research over recent decades (Ben-Arieh & Frones, 2011; Clack, 2012; Ereaut & Whiting, 2008; Fattore, Mason & Watson, 2009; Fauth & Thompson, 2009; Lewis, 2016; Mashford-Scott *et al.*, 2012; Morrow & Mayall, 2009; McLellen & Steward, 2015; OECD, 2013; Pollard & Lee, 2003; Roberts, 2010; Statham & Chase, 2010). It has been described as 'intangible, difficult to define and even harder to measure' (Thomas, 2009, p11). Silberfield (2016) notes that it is easy to use the term wellbeing loosely or rhetorically, without clearly defining what is meant. It has also been associated with a tendency to overuse the term in relation to emotional or psychological aspects (Clack, 2012; Roberts, 2010). As a result of this, researchers reporting to explore or measure the wellbeing of children may in fact only be assessing a single domain or

indicator (Pollard & Lee, 2003) and it is important to be mindful of this when researching wellbeing. As a term within existing literature, *wellbeing* is often used interchangeably with terms such as *happiness*, *flourishing*, *quality of life* and *life satisfaction* (Clack, 2012; Deci & Ryan, 2008; Statham & Chase, 2010). In the context of UK service children's education, I add *pastoral* to that list. In England, the policy of the Service Pupil Premium for school-aged children has been in place since 2011 to 'offer mainly *pastoral support* during challenging times and to help mitigate the negative impact on service children of family mobility or parental deployment' (MOD, 2018, p.1, emphasis added), yet little consideration is given to how these *pastoral* needs are defined, thereby leaving the term open to interpretation (Normile, 2016).

As with service children's literature and policy, wider educational literature and policy often refers to wellbeing with an assumption that the recipient already has a firm grasp of what the dimensions of this concept are. This is problematic in both researching wellbeing and operationalising it within policy and practice. Exploring the use of the term wellbeing within the then Department of Children Schools and Families (DCSF, now the DfE), Ereaut and Whiting (2008, p.1) noted 'the term 'wellbeing' features strongly in policy and delivery documents and this term is now a feature of the everyday discourse of DCSF and beyond'. Significantly, however, they also noted 'subtle but important differences' (p.1) in the way that wellbeing was being used which they then suggested had negative implications for cross-government working. A common ground of understanding is needed given the fact that the complexities of children's wellbeing produces a variety of dimensions, perspectives and a corresponding variety of indicators (Ben-Arieh & Frones, 2011). Roberts (2010) similarly remarks that we need to be clearer about what wellbeing actually is, especially if we are going to make the most of opportunities to work with children and families, particularly in the earliest years. In a similar sense, using the term *wellbeing* within pre-school service children's literature without an accompanying exploration of what it actually is or how it is being operationalised leaves the door open to wide variations in how it is defined and used. Some of the different discourses of wellbeing that lead to such variation will now be considered.

3.3 Four discourses of wellbeing

Despite the rising use of the term *wellbeing* across multiple domains in recent years, finding a definition of wellbeing can often prove difficult. In this sense, wellbeing is what Morrow & Mayall, 2009 (p.221) refer to as ‘conceptually muddy, but has become pervasive’. An exploration of the dominant discourses of wellbeing is therefore needed in order to give depth to the exploration of wellbeing in relation to parental deployment.

Wellbeing can generally be thought of as falling into one of two traditions - hedonia or eudaimonia. The hedonistic tradition is concerned with the presence of positive affect (particularly happiness) and the absence of negative affect (Clack, 2012). In contrast, the eudaimonic tradition focuses on living life in a full and deeply satisfying way. It is important to note, however, that hedonia and eudaimonia should not necessarily be seen as completely separate entities. There is a degree of overlap between both and a perspective exists that it is in fact multi-dimensional, with people needing both hedonia and eudaimonia to flourish (Bauer, McAdams & Pals, 2008; Dodge *et al.*, 2012; Ryan & Deci, 2001; Waterman, Schwartz & Conti, 2008). A high level of overlap is thus seen between the discourses and they should not necessarily be considered as entirely distinct from each other.

Discourses of wellbeing are shaped by the positions from which individuals and organisations approach the subject and their motivations for doing so. Axford (2008; 2009) identified five different lenses for conceptualising wellbeing in the UK and other Western developed countries: need, rights, poverty, quality of life and social exclusion. He argues that these concepts and their empirical manifestations are less closely related than often assumed. In short, different stakeholders have different goals which, in turn, are informed by different discourses of wellbeing. This stance is supported by Silberfield (2016) who notes that definitions of wellbeing tend to be contextual to what is being discussed by different individuals and organisations. Different interpretations of wellbeing, therefore, emerge from different disciplinary areas. Consideration will now be given to four of the dominant discourses of wellbeing.

3.3.1 The philosophical discourse

Philosophical discourses of wellbeing can be traced back to the times of the ancient Greek philosophers Aristotle and Aristippus (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Aristotle was the first to write at length about the eudaimonic-hedonic distinction in the 4th century BCE. He rejected hedonic pursuits, favouring the pursuit of an overall happy or fulfilling life over the feelings that are associated with it. In contrast, the philosopher Aristippus, also in the 4th century BCE, taught that life was concerned with the seeking of pleasure and maintaining control over both prosperity and adversity.

Within the eudaimonic tradition wellbeing is seen as more than happiness in response to one's life, challenging the assumption that *wellbeing* and *happiness* are two sides of the same coin (Clack, 2012). This tradition asserts that being happy, having positive affect and being satisfied do not necessarily mean that the individual is psychologically well (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Proponents of the eudaimonic tradition somewhat convincingly note that emotions are by their nature transitory in that they come and go. In the realities of life, happiness cannot be maintained at all times. If the meaning of life and wellbeing is dependent on how we are feeling at any one moment, then we are left vulnerable to the impact of external events (Clack, 2012). By its nature, life is characterised by periodic sadness and loss in the forms of disappointment, disillusionment, failure, rejection and death, to name but a few. Feeling sad when faced with the loss of something or someone important to us is an entirely appropriate emotion (Clack, 2012). Such an interesting approach implies that pre-school children's wellbeing during a parental deployment should not just be seen as a reaction, but also with the consideration of the factors that lead to this reaction.

Ancient philosophical schools, such as the Stoics, acknowledged the importance of cultivating mental resources that enable individuals to cope with all of life's eventualities, good and bad (Clack, 2012). According to Clack (2012, p.501) this position recognises that the fulfilling life requires both the 'cultivation of an appropriate disposition *and* a supportive external context in which such an outlook might flourish' (original emphasis). Focusing on just the internal world of the individual is deemed to not go far enough and

the role of action in the external world was also seen as important for living a fulfilling life. In this sense, wellbeing is the product of individual, social and environmental influences. This relational nature of wellbeing has implications for my research and will be considered in more detail in section 3.6.

3.3.2 The medical/health discourse

The health and medical model is one of the most dominant discourses of wellbeing in modern times. This is likely on account of a tendency to look to science for a solution to today's problems (Clack, 2012), its visibility within public health policy and the prominent use of the term wellbeing to refer to both physical and psychological aspects of people's health. The frequent combined use of the terms *health and wellbeing* in modern discourse arguably further medicalises its use. This linking of the concepts of health and wellbeing can, however, have a tendency to underplay significance and complexity of wellbeing as a concept (La Placa, McNaught & Knight, 2013). The terms health and wellbeing have origins in different discourses: *health* has tended to occupy more medical and positivist discourses whereas *wellbeing* has firmer origins in psychological/emotional discourses (La Placa, McNaught & Knight, 2013).

In many ways aligning more with the hedonistic tradition of wellbeing, this discourse tends to place emphasis on the absence of negative affect in the pursuit of positive affect (for example, in the medical treatment of physical and psychological illnesses). Even so, the medical model has increasingly recognised the significance of wellbeing to wider health. Early medical conceptions of wellbeing emerged from a movement to encourage governments to consider the wide range of factors which contribute to poor health beyond the traditional view of it simply being related to physical disease or its absence. Reflecting this conceptual change but keeping the focus on health, in 1978 the World Health Organisation affirmed that:

Health, which is a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity, is a fundamental human

right and that the attainment of the highest possible level of health is a most important world-wide social goal whose realization requires the action of many other social and economic sectors in addition to the health sector. (WHO, 1978, p.1)

This viewpoint remains a cornerstone of their constitution to the present day and reflects a change to incorporate other aspects of wellbeing that may be more associated with the eudaimonic tradition. Similarly, from the UK medical perspective, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE), incorporate wellbeing as a central aspect of health, again giving emphasis beyond physical health alone:

Health relates to a person's physical and mental condition. Wellbeing is the subjective state of being healthy, happy, contented, comfortable and satisfied with one's quality of life. Mental wellbeing relates to a person's emotional and psychological wellbeing. This includes self-esteem and the ability to socialise and cope in the face of adversity. It also includes being able to develop potential, work productively and creatively, build strong and positive relationships with others and contribute to the community. (NICE, 2017, p.3)

In this viewpoint, however, wellbeing is more associated with the emotional or psychological aspects of feeling happy or satisfied in the here and now, not what may be leading to this subjective state or how this may be impacted by life's inevitable adversities. Interestingly, the medical discourse of wellbeing also extends specifically into the field of early years. In setting out their quality standard, *Early years: promoting health and wellbeing in under 5s*, NICE (2016) highlight that:

Social and emotional wellbeing is important in its own right. It also provides the building block for healthy behaviours and educational attainment. Poor social and emotional wellbeing increases the likelihood in later life of antisocial behaviour and mental health problems, drug or alcohol misuse,

teenage pregnancy, poor educational attainment and involvement in criminal activity. (NICE, 2016, p.1)

They highlight five areas in which their quality standard is expected to contribute to child wellbeing:

- school readiness
- child development
- antisocial behaviour
- mental health
- educational attainment

From this perspective, wellbeing is rightly seen as important in the here and now although there is arguably more emphasis on children's future development, in this sense potentially viewing them more as human *becomings* than as human *beings*. A strength of NICE's (2016) early years standard is that they also draw on the importance of wider social and environmental factors, particular on the relationship with their main caregivers:

A child's relationship with their main carers has a major impact on the child's social and emotional development. In turn, their carers' ability to provide a nurturing relationship depends on their own emotional and social wellbeing. This can be affected by a range of factors, for example, the family environment, their social networks and employment status. (NICE, 2016, p.1)

Where NICE's approach to wellbeing is more limited, however, is in its reliance on objective medicalised indicators and measurements such as breastfeeding rates, infant mortality, school readiness and hospital admissions. As such, whilst this discourse recognises that wellbeing is a subjective state, it gives little emphasis on young children's subjective views of their own wellbeing. My research will, therefore, represent the subjective views of the pre-school children themselves.

3.3.3 The economic discourse

From the economic perspective, wellbeing is often measured by outputs such as nations' Gross Domestic Product (GDP) which in turn is heavily influenced by a multitude of factors including poverty, education and health. Further economic measures include assessments of family resources, adequacy of parental income and economic hardship and there has been much use of this discourse in relation to issues such as poverty (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2008). The economic discourse often links increased material possessions or wealth with increased subjective states of wellbeing (OECD, 2013). For example, within the five principles of the Labour Government's Every Child Matters agenda (2003), which sought to promote the wellbeing of children in the UK, the only explicit reference to wellbeing was in achieving *economic wellbeing*.

This economic perspective of wellbeing is well established across the global political landscape, yet should not be used as the sole indicator of wellbeing. Interestingly, in recent decades both economists and politicians have been vociferous in championing wellbeing as a key indicator of the state of a nation beyond the overreliance on objective measures such as GDP. In 2006 David Cameron, the then leader of the opposition, remarked in a speech:

It's time we admitted that there's more to life than money and it's time we focused not just on GDP, but on GWB – General Wellbeing. Wellbeing can't be measured by money or traded in markets. It's about the beauty of our surroundings, that quality of our culture and, above all, the strength of our relationships. Improving our society's sense of wellbeing is, I believe, the central political challenge of our time. (Cameron, 2006)

The level to which this vision was delivered during his subsequent time as Prime Minister is, however, questionable at best. The Strategic Review of Health Inequalities in England post-2010 (Marmot, 2010) similarly asserted that economic growth is not the most important measure of a country's success, but rather the fair distribution of health, wellbeing and sustainability. Marmot himself referred to this concept as not being a new

one, but one that had internationally been given new emphasis by the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress (Stiglitz, Sen, & Fitoussi, 2009). This slightly earlier report had asserted 'The time is ripe for our measurement system to *shift emphasis from measuring economic production to measuring people's wellbeing*' (Stiglitz, Sen, & Fitoussi, 2009, p.12, original emphasis). In order to shift this emphasis, prominent economists such as the UK's Richard Layard have drawn upon constructs arising from different disciplinary areas, such as positive psychology, in order to measure people's subjective wellbeing (McLellen & Steward, 2015). In similarities to the medical model, this may again be due to what Clack (2012) describes as the tendency to look to science for a solution to today's problems. Such a move demonstrates the interrelated nature of some of the dominant discourses of wellbeing.

3.3.4 The psychological discourse

The psychological discourse is often associated with the field of positive psychology (Seligman, 1999), yet this should not be seen as psychology's first attempt to explore wellbeing as this had already formed the focus of humanist psychologists such as Maslow (1962). This discourse is more aligned with the eudaimonic tradition of the pursuit of a well-lived and fulfilling life although it incorporates hedonia in the terms of a pleasant life in the here and now. Positive psychology advocates a science of positive subjective experience which Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000, p.5) propose is in opposition to 'the exclusive focus on pathology that has dominated so much of our discipline (which) results in a model of the human being lacking the positive features that make life worth living'. In this sense, it can be argued that positive psychology is in opposition to a *crisis narrative* surrounding wellbeing within aspects of wider psychology, where positive features such as hope, creativity, future-mindedness and perseverance are 'ignored or explained as transformations of more negative impulses' (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p.5). Building on his earlier work, Seligman (2011) has more recently developed an approach to wellbeing which incorporates five constructs; Positive emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning and Accomplishment (PERMA). Each of these elements is seen to contribute to human flourishing (Kaczor, 2015).

From the psychological perspective wellbeing is subjectively defined; two individuals in the same circumstance may experience different wellbeing and therefore objective indicators (such as socio-economic or physical health measures) can not alone capture wellbeing (Fegter, Machold & Richter, 2010). This viewpoint is a strength of the positive psychology approach and has implications for the importance of including individual's perspectives when researching wellbeing, regardless of age. Where this discourse is more limited, however, is in its under-theorisation of the social context that impacts upon the feelings and functioning of an individual (McLellen & Steward, 2015). This will be considered in more detail in section 3.6 below.

This consideration of four dominant discourses of wellbeing has highlighted that whilst they view wellbeing through different lenses, there is also a degree of overlap between these discourses and they should not necessarily be considered as siloed approaches. All have potentially important insights to offer and adopting a multi-disciplinary understanding of wellbeing is useful in order to capture both children's objective and subjective wellbeing (Lewis, 2019) (see also section 3.5). Researching the wellbeing of service children should not, however, be done in the absence of the acknowledgement that different individuals and organisations will adhere to different discourses which then frames the way that they attempt to explore, measure and/or support it. The next section will consider how researchers have explored the different aspects or *domains* that make up an individual's wellbeing.

3.4 Domains of wellbeing

Research frequently discusses wellbeing in terms of the different aspects or *domains* in which it may present within the lives of children and adults. Whilst sight should not be lost of the holistic nature of wellbeing, an exploration of the different domains provides an opportunity for greater clarity and understanding when researching a concept as multifaceted as wellbeing. An exploration of different domains of wellbeing also goes some way to addressing the tendency for it to be referred to as relating to just one aspect

of people's lives: namely emotional wellbeing (Clack, 2012; Roberts, 2010). Whilst not overlooking the holistic nature of wellbeing, we need to be clear about the specific aspects of pre-school children's wellbeing that may be impacted by a parental deployment so that they in turn may be better supported.

A variety of perspectives have emerged regarding the different domains of wellbeing. Critiques have also emerged arguing that such attempts to categorise wellbeing can in fact detract from its holistic nature (Hobson, 2002). Despite this, Roberts (2010) points out that over a half of a century's literature on early childhood development can broadly be categorised into the four domains of physical, emotional, social and cognitive development. Similarly, in a somewhat dated but useful systematic review of literature on child wellbeing, Pollard and Lee (2003) identify five domains of wellbeing: physical, psychological, social, cognitive and economic. They reported specific themes within the domains; social domains contained only sociological perspectives, indicators of emotion, mental health or mental illness were included in the psychological domain and intellectual or school-related indicators fell under the cognitive domain. Interestingly, they noted that the physical, social, cognitive and economic domains tended to measure more positive indicators of wellbeing while the psychological domain was characterised by more deficit indicators. As discussed in Chapter 2, this is also characteristic within pre-school service children's literature whereby a child's wellbeing during a parental deployment is often measured with deficit indicators related to the psychological domain, such as behavioural problems. The comments of Pollard and Lee (2003, p.65) further strengthen the argument for a more balanced approach within pre-school service children's research, as they note the 'reliance on negative or deficit indicators of wellbeing fails to capture the positive continuum of the strengths, assets and abilities that can be promoted in children and adolescents'.

Fauth and Thompson (2009) give a slightly different perspective on the domains of wellbeing, proposing that young children's (aged eight and below) development occurs across four separate but interlinked domains; 1) physical wellbeing 2) mental health, emotional and social wellbeing 3) cognitive and language development and school performance and 4) beliefs. In a strength of their approach, they acknowledge the

significance of the environmental context to wellbeing. Fauth and Thompson (2009) propose that this development occurs within three important contexts or environments; 1) family economic status and resources (with a particular focus on poverty), 2) caregiving and the home environment and 3) features of the community and neighbourhood. Similarly, although in the context of adults, McNaught (2011) proposes four interlinked domains of individual wellbeing, family wellbeing, community wellbeing and societal wellbeing, again emphasising the significance of environmental forces. Lewis (2019) notes how there is little consensus about the domains of wellbeing and mixed views about whether they apply to both adults and children. Reviewing evidence in the field of childhood wellbeing, Statham and Chase (2010) found that there were a wide variety of domains and measures used to assess childhood wellbeing but suggest there is an emerging consensus that it should include dimensions of physical, emotional/psychological and social wellbeing. They further conclude that improvements in theorising and operationalising childhood wellbeing are likely to emerge from a shared understanding that wellbeing is multidimensional, should focus on the immediate lives of children but also focuses on their future lives and incorporates some subjective as well as objective measures. To this I add that it should be done with a consideration of the familial, social and environmental aspects of wellbeing due to the significance of attachment relationships highlighted in Chapter 2 (see also section 3.6 below).

One such approach that incorporates psychological, social and physical elements into a new definition of wellbeing is that of Dodge *et al.* (2012). Dodge *et al.* (2012) draw on dynamic equilibrium theory (e.g. Headey & Wearing, 1991) which proposes that, for most people for most of the time, subjective wellbeing is fairly stable and a state that people want to return to. Building on this, Dodge *et al.* (2012) propose a more simplified model whereby the set point of wellbeing is one of equilibrium or homeostasis, and the fluctuating state of wellbeing is caused by challenges and resources of the individual. Based on the concept of a see-saw, Dodge *et al.* (2012) assert:

In essence, stable wellbeing is when individuals have the psychological, social and physical resources they need to meet a particular psychological, social and/or physical challenge. When individuals have more challenges than

resources, the see-saw dips, along with their wellbeing and vice-versa.

(Dodge *et al.*, 2012, p.230)

Whilst not specifically relating to children, the model of Dodge *et al.* (2012) offers an interesting approach which acknowledges the importance of individual resources for coping with the demands of life's inevitable challenges. Lewis (2019), however, notes that the model would benefit from showing examples of how someone's resources, challenges and equilibrium interact and function. I further argue that the model would benefit from a greater emphasis on the interplay of internal and external resources of the individual, thus emphasising the dynamic interaction of individuals and their environments.

The literature reviewed in this section indicates that an analysis of the different domains of wellbeing would be useful to provide clarity in the study of pre-school service children's wellbeing during a parental deployment. Whilst my research does not lose sight of the holistic nature of wellbeing, in this thesis I explore the different domains of pre-school children's wellbeing to emerge from my data in order to better understand how these are specifically impacted by a parental deployment.

3.5 Objective and subjective dimensions and measures of wellbeing in the early years

Chapter 1 introduced the argument that more should be done to represent pre-school service children's voices on their own wellbeing within both international and UK literature. It is important to gather a variety of data in order to gain a more accurate picture of young children's wellbeing during a parental deployment, including that of parents, educational practitioners and the children themselves. Including subjective accounts of young children's wellbeing alongside more objective measures also forms an area of wider debate within wellbeing literature.

Mashford-Scott *et al.* (2012) highlight the multi-dimensionality and ambiguity of wellbeing by the fact that it can be reflected in terms of a child's achievements as well as their personal experiences. Exploring such objective and subjective indicators of

wellbeing form the primary method of measuring the concept. More precisely, objective data are those that can be measured by observable facts (e.g. GDP, household income, family structure, educational outcomes, health status, vaccination rates) whereas subjective data refers to individual's own perspectives about their wellbeing. As discussed in sections 2.3.1 and 3.3, the choice to use objective or subjective data will be influenced by the discourse that the individual or organisation is situated within and their views on whether young children are capable of representing their experiences. Whilst often insightful and useful, objective data alone can not represent an individual's wellbeing as it omits an individual's perspective on their own lives. For example, from an ethical perspective, one can not presume that a child from a low socio-economic background experiences poor wellbeing as a result of this status, or that all pre-school service children will experience poor wellbeing as a result of a parental deployment. Despite this, children's perspectives - particularly those of young children - on their own wellbeing are often overlooked in the pursuit of objective (often quantifiable) data.

In recent years there has been a shift towards engaging with children and young people in defining the parameters of wellbeing. As discussed in section 2.3.1, this approach reflects an adherence to the new sociology of childhood (e.g. James, Jenks & Prout, 1998) which argues that children are competent human beings in the here and now and not incompetent human beings simply on their route to adulthood. It also reflects an adherence to a children's rights perspective; a concept enshrined in international law in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989) which came into force in the UK in 1992. Specifically, Article 12 states that all children have a right to express their views, feelings and wishes in matters that affect them and to have these views taken seriously. Representing the perspectives of children and young people has also highlighted some important differences in how children and adults view and define wellbeing. Several researchers have, however, expressed their concerns at the lack of emphasis given to wellbeing in children in the early years (birth to six years) with the majority of focus being on older children (Lewis, 2016; Manning-Morton, 2014; Mashford-Scott *et al.*, 2012; McLellan & Steward, 2015; Statham & Chase, 2010). Manning-Morton (2014) notes that within the UK, concepts of wellbeing that are influencing policy and practice in the early years are frequently derived from research from children in late

childhood and adolescence. Further to this, those that do consider younger children are often overly reliant on objective data exploring physical measures such as infant mortality, birth weight and immunisation levels. Moss, Clark and Kjørholt (2005) agree that the focus on this younger age group tends to be on promoting development rather than on promoting rights. Lewis (2016) found that the general assumption that young children are incapable of communicating a personal view of themselves and the world around them was associated with a tendency of early years practitioners to favour more objective indicators of wellbeing. This view of young children as human beings can lead to a diversion of attention away from their subjective experiences of their wellbeing in the here and now (James, Jenks & Prout, 1998). Roberts (2010, p.11) argues against such a perspective, asserting that 'babies and young children are not just *potential* citizens but are citizens *now*' (original emphasis). Supporting this, Ben-Arieh *et al.* (2001) assert that children need to be involved in all stages of research efforts to measure and understand their wellbeing if we are going to accurately measure it. Mashford-Scott *et al.* (2012) similarly argue for the inclusion of young children's perspectives of their own wellbeing.

Whilst the inclusion of young children's perspectives on their own wellbeing should be pursued, there are undeniable challenges associated with this aim. As Colliver (2017, p.855) notes 'although there are many reasons why they are important, researching young children's perspectives ethically and authentically can be difficult'. Mashford-Scott *et al.* (2012) similarly acknowledge the challenge of investigating the subjective experience of wellbeing in young children who may not yet have the linguistic or metacognitive resources for communicating their perspectives on this abstract topic. They call for researchers to meet this challenge of creatively and authentically capturing the experiences of young children in order to build a more comprehensive and meaningful understanding of children's wellbeing and how it can be best supported. Participatory methods such as Clark and Moss' (2011) *mosaic approach* is one such method that offers young children and adults the opportunity to be involved in making meaning together and will be considered in more detail in Chapter 5.

Taking a children's rights perspective, it could be argued that seeking the voice of the child is imperative in the pursuit of accurately representing the subjective wellbeing of that child. Despite the challenges of representing the views of young children, it could be argued that it is better to attempt this and potentially fail than to not attempt it at all. This viewpoint is supported by Manning-Morton (2014), who argues that not including young children's voices is potentially more of a problem than their perceived unreliability. Ben-Arieh and Frones (2011, p.470) similarly argue that objective measures should be coupled with the subjective perspectives of the children, partly because of children's right to a voice and 'partly in the fact that information on children's life world is doomed to be skewed, as long as the children's own perspectives are missing'. Clearly there is a need to gather a variety of perspectives on the issue of pre-school service children's wellbeing within my research including those of the children themselves.

3.6 The relational nature of wellbeing and implications for service children's literature

Chapters 1 and 2 introduced the argument that pre-school service children's wellbeing should not be considered outside of the individual, familial, social, cultural and historical contexts that shape their everyday lives. The literature considered so far in Chapter 3 has equally emphasised the need to understand the concept of wellbeing as something that is inseparable from children's social and environmental contexts. This argument will now be considered in more detail. Two models that reflect the relational nature of wellbeing will then be introduced and the influences of these to the study of pre-school service children's wellbeing will be considered.

In the wider field of wellbeing, numerous researchers have criticised approaches and discourses of wellbeing that focus on the individual away from their environment (Ben-Arieh & Frones, 2011; Clack, 2012; Ereaut & Whiting, 2008; Roberts, 2010). Discourses of wellbeing that focus solely on the individual and their emotions leads that individual to be defined in a way that detaches him or her from the environment that they inhabit; family, friends and the surrounding community (Clack, 2009). This view is supported by Ben-Arieh and Frones (2011) who assert that 'the relationship between the family and the

community and the community and the wider society and its institutions facilitates or obstructs the transactions that produce the level of wellbeing' (p.467). Erel & Whiting (2008) argue that the very difficulties in universally defining wellbeing are due to the fact that it is socially and culturally constructed and does not have a fixed meaning. They further posit that 'essentially, wellbeing is a cultural construct and represents a shifting set of meanings – wellbeing is no less than what a group or groups of people collectively agree makes a 'good life'' (Erel & Whiting, 2008, p.1). Clearly, social and environmental factors must be explored alongside individual factors in the study of pre-school service children's wellbeing.

A crucial task in the study of wellbeing is to identify the key risk factors that are likely to have an adverse effect on children's development alongside the corresponding protective factors that can help to develop resilience (Roberts, 2010). This approach has much to offer to the study of wellbeing in pre-school service children during a parental deployment as it acknowledges both the individual and environmental characteristics that play a role during this time. Acknowledging protective factors alongside those that pose a risk also leads us away from the potential of a crisis narrative surrounding this population of children. One interesting and useful viewpoint on the relational nature of wellbeing comes from Pugh (2005) who proposes that 'wellness or wellbeing is both an individual and collective concept, something that is measured in terms of individual lives, but is very often delivered through families and communities' (Pugh, 2005, p.45). She identifies four characteristics relating to individual, social and environmental factors that are important in creating resilience in children:

- An adequate standard of living
- A temperament/disposition that encourages caregiving, leading to high self-esteem, sociability and autonomy, the ability to solve problems, and an internal locus of control
- Dependable caregivers, where children can grow up in a family with one or two caring adults, who have positive and appropriate child-rearing practices

- Networks of community support, including a pro-social peer group, high quality early education and schools where children are valued and learning is encouraged

Similarly, drawing on research surrounding resilience, Masten and Gewirtz (2006) identify contextual factors that are important in early childhood development. They highlight quality of care, opportunities for learning, adequate nutrition, and community support for families to facilitate positive development of social, cognitive and self-regulation skills. They further stress the importance of healthy attachment relationships and good internal adaptive resources to give children a good start in life and to equip them with the human and social capital needed for success when entering school and society. In this sense wellbeing - as influenced by contextual social and environmental factors - can be seen to be a *prerequisite* as well as an *outcome* of situations that bring challenge to the lives of young children. Combining these elements, Roberts (2010, p.15) uses the term 'resilient wellbeing' to refer to normal development under difficult conditions. She proposes a new model of wellbeing specifically related to children in the early years: a triangular *hierarchy of wellbeing* reminiscent of Malsow's (1962) hierarchy of need. Her model offers an interesting perspective on the relational nature of wellbeing in young children:

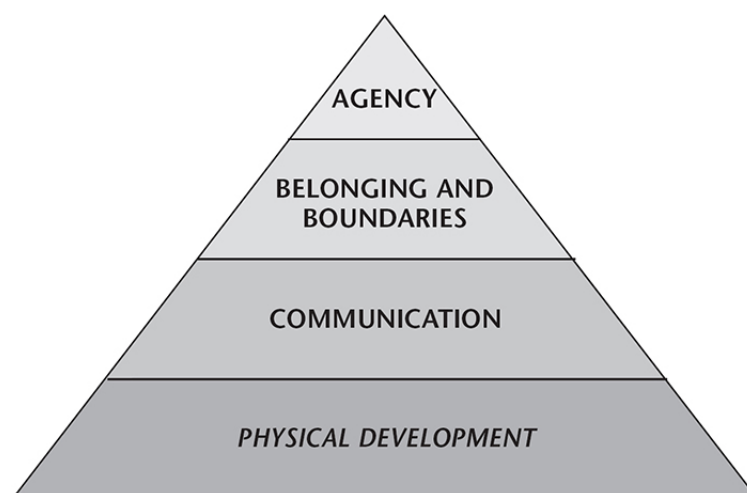


Fig.2 - Roberts' (2010, p.45) ABC model of wellbeing

Roberts' (2010) model consists of four interdependent constructs with *physical wellbeing* underpinning the other elements at the base of the triangle. Interestingly, she argues that physical wellbeing has two distinctive components relating to both the individual and the environment. The former relates to physical health and development and incorporates elements such as eating and sleeping, health routines, motor control and managing illness and pain. The latter component relates to wider elements that can have a profound impact on children's health and wellbeing, such as family income, housing and the local environment. She argues that some types of environment can have an impact on physical wellbeing, just as some types of physical activity can. Interestingly, she highlights the role of parents' perceptions of their own wellbeing too, noting 'eating and sleeping patterns for everyone, as well as the relentless pace of life with babies and young children, make a profound impact on wellbeing in families' (Roberts, 2010, p.33).

Roberts (2010) continues to build her model of wellbeing with three additional elements: communication, belonging and boundaries and agency. Communication, she argues is the central process that underpins all emotional, cognitive and social development in the cultural contexts of family, community and society. She asserts that communication is about processes of active interaction and involves both received and involved communication. Belonging and boundaries refers to a child having an identity in relation to others. Roberts (2010) argues that this involves bonding with the primary caregiver but is also more than this, requiring attachments to another or others. *Belonging*, she notes, is about a sense of identity (in relation to others), attachment to others (including other children) and a sense of belonging to place. *Boundaries* accompany belonging and refer to the set of rules within those relationships. In this model boundaries can not exist without belonging. Roberts (2010, p.38) argues 'if attachment, security and trust are not in place, our first task is surely to work to establish a genuine sense of belonging, as a first step to putting in place the boundaries that are needed'. This, she notes, is especially the case for vulnerable and challenging children. The final element of Roberts' model is the construct of agency, the feeling of empowerment that we can make a difference for ourselves and for others. A strength of Roberts' model is that it offers some interesting insight into how different elements of wellbeing may interrelate and lead to an overall sense of wellbeing within a young child. This again reaffirms the position that analysing the component

domains of wellbeing may lead to a greater understanding of how these influence a young child's overall wellbeing. It also reaffirms that individual, social and environmental factors must be taken into consideration when exploring the deployment-related wellbeing of pre-school service children. Where it may be seen to be more limited, however, is in its assumption that all children, regardless of cultural background, will experience these constructs in the same sequential order.

A further useful model of wellbeing is that of McNaught (2011). Whilst this model specifically relates to adults there are nevertheless important insights to be gained for the study of pre-school children. His model incorporates the family, community and society as well as a range of environmental, socio-economic, geographic and political forces. The perspectives of the individual are important but do not necessarily dominate. Rather, he proposes an interplay of individual wellbeing, family wellbeing, community wellbeing and societal wellbeing.

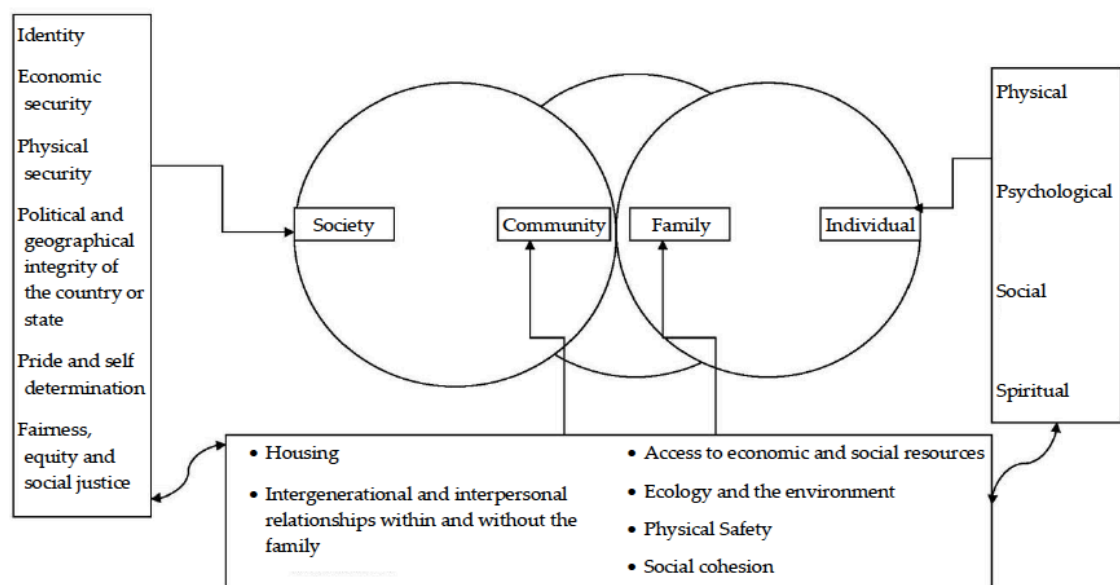


Fig. 3 - McNaught's (2011, p.11) structured framework for defining wellbeing

In this model, wellbeing is seen to be dynamically constructed by its actors through an interplay of their circumstances, locality, psychological resources and interpersonal relations with families and significant others. The bringing together of how people feel

about their circumstances alongside an assessment of how their objective circumstances affect them as individuals, families and societies can be seen as a strength of McNaught's framework (La Placa, McNaught & Knight, 2013). La Placa, McNaught and Knight (2013, p.120) further assert that this approach 'reverses the tendency towards fragmentation, silo thinking and silo analysis in the social sciences', again reaffirming the relational nature of wellbeing. In similarity to the influence of Roberts' model of wellbeing to my own case study, a strength of McNaught's approach is that it considers the interplay of multiple individual and environmental factors in the shaping of an individual's wellbeing. Where it is more limited, however, is that it was not devised to specifically relate to children. Despite this, the model still offers the important insight that the wellbeing of service children during a deployment can not be seen as the result of that one single event. It is shaped by the interplay of multiple individual, familial, societal and cultural factors that have occurred over time.

3.7 Summary

This chapter has explored several factors surrounding wellbeing that influenced my approach to exploring the deployment-related wellbeing of pre-school children. The chapter began by discussing the issue that *wellbeing* is increasingly being referred to within service children's research yet is often done so without an accompanying explanation of this conceptually vague term. Any search for a generic definition of pre-school service children's wellbeing may not, however, prove to be fruitful in light of the fact that each service child, their family and their circumstances are unique and they will experience deployments in different ways. Instead, what emerges from this chapter are important points to consider regarding the conceptual nature of wellbeing when researching pre-school service children during a parental deployment.

Drawing on different discourses of wellbeing provides a variety of lenses through which to explore the deployment related experiences of service children as each offer differing and insightful perspectives through which to better understand this conceptually vague term. Drawing upon different discourses helps to avoid the potential for siloed thinking,

where pre-school children's wellbeing is defined only in terms of the presence or absence of observable problematised behaviours during a parental deployment (see section 2.3.1) or in terms of academic attainment during this time. Reliance on such objective data (frequently in the form of test scores and/or the perspectives of the at-home parent) can lead to the subjective views of the young service children themselves being underrepresented. This chapter concludes that it is vital to attempt to represent young children's subjective voices of their own wellbeing alongside such objective data. This chapter also concludes that, whilst wellbeing should be considered a holistic concept, breaking it down into domains makes it more focused and accessible, helping to establish a consensus in the study of pre-school service children's wellbeing. Finally, this chapter has highlighted that wellbeing is formed within social relationships and cultural environments and that this should form an important focus within research on pre-school children's wellbeing. The theoretical underpinnings of this final point will now be considered in more detail in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4 - Theoretical Approach

4.1 Introduction

The three chapters so far have highlighted how consideration needs to be given to both individual and wider social and environmental factors in order to explore the gap in current understanding of the wellbeing of pre-school service children during a parental deployment. Chapter 2 argued the importance of viewing the pre-school service child as part of the families, societies and cultures that they inhabit. This is because the experiences of service families do not occur in a vacuum but rather are shaped by, and often shape, the context in which these families are embedded (Paley, Lester & Mogil, 2013). The literature reviewed in Chapter 2 led to my conclusion that, as a researcher of pre-school service children, I can only truly understand and support the impact of a parental deployment by considering factors of the wider social and cultural environments that these children inhabit. Both international and UK-focused research has commented on the need for research to move beyond the clinical models that focus on service children as individuals, instead recognising that they are embedded in many interacting systems, such as families, schools and the military itself (Clifton, 2007; Kudler & Porter, 2013; Lester & Flake, 2013, McCullouch, Hall & Ellis, 2018). Chapter 3 similarly argued that wellbeing is a socially and culturally constructed concept which is influenced by the interplay of individual, social and environmental factors, further strengthening the argument that my research should explore these factors further.

In light of these arguments, my research draws upon cultural historical theory (Hedegaard, 2008; Vygotsky, 1998) and the bioecological model of development (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994) and therefore both will be considered in this chapter. Both theories emphasise how a child's development does not occur in a social vacuum but is the result of interacting individual, social and cultural processes. These approaches reject the evolutionary perspective of development which view children as a homogeneous group for whom universal methods of instruction and assessment can be applied (Goncu,

1999; Robbins, 2005; Wong, 2015). Both cultural historical theory and the bioecological model of development afford an exploration of the wholeness of the pre-school service children's situations beyond that which is occurring individually or solely within their educational settings. Significantly, they give emphasis to the interplay of individual, familial, social and wider contextual factors.

Research conducted within both the American and British contexts has highlighted the insight that can be gained by taking a multi-theoretical approach such as this to understanding the experiences of service children (Lester & Flake, 2013; McCullouch, Hall & Ellis, 2018; Paley, Lester & Mogil, 2013). Paley, Lester and Mogil (2013), for example, use family systems theory (Minuchin, 1985) to focus on the interrelatedness of individuals and their relationships. They then combine this with a social ecological framework (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994) which, they argue, broadens the lens to include a consideration of the larger contexts within which military families are embedded. In the British context, McCullouch, Hall and Ellis (2018, p.4) recently drew upon multiple 'social constructivist lenses' to explore the educational experiences of service children related to the concepts of agency, identity and capital. Cultural historical theory (Hedegaard, 2008; Vygotsky, 1998) in particular has been used comparatively less with service children's education and this chapter argues that it has important insights to offer in terms of understanding the deployment-related wellbeing of pre-school children. With this in mind, this chapter discusses how both the bioecological model of development and cultural historical theory influenced my approach to the research.

4.2 The influence of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model of development in my study

Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model of development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994) recognises the interrelatedness of the individual and their cultural processes. Existing research on service children, particularly that originating in America, has highlighted how Bronfenbrenner's ecological approach offers a framework for understanding how the multiple systems of family, school and local and national communities influence the wartime experiences of service children (Lester & Flake, 2013).

Identifying the links between family and community can then lead to a greater understanding of how they affect the way children experience a parental deployment as well as the interplay between risk and resilience across the family system (Wadsworth *et al.*, 2013). From an ecological perspective, the impact of deployment on service children and their families may also be related to historical, social and cultural contexts such as the national response to a particular conflict (Lester & Flake, 2013). This is important in light of an argument presented in section 2.2, that the operational commitments of the Armed Forces changes over time and we can not be overly reliant on research from a past era. Whilst not all Armed-Forces deployment takes place in the context of war, approaches such as this can equally be applied to peacetime deployments.

Bronfenbrenner's model (see Fig. 4) conceptualises four ecological systems or niches that the child interacts with, each nested within the others. This model theorises that a child's development is a result of an interplay of both individual factors and the surrounding environment over ontogenetic and historical time. Evolving from his earlier Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), this later version of his model addressed the previous lack of emphasis given to individual factors (particularly bioecological and psychological aspects) in children's development. Indeed, Bronfenbrenner himself noted of the earlier model 'in the place of too much research on development 'out of context', we now have a surfeit of studies on 'context without development'' (Bronfenbrenner, 1986, p.288).

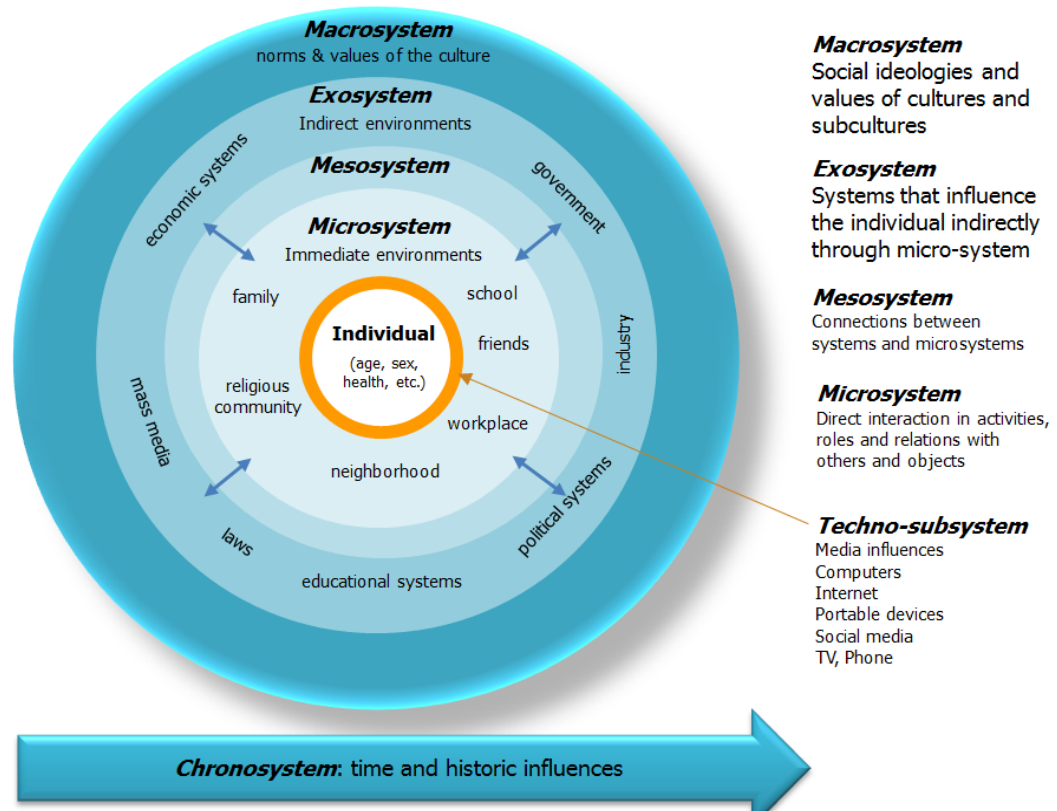


Fig.4 - Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model of Development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979)

At the centre of the model is the individual child and their own characteristics which both Chapters 2 and 3 have highlighted are important to consider when researching the wellbeing of pre-school service children. The *microsystem* refers to the most immediate systems that the child inhabits, such as their family, school and peer groups. The next nested layer is the *mesosystem*, which refers to the interactions between the different components of the microsystem, such as the relationship between the parents and the educational setting. The third layer, the *exosystem*, refers to elements that do not affect the child directly but may do so indirectly, such as the deployment of a parent on military operations. The *macrosystem* refers to the wider societal and cultural influences that may influence the child's development, such as the operational commitments of the Armed Forces from a particular country at that particular time and the wider educational system in which the children are embedded. Finally, the *chronosystem* refers to time, both in the physiological sense of developmental changes associated with age and in the historical sense of the passage of time within the child's environment.

Reformulating his theory right up until his death in 2005, Bronfenbrenner came to place much emphasis on the reciprocal nature of interactions between an individual and environment, defined as *proximal processes* (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994). From the mid 1990s onwards the Process, Person, Context, Time (PPCT) model was described as the theory's appropriate research design (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). This model highlights the role of reciprocal interaction between the biopsychological human being and their immediate environment over ontogenetic and historical time. Bronfenbrenner (2001, p.3) defined development as:

(the) phenomenon of continuity and change in the biopsychosocial characteristics of human beings both as individuals and as groups. The phenomenon extends over the life course across successive generations and through historical time, both past and present. (Original emphasis)

Throughout decades of work both on his own and in collaboration with others, Bronfenbrenner identified ten propositions of development, four of which have particular significance to the exploration of child wellbeing during a parental deployment and will be considered further here. Firstly, Proposition IV highlights the significance of attachment relationships to a child's development, a factor which has been highlighted as important to both the study of service children and wellbeing in Chapters 2 and 3 respectively. Bronfenbrenner notes that in order for a child to develop intellectually, emotionally, socially and morally, they require:

...participation in progressively more complex activities, on a regular basis over an extended period of time in the child's life, with one or more persons with whom the child develops a strong, mutual emotional attachment and who are committed to the child's wellbeing and development, preferably for life. (Bronfenbrenner, 2001, p.9, original emphasis)

This significance of attachment relationships is extended in Proposition V, whereby he proposes that the establishment of a strong mutual emotional attachment leads to

'internalisation of the parent's activities and expressed feelings of affection' (Bronfenbrenner, 2001, p.9, original emphasis). In turn, he argues, this motivates the child's interest and engagement in related activities within their immediate environment. Interestingly, Proposition VI goes on to consider the support that the main carers of children need in order to support the emotional attachment between a parent and child. This, he argues, depends in substantial degree on the availability and involvement of another adult to support the main carer in their role, someone who 'assists, encourages, spells off, gives status to and expresses admiration, and affection for the person caring for and engaging in joint activity with the child' (Bronfenbrenner, 2001, p.10). In short, main carers are bolstered by having someone to 'back them up' (Roberts, 2010, p.18). This is interesting in light of the research considered in Chapter 2 which suggested that the wellbeing of young children is influenced by the wellbeing of the at-home parent during a deployment. Bronfenbrenner (2001, p.11) notes 'what mattered most was not only the attention given to the child – important as this was – but also the assistance provided to the single parent or by others serving in the supportive roles...'. From this perspective the experiences of the at-home parent during a time of deployment, their sources of resilience/risk and the impact these have on the pre-school child are points that warrant further analysis.

Whilst Bronfenbrenner's model remained influential within my case study of pre-school service children, as my research progressed a limitation of only drawing upon Bronfenbrenner's approach became apparent. As Wong (2015) notes, whilst Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model considers a wide range of contextual influences, cultural historical theory (Hedegaard, 2008; Vygotsky, 1998) offers the potential for more precise conceptual tools for understanding child development. Rogoff (2003) argues that the separation of the four systems of Bronfenbrenner's model into definable, independently occurring and hierarchical niches somewhat constrains the concept of the relations between those individual and cultural processes. In this way, she notes, culture is presented as having more of a unidirectional influence *on* the development of the individual. Instead she foregrounds the cultural historical perspective that 'cultural and personal processes create each other' (Rogoff, 2003, p.49). Within cultural historical theory, the child is regarded both as an individual and a collective member of his/her

community (Rogoff & Chavajay, 1995). In this sense, the child can be seen to be an active agent in the creation of the circumstances that promote their health and wellbeing (Rose, Gilbert & Richards, 2016) and contextual factors are seen to not only be having an effect *on* the child (Fleer, 2003). Utilising the cultural historical approach in addition to Bronfenbrenner's model provided my research with an additional conceptual tool, affording a greater exploration of the dynamic interaction between individual factors of the child with their social relationships and their cultural environments. This is important in light of two arguments presented in Chapter 2; 1) that there is the potential for a crisis narrative to emerge surrounding the coping of the at-home parent and 2) that service children should not be seen to be a homogenous group experiencing or responding to a similar situation in the same way. In comparison to ecological approaches such as that of Bronfenbrenner, cultural historical theory has, however, been utilised less within the field of service children's research. This is despite the argument that the cultural historical approach offers the potential for '...new and exciting understandings, highlighting how children are thinking, learning, developing and changing *through participation in the sociocultural activities of their communities*' (Robbins, 2005, p.147, original emphasis). Cultural historical theory and its implications for my study will now be considered.

4.3 The influence of cultural historical theory in my study

Derived from the work of Vygotsky and his Soviet colleagues (such as Luria and Leont'ev) in the early decades of the twentieth century, cultural-historical theory asserts that in order to understand individual thinking, the cultural-historical contexts in which it occurs must also be understood (Cole, 1996; Daniels, 2001; Robbins, 2005; Rogoff, 2003; Rogoff & Chavajay, 1995; Stetsenko, 2017; Vygotsky, 1978). Cognition is not seen to be an individual construction but instead is contextually specific, guided socially by others and mediated by cultural tools and artefacts. Individuals' participation in cultural activities and their communities are therefore foregrounded (Robbins, 2005). This premise that individual, social and cultural factors are inseparable is inherent to the cultural historical perspective (Rogoff & Chavajay, 1995). As summarised by Rogoff and Chavajay (1995, p.866), 'researchers cannot just look at individual thinking in a vacuum, as though

individual thinking is separate from the kinds of activities in which people engage and the kind of institutions that they are part of'. In opposition to Cartesian reductionism - where processes are artificially separated for study out of context - this dialectical approach aims to understand processes *within* the complexity of their interrelationships (Bidell, 1988). In similarity to the ecological approach of Bronfenbrenner, within the cultural historical perspective examination is given to the individual and to the material conditions and social relations that societies and institutions create (Fleer, 2016). Where the cultural historical approach can be argued to be going further, however, is in its greater emphasis of the child not only being influenced by social relationships and environments but also having an impact upon them. As Rogoff (2003, p.51) notes;

In the emerging sociocultural perspective, culture is not an entity that *influences* individuals. Instead, people contribute to the creation of cultural processes and cultural processes contribute to the creation of people. Thus, individual and cultural processes are *mutually constituting* rather than defined separately from each other. (Original emphasis)

From the cultural historical perspective, cognition is a collaborative rather than individual process, the individual, their social partners and the cultural contexts in which they are in being interdependent (Rogoff, 1998, 2003; Rogoff & Chavajay, 1995; Vygotsky, 1978). The cultural and social context within which an individual inhabits is seen to be integrated with the development of that individual, therefore these factors are studied together (Robbins, 2005; Rogoff, 1998, 2003). As Robbins (2005, p.143) highlights, 'thus, rather than being a universal skill, thinking is very much contextually specific, guided by others, and mediated by particular cultural tools and artefacts'. Cole (1996) notes how such culturally mediated, historically developing practical activity and mediation through tools or artefacts (such as language, number systems and physical objects) is the central thesis of the Russian cultural historical school. Psychological tools may be defined as symbolic artefacts (signs, texts, language, formulae, and so on) that aid individuals in mastering their own psychological functions (such as attention, memory and perception) (Kozulin, 2003). Such tools/artefacts may simultaneously have both an obvious material aspect and

an ideal or conceptual form (Cole, 1996). Vygotsky (1981) expressed the social nature of cultural behaviour in his general genetic law of cultural development:

Any function in children's cultural development appears twice, or on two planes. First it appears on the social plane and then it appears on the psychological plane. First it appears between people as an interpsychological category and then within the individual child as an intrapsychological category...but it goes without saying that internalisation transforms the process itself and changes its structure and function. Social relations or relations among people genetically underlie all higher functions and their relationships. (Vygotsky, 1981, p.163)

Vygotsky's concept of higher psychological functions exemplified his principle that human beings have higher psychological functions (such as voluntary attention, mediated memory and object perception) in addition to the natural psychological functions commonly shared with other animals (such as attention and memory). Summarising the features of higher psychological functions, Luria (1969) notes how these are social by their nature, mediated by their structure and voluntary and deliberate by their way of functioning. Vygotsky (1989) considered these higher psychological functions to be firstly shared between persons before subsequently becoming internalised or private, essentially changing from outer to inner control:

For us to speak about the external process means to speak of the social. Any higher psychological function was external. This means that it was social before becoming a function; it was a social relation between two people. The means of acting upon oneself is originally a means of acting on others and the action of others on one's personality. (Vygotsky, 1989, p.56)

From this perceptive, research should consider children's development as being inherently situated in a system of social relationships, even when those children are being

observed alone (Goncu, 1999; Stetsenko, 2017). Stetsenko (2017) argues that memory is never just about the past but is also about both the individual's orientation towards the future and their activities aimed at changing the present. Summarising this point, she asserts '...persons are always acting in collaborative ways (even when acting alone), when engaging in a world shared with others' (Stetsenko, 2017, p.310). Social learning through participation occurs within what Vygotsky (1978) termed the *zone of proximal development*. This refers to the difference in what the learner can accomplish independently and what they can accomplish with the assistance or guidance of more experienced others, such as peers, parents and educational practitioners. The interactions that occur within the zone of proximal development afford children the opportunity to learn the intellectual tools of their community (Rogoff, 2003). Such interactions go beyond those which focus on academic skills and learning, with parents and children engaging in everyday practices and conversations that are not designed as instruction but still have the result of children actively participating in the practices and skills of their community (Gonzalez, Moll & Amanti, 2005; Rogoff, 2003).

From the cultural historical perspective, the various aspects of individuals' lives are conceptualised as interacting dialectically, shaping and reshaping each other continuously (Vygotsky, 1998; Wong, 2015). Learning and development are seen to be occurring through a process of changing participation in dynamic cultural communities, with active contributions from the individuals themselves, those with whom they have social relationships, cultural tools/artefacts (both in material and conceptual form) and traditions and establishments (both in the present and historical sense) (Rogoff, 1995). In this way, individuals are seen to be active participants in the routines of cultural activities and each generation makes use of and transforms intellectual traditions and tools passed down from the previous generation (Hedegaard, 2009; Robbins, 2005; Rogoff & Chavajay, 1995; Rogoff *et al.*, 2005). This is an important factor to my study of the wellbeing of pre-school service children in light of an argument presented in section 2.2, that the cultural context and identities of Army families is significantly influenced by historical tradition and cultural norms within that community and research into the deployment-related wellbeing of service children should acknowledge and explore this factor. Certain cultural practices and routines may be associated more with some groups than others as a result

of the histories of previous generations (Rogoff *et al.*, 2005). Gonzalez, Moll and Amanti (2005, p.10) emphasise, however, how culture should not be seen to be a static concept, arguing that 'the term 'culture' is loaded with expectations of group norms and often static ideas of how people view the world and behave in it'. They note that instead, individuals draw upon 'multiple cultural systems' which they use as a strategic resource (Gonzalez, Moll and Amanti, 2005, p.10). Rogoff *et al.* (2005) use the term *repertoires of practice* to refer to this notion of individuals having some form of history in the practices and routines of multiple cultural communities and institutions. Culture may then be conceived in terms of groups of people with shared meanings instead of simply being defined by national boundaries (Goncu, 1999). Goodnow (1997) provides examples of cultures defining themselves by ethnicity, sexual orientation and professional affiliation, amongst others. Drawing on these perspectives, Army families can then be seen to be part of a culture centred around the military yet simultaneously drawing upon their own multiple cultural and historical contexts. An example of this within the context of the British Army is the socio-economic and educational background of the serving member, which is frequently linked to that member having entered the Army either as an officer or as a private soldier and can have an influence on the Regiment that they then serve within. The rank of the serving member in turn impacts upon pay, the type of service family accommodation on offer and their roles and responsibilities. Army families should not, therefore, simply be seen as a homogenous group who will experience Army life in the same way.

Expanding on this notion of collective identity, Holland *et al.* (1998) draw upon the work of Vygotsky to propose their concept of *figured worlds*, referring to socially constructed contexts in which people *figure* how they relate to one another. Holland *et al.* (1998, p.60) argue that figured worlds are not abstract and imaginary but instead become 'a social reality that lives within dispositions mediated by relations of power'. Within these figured worlds, social relationships and social positions are conducted and named and identities are developed. Identities are seen to form from the day to day occupations an individual engages in, meaning that they can be part of multiple figured worlds and have varying degrees of participation. Drawing on this perspective, Cogan (2015) notes that the serving member's rank and job title in the Armed Forces can make their positional

identity very clear, something that may also extend into their wider family units (Clifton, 2007; Strong & Lee, 2017). The notion of figured worlds holds similarity to *communities of practice* (Lave & Wenger, 1991), which describes members of a community as being informally bound by what they do together and what they learn through these activities. Individuals initially participate at the peripheries of the community before potentially moving into full participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Communities of practice, Wenger (1998) argues, develop around the things that matter to people and therefore reflect members' perspectives of what is important. Outside constraints can influence these perspectives yet members practices can be seen to represent their responses to such constraints. As a community, it has an identity and this acts to shape the identity of its members. These cultural historical approaches to identity offered interesting perspectives for exploring the culture within the British Army community that formed the context of my case study research.

Utilising the cultural historical approach further afforded an exploration of both the positive and negative influences and outcomes on the wellbeing of pre-school children during a parental deployment. Vygotsky (1998) saw child development as a qualitative transition, moving from one form to another rather than simply being a qualitative increase in knowledge. Such development is spurred on by the conflicts or crises that arise when social and environmental demands are greater than the child's existing competences or resources (Bidell, 1988, Fler, 2010; Sameroff, 1980; Vygotsky, 1998; Wong, 2015). Hedegaard (2018) emphasises the importance of understanding the nature of such cultural demands from society and specific institutions (such as schools) that lead to such crises. In foregrounding contradictions and conflicts as a salient feature for driving change and development, the cultural historical approach provides a framework to explore the specific individual, social and cultural demands that are placed on pre-school Army children during a time of parental deployment. It affords the exploration of how these children might not just respond to but also develop within these situations, allowing the potential to move away from the crisis narrative of problematised deployment-related behaviours towards a recognition of the developmental changes that may support a child's wellbeing. For example, as noted in section 2.3.1, mild to moderate, developmentally acceptable stress can enable a child to develop and practise strategies

to tolerate such displeasure, anger, pain or fear in order to recover from emotional dysregulation, and to repair interpersonal conflict and manage frustration in the course of exploration and learning (Lieberman & Horn, 2013; Vygotsky, 1998). However, if a child remains in a conflict that cannot be transformed into a positive development, detrimental developmental effects can then emerge (Fleer, 2010; Hedegaard, 2009).

Cultural historical theory offered several further principles that facilitated my research with pre-school service children. Importantly, it allowed the individual, social and cultural dimensions of pre-school service children's lives to become focal points whilst not losing the interweaved sense of relationships between them. Vygotsky (1987) argued that an atomistic approach – one that is designed to examine the whole by a reduction into its simplest elements – loses the properties of the whole. He cited the example of the breaking down of water in which neither the elements of hydrogen or oxygen now represent the whole. Rogoff (2003) asserts how the cultural historical approach affords the foregrounding of one of the mutually constituting elements (the individual, their social relationships cultural contexts) to become the focal unit of analysis. This foregrounding approach is reflected in the data analysis and discussion chapters within this thesis (Chapters 6, 7 and 8) which focus on the individual children within their cultural contexts and social relationships. This is important to the study of pre-school service children, particularly in light of the evidence reviewed in Chapter 2 which notes the importance of acknowledging the dyadic nature of attachment relationships during a parental deployment in the cultural context of the British Armed Forces. It is also important to the study of pre-school service children in light of the literature reviewed in Chapter 3, which considered the importance of dyadic processes in attachment relationships and cultural environments in the study of wellbeing. Importantly, the child is seen as an active agent in this process, with variations in their personality and temperament influencing both their own wellbeing and that of the at-home parent during a time of deployment (Lieberman & Horn, 2013; Paley, Lester & Mogil, 2013). According to Chen and Schmidt (2015, p.2), temperament and personality refer to 'individual behavioural, emotional, and attentional characteristics that are relatively stable across situations and over time and have a pervasive impact on wide ranges of social and cognitive functions'. Children are seen to be born with biologically related temperamental

biases which are then shaped and adjusted through social interactions within their cultural world (Chen & Schmidt, 2015; Rose, Gilbert & Richards, 2016). Personal identities and social understandings are then developed as people interact together over time (Pollard, 1996). Bennet and Palaologou (2010) note how children simultaneously become integrated into their larger communities and develop as distinctive individuals. That is, they acquire the social knowledge and values of their community whilst developing their own unique patterns of thinking, feeling and behaving. The recognition that even very young children are individuals with their own personalities further helps to avoid the potential for a crisis narrative surrounding the at-home parent during a parental deployment.

4.4 Summary

This chapter has considered the two theoretical frameworks that influenced my approach to my case study of pre-school service children. Both of these theories highlight the significance of individual, social and environmental factors on the development of children. This is a gap which has been highlighted within both service children's research and approaches to the study of wellbeing. As a result of this, my research approach considered the influence of the individual child, their social relationships and the cultural environments that they inhabit on their different domains of wellbeing during a parental deployment.

Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model of development (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994) was particularly influential to my research via four of his ten propositions of development. These note the importance of the attachment relationship between the child and a parent and the factors that bolster the adult in their role as a parent. Chapter 2 considered evidence suggesting that the wellbeing of children is influenced by the wellbeing of the at-home parent during a deployment. My approach therefore considered the role of this attachment relationship and the factors influencing the parent's wellbeing during this time. Importantly, in order to avoid the potential of a crisis narrative surrounding the non-deployed parent, this thesis considered factors that bolster their

resilience alongside those that may lead to poorer wellbeing during this time. Where Bronfenbrenner's model is considered to be more limited, however, is that it places less emphasis on the dynamic interaction between individual factors of the child with their social relationships and their cultural environments. Utilising cultural historical theory in addition to Bronfenbrenner's model provides a conceptual tool that affords an exploration of the dynamic interaction between individual factors of the child with their social relationships and their cultural environments. In this sense, the child can be seen to be an active agent in the creation of the circumstances that promote their health and wellbeing and contextual factors are seen to not only be having an effect *on* the child. Adopting a holistic understanding of the nature of child development such as this can facilitate the development of tools to support children's optimal levels of development (Wong, 2015). This holds particular significance for my study in light of the current lack of education, social and Armed Forces policy specifically related to supporting the wellbeing of pre-school service children during a parental deployment.

Chapter 5 will now discuss the methodology of my case study which has been shaped by the arguments presented in Chapters 1 to 4.

Chapter 5 – Methodology

5.1 Introduction

Chapters 1 – 4 have outlined how my study aims to explore the impact of a parental deployment on the wellbeing of British Army children in the pre-school year. Framed within a cultural historical and bioecological approach, it will explore this by asking the following two research questions:

- How do environmental and contextual factors impact upon different domains of pre-school children's wellbeing during a parental deployment?
- How do social relationships impact upon different domains of pre-school children's wellbeing during a parental deployment?

This chapter outlines decisions relating to the methodology and design of my research in seven sections. Following an introduction to the chapter in section one, section two considers the research design and approach. Section three describes sampling techniques and provides more information on the early years settings that were accessed. Section four critically discusses the methods for data generation and section five describes how this data was analysed. Section six discusses ethical considerations of the research. Finally, a reflexive account of my own position within the research is given in section seven.

5.2 Research Design and Approach

5.2.1 Rationale for an interpretivist research paradigm

The selection of a research approach is based on the nature of the issue being addressed, the researchers' personal experiences and the audiences for the study (Creswell, 2014). Rooted in the natural sciences, positivism holds that all genuine knowledge can only be advanced by means of experiment or observation. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018, p.65) note that where positivism is less successful is in its application to the study of human behaviour, 'where the immense complexity of human nature and the elusive and intangible quality of social phenomena contrast strikingly with the order and regularity of the natural world'. Rejecting the notion of a detached, objective observer, interpretivists argue that the behaviour of individuals can only be understood by the researcher striving to understand their frame of reference. To understand the subjective world of human experience, efforts are made to get inside the person and understand from within. It is this approach that was selected in my study in order to understand the impact of parental deployment through the perspectives of the at-home parent, pre-school practitioners and, importantly, of the pre-school children themselves.

Often, research begins from more vaguely formulated issues (Hammersley, 2014). In the case of my research, this was motivated by my desire to explore the experiences of pre-school Army children experiencing a parental deployment, particularly in light of this age group being under researched and currently not being represented within English educational or social policy (see Chapter 2). In developing my study, I therefore looked to education policy relating to school-aged service children to inform my approach. As discussed in section 3.2, the British Government currently allocates schools in England £300 per pupil per year to 'offer mainly *pastoral support* during challenging times and to help mitigate the negative impact on service children of family mobility or parental deployment' (MOD, 2018, p.1, emphasis added). This notion of pastoral support raised the question of what the pastoral needs might be in children experiencing a parental deployment in the pre-school year. Upon further exploration, however, I concluded that the pastoral needs that the Government's Service Pupil Premium looks to address are

conceptually vague and lacking in robust academic foundations. Whilst some examples of best practice are provided (MOD, 2019d), no accompanying definitions of the concept of pastoral needs are provided. As discussed in Chapter 3, wellbeing, whilst also conceptually vague, has been drawn upon as it offers firmer academic foundations for enquiry.

A further issue that became apparent within the early stages of my research was the tendency to consider service children in isolation of the variety of social relationships and environments that they inhabit. My research approach has been influenced both by Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model of development (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994) and cultural historical theory (Hedegaard, 2008; Vygotsky, 1998), both of which emphasise how a child's development does not occur in a social vacuum but rather is the result of individual and social processes. My approach therefore looks to explore the individual, social and environmental factors that influence pre-school children's domains of wellbeing during a parental deployment.

5.2.2 Rationale for a case study design

My research is a case study of ten three to four-year-old Army children in the preschool year who were experiencing an Army-related parental deployment. The Ministry of Defence highlights how 'deployments can be anything from a month to up to 12 months and can place a strain on family life and have an impact on the education and wellbeing of children' (MOD, 2018, p.3). My study therefore looks to explore the wellbeing of children experiencing a parental deployment of one month or more in length.

A conclusion following the review of service children's literature in Chapters 2 was that service children need to be considered within and as part of the unique culture and communities that they inhabit. This stance is supported by Creswell (2014) who notes that researchers should focus on the specific contexts in which people live and work in order to understand those historical and cultural settings of the participants. Similarly noting the significance of context, Yin (2009) argues that the boundary line between the

phenomenon and its context is blurred as a case study is the study of a case in a context and it is important to set that case within its context. From a cultural historical perspective, Hedegaard & Flear (2008) further note that in order to understand children we must be cognisant of the social, cultural and historical practices in which they live and learn. A case study design was therefore selected to allow an in-depth exploration of the wellbeing of Army children in the pre-school year from a variety of perspectives within the relationships, contexts, environments and culture that they and their families inhabit. The decision was made to focus specifically and in-depth on Army children as the differences between the branches of the services (Army, Royal Air Force, Royal Navy) mean that the experiences of children from military families can and do differ and they should not be referred to as a homogenous group (McCullouch & Hall, 2016).

Case studies provide the flexibility to incorporate multiple perspectives, data generation tools and interpretive strategies (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Whilst it may be argued that case studies present limited generalisation outside of that case (Nisbet & Watt, 1984), I draw on the work of Vasconcelos (2010) in pointing out that generalisation is not the aim, rather the emphasis is on uniqueness and understanding. Yin (2009) notes that case studies opt for analytic rather than statistical generalisation, whereby the concern is not so much for a representative sample so much as its ability to contribute to the expansion and generalisation of theory which can help researchers to understand similar cases. One may be interested in a particular case in and of itself (an intrinsic case) or, as is the case in my research, one may wish to explore a case as an illustration of a larger phenomenon (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

5.2.3 The case study

The context of my case study is a large British Army Garrison in England. Within this study, it will be referred to by the pseudonym *Middlesford* to reflect the fact that participants often referred to the Garrison town by its name. By definition, Garrisons have two or more major units/regiments in geographical proximity with a one-star headquarters (a headquarters unit under the control of a one-star General/Brigadier)

(MOD, 2018). Garrison towns are not exclusively military and may also have a civilian population. Service Family Accommodation (SFA) is provided for married personnel and their families and, in the case of the Army, such housing is not normally within an Army compound, frequently referred to within the Armed Forces community as *behind the wire*. This means that, although often on military-only estates and streets, Army housing frequently sits beside rather than on the military base. It is also not uncommon for service personnel and their families to live amongst the civilian population either in their own or rented homes.

Middlesford Garrison is home to multiple units representing a range of roles, capabilities and ranks ranging from Private to General. This Garrison was selected so that a representative cross-section sample of pre-school children and their families could be accessed. It was also selected as many personnel from the Garrison were regularly experiencing deployments at the time of data collection. Furthermore, the Garrison was chosen due to the relatively large numbers of early years settings and the high numbers of Army families in the area increasing the likelihood of these settings having pre-school Army children currently experiencing parental deployment.

5.3 Sample Profile and Sampling Techniques

This study draws upon the bioecological model of development (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994) and cultural historical theory (Hedegaard, 2008; Vygotsky, 1998) which both emphasise the importance of the individual characteristics of the child and the social relationships that they inhabit. The arguments presented in Chapters 1 – 3 also highlight that existing British and international literature is too often reliant on non-deployed parents' perspectives on their child/children (Park, 2011; Trautmann *et al.*, 2015). It also often fails to represent the voices of the service children themselves (Clifton, 2007) or the early years practitioners who work with these children (Stites, 2016). Literature focusing on wellbeing in the early years often favours objective measures of wellbeing over subjective measures based on a view that young children are incapable of representing themselves (Eide & Winger, 2005; Lewis, 2016; Manning-Morton, 2014; Mashford-Scott

et al., 2012). A greater understanding of the impact of deployment on the wellbeing of children may therefore be gained where research considers the perspectives of adults within the children's lives alongside the perspectives of the children themselves. This approach is supported by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018) who argue that the many variables operating in a single case usually require more than one tool for data generation and many sources of evidence. Yin (2014) agrees that the use of multiple sources of evidence is a key principle of higher quality case study research, leading to greater validity and reliability. My study therefore employed purposive sampling to ensure that multiple voices and perspectives of children, parents and early years practitioners are represented.

Purposive sampling describes where a sample is chosen based on specific characteristics, i.e. those who by virtue of their professional role, expertise or experiences, have in-depth knowledge about specific issues (Ball, 1990). My study explores the wellbeing of pre-school Army children experiencing a parental deployment, therefore random or probability sampling would have been inappropriate due to the high probability that the wider population would be unaware of the particular issues that I aim to research. Ridder (2017) notes that non-random sampling is typical for case study research such as this as there is no sample that represents the wider population. Contrary to quantitative methodologies, the specific case is chosen because that case is of interest (Stake, 1995). Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018) further assert that wider representation and generalisability is not the concern in such sampling, rather it is to acquire in-depth knowledge from those who are in a position to give it. Yin (2009) highlights that case studies aim for analytic over statistical generalisation; whilst the case only represents itself, it can yet contribute to broader theory in similar cases. I acknowledge, therefore, that whilst the sampling of participants in this study limits generalisability outside of this particular Garrison Town, it may still offer a wider contribution to knowledge in similar samples of British Army families.

Purposive sampling ensured the participants would be in possession of the particular characteristics being sought. I aimed to recruit Army children aged three to four in the pre-school year who were currently experiencing an Army-related parental deployment.

Sampling also extended to the at-home parent (spouse/partner of the deployed parent) and the pre-school practitioners currently working with these children (keyworkers and managers). The characteristics being sought in this study varied between the different types of participants and, consequently, the sampling technique varied between the different groups. In all cases, participant numbers were determined by the point at which the data was considered saturated; sampling continued until it became clear that no new themes were emerging within the data analysis. Table 1 below represents the full list of anonymised participants that took part in my research. Each row represents a participant group, whereby the mother, keyworker and manager/deputy manager for that child is grouped together. A gap denotes that this individual did not take part in my study (see below for further discussion). The ten children from these families are from this point on referred to as the *focus children* to reflect the fact that the pre-school practitioners often referred to other Army families outside of this sample to illustrate their wider experiences of working with Army children. The managers and deputy managers are being referred to as Managers/Deputy Managers A – F to avoid confusion where they referred to Army families outside of the ten focus children within the data.

Child (These names have been changed to preserve anonymity)	Mother	Keyworker	Pre-School Manager
Joshua	Joshua's Mother	Joshua's Keyworker	Manager A
Tom	Tom's Mother	Tom's Keyworker	Manager B Deputy Manager B
Alfie	Alfie's Mother	Alfie's Keyworker	Manager C
Jessica	Jessica's Mother	Jessica's Keyworker	Manager C
Isla	Isla's Mother	Isla's Keyworker	Manager D
Lucy	Lucy's Mother	Lucy's Keyworker	Manager E
Toby	Toby's Mother	Toby's Keyworker	Manager F
Charlotte	Charlotte's Mother	-	-
Daisy	Daisy's Mother	-	-
Owen	Owen's Mother	-	-

Table 1. Full anonymised list of participants

Access to pre-school Army children and their families was mediated via the pre-school settings, therefore sampling pre-school practitioners will be discussed first:

1) Pre-school settings and practitioners

In total eight pre-school settings (operating under the banner of nurseries, pre-schools and playgroups) in and around Middlesford Garrison were approached, of which six agreed to take part. The two who were not involved were approached in early July 2018 but declined due to other commitments and the proximity of the research to the end of the school year. Whilst it was recognised that this would be a limitation of the data for this particular participant group, it was decided that the voices of the parents and the children would still add to the richness of the data. Five of the eight pre-school settings attended by the ten focus children were located within Middlesford Garrison. Two pre-school settings were located outside of the Garrison. A final setting that took part in the research was located next to a large Army base in Eastford (Eastford is a pseudonym) ten miles away from Middlesford Garrison. The settings were approached in one of two ways, 1) through direct contact from myself via telephone/email, and 2) through my attendance at a local pre-school manager's meeting which was arranged via my email contact with their Area Manager.

Managers and staff in the pre-school settings were approached to ask if they would consent to a) being participants and b) enabling the wider research with their pre-school children and parents to be undertaken within their settings (see Appendix A for information and consent forms). Child minders were not included in the sample due to the large uptake of participants from the early years settings. In total, 14 early years practitioners took part in the research. All had extensive experience of working with early years service children (see tables 2 and 3 below). All were female, which is likely reflective of the female dominance in the early years workforce as a whole (Education Policy Institute, 2019). Table 2 below gives details of the pre-school managers and deputy managers who took part in my research.

Manager/Deputy Manager	Length of experience working with early years children	Length of experience working with early years service children
Manager A	15 years	14 years
Manager B	15 years	15 years
Deputy Manager B	20 years	20 years
Manager C	20 years	20 years
Manager D	25 years	18 years
Deputy Manager E	25 years	25 years
Manager F	20 years	12 years

Table 2 – Details of the managers/deputy managers who took part in the study

Table 3 below gives details of the focus children’s keyworkers who took part in my research.

Keyworker	Length of experience working with early years children	Length of experience working with early years service children
Joshua's Keyworker	14 years	14 years
Tom's Keyworker	6 years	6 years
Alfie's Keyworker	10 years	4.5 years
Jessica's Keyworker	8 years	8 years
Isla's Keyworker	5 years	5 years
Lucy's Keyworker	11 years	11 years
Toby's Keyworker	10 years	3.5 years

Table 3 - Details of the keyworkers who took part in the study

2) Pre-school children aged three to four years currently experiencing parental deployment and their at-home parent

Once permission had been granted via the managers at the pre-school settings, individual managers were asked to approach parents (either verbally or via newsletters) with information about my research. This was informed by the information sheet (Appendix A) which gave details of the nature and purpose of my research project. Volunteers were sought from families who were currently experiencing an Army-related deployment. Thus, a convenience or opportunity sample was obtained of those who were willing to take part in the study. In total, six families from five pre-school settings agreed to take

part via this sampling method. A family identified as experiencing difficulties during a deployment was approached by one of the managers but chose not to take part in my research. Such self-selection possibly led to a larger sample of families with a more positive view of Army life within my research. Later in my research, snowball sampling was employed whereby those mothers who had consented to take part in the study were asked if they were aware of any similar Army families who might be willing to be involved in the research. A further four families from three different pre-school settings were sampled in this way.

In all, ten families with pre-school children agreed to take part in the study. Table 4 below gives details of the ten focus children.

Child's Name	Age	Location and length of father's deployment	Child took part in study? (Yes/No)
Alfie	4 years 5 months	Estonia 9 months	Yes
Charlotte	4 years 10 months	Estonia 9.5 months	Yes
Daisy	3 years 11 months	Estonia 6 months	Yes
Isla	3 years 9 months	Canada 3 months	No
Jessica	3 years 10 months	Canada 3 months	No
Joshua	4 years 3 months	Estonia 9 months	Yes
Lucy	4 years 2 months	Afghanistan 6 months	No
Owen	3 years 11 months	Estonia 5.5 months	No
Toby	4 years 6 months	Estonia 5.5 months	Yes
Tom	4 years 4 months	Canada 3 months	Yes

Table 4 – Details of the ten focus children

Of the ten focus children, six took part in the research. Four children did not take part in the research due to either the mothers or the early years settings not giving consent, believing that it was not appropriate to the wellbeing of the child at that time.

Whilst my research did not aim to be gender-specific in terms of the non-serving parents, in the final sample all of the non-serving at-home parents were the mothers. This is likely reflective of the wider gender breakdown of the British Army, with recent statistics showing that only 9.5% of the UK Regular Army is female (MOD, 2019e). From this point on I am using the term *at-home mothers* over the term *non-deployed mothers* to avoid the potential confusion that could arise if the mothers were currently serving members of the Armed Forces in single or dual serving families. In this sense, they could be currently serving but not currently deployed. In the case of my sample, none of the mothers were serving members of the Armed Forces. The term *at-home* is intended to reflect the fact that the mothers were the main caregivers in the absence of their deployed spouses. It is not intended to reflect the fact that they were all stay-at-home mothers, with many being engaged in part-time or full-time employment. Furthermore, all families taking part in my research were white British. This again was not purposive sampling, but the result of no minority ethnic or foreign commonwealth families coming forward to take part in the research despite it being open to all members of the Army community currently experiencing a deployment. This could be seen as a limitation of the study and an area to be considered in future research. Due to the small sample size it was decided that the rank of the service member would not be explicitly stated in my study as this may compromise participant anonymity. I recognise, however, that this is an important aspect of the military community and identity and future research (particularly that with a larger sample size) would benefit from a detailed consideration of this factor.

5.4 Methods for Data Generation

According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018) methods concern instrumentation: how data are generated and analysed. They note how the decision of which instrument (or method) to use frequently follows on from an earlier decision on which kind of research to undertake (the methodology), such as an experiment, a survey, in depth ethnography or case study research. In short, the methods of data generation must be compatible with that of the chosen methodology and must be capable of generating data that answers the research question/s. This follows on from the methodological

justifications that were given in section 5.2 to consider the methods of data generation that were employed in this study. Importantly, they were chosen to align with cultural historical theory (Hedegaard, 2008; Vygotsky, 1998) which has influenced my approach to this study. As a result of this, methods that allowed a consideration of the individual, social and environmental factors that influence a pre-school child's wellbeing were selected. The methods employed differed between adult and child participants and thus will be considered separately. A pilot study conducted in one of the six participating pre-school settings explored the suitability of these methods for the main phase of data generation. The discussion below will include an analysis of the benefits and limitations of the methods used, particularly for the pre-school children where the chosen method had not previously been employed in the context of UK service children's literature. Table 5 details the methods of data generation employed for each group of participants.

Participant/s	Method/s of Data Generation
Pre-school Army children aged 3 – 4 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Photography • Drawing • Storytelling • Talking alongside a trusted adult
Parent/s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual semi-structured interviews
Pre-school practitioners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual semi-structured interviews

Table 5 – Methods of data generation

5.4.1 Methods of data generation with pre-school child participants

Recognising the lack of child voice within early years literature on both service children and wellbeing considered in Chapters 2 and 3, my study represented the subjective voices of pre-school Army children. Researching young children's perspectives ethically and authentically can be difficult (Colliver, 2017), particularly when young children may not yet have the linguistic or metacognitive resources for communicating their perspectives on a topic as abstract as wellbeing (Mashford-Scott *et al.*, 2012). Children of all ages have a right to be heard on matters that concern them (United Nations, 1989) and researchers must rise to the challenge of creatively and authentically capturing the experiences of young children in order to build a more comprehensive and meaningful understanding of children's wellbeing and how it can be best supported (Mashford-Scott *et al.*, 2012). It must, however, equally be recognised that children have a right to choose to not participate in research, even where consent has been given by the parent/s. Researchers working alongside young children must be mindful of how the children could indicate that they do or do not give their assent to take part (see section 5.6 for further discussion). A challenge in this study was to employ methods that would attempt to represent pre-school children's voices whilst simultaneously respecting the ethical implications that may go alongside the sensitive subject of parental deployment.

One approach that offers opportunity to represent children's voices is Clark and Moss' (2011) mosaic approach of research with young children. The mosaic approach uses age-appropriate participatory research methods to allow young children and adults to be involved in meaning making together. As Clark notes:

The aim is to identify methods that position children as holders of unique insights into the lived experiences of their lives and that open up as many different ways for children to communicate this competency as possible.
(Clark, 2017 p.27)

Clark (2017) reflects on the differences of pedagogical frameworks that open up or limit the opportunities to listen to children's perspectives. She draws comparison between

those that view children as empty vessels waiting to be filled up and those that see children as active participants in their own learning. In contrast, the mosaic approach refers to the importance of the methods employed replicating the day to day activities of the child so that their views may be authentically replicated and valued.

In my study, visual and verbal methods were combined in order to build up a mosaic of evidence by which to represent the views of the pre-school Army children on the subject of parental deployment. During the ethical approval phase of the research, three methods in particular were identified as being age-appropriate and accessible for use with the pre-school children: photography, drawing and stories with discussion. These methods were chosen as they do not assume that all children are literate and allow children with fewer verbal skills to participate. During the pilot study, discussions with early years practitioners and the manager indicated that observation of play between child and keyworker using toys such as *Small World People* could also provide an appropriate starting point for data collection with young children. The practitioners felt that this would give the child an opportunity to explore their thoughts and feelings in a situation with an adult with whom they are familiar.

Following the pilot study, four methods of data generation with the pre-school children were proposed for the main phase of data generation; photography, drawing, storytelling with discussion and observed play between the child and a known/trusted adult. In the final study, two of these methods were used, 1) photography and 2) drawing, whilst an additional research method emerged that successfully involved the pre-school children: 3) interviews alongside a trusted adult. Two additional methods - storytelling with discussion and observed play - were not used as it was not felt necessary to draw on additional methods when the young children had already participated using one or more of the other activities. In practice, the pre-school children only gave their assent to participate for short periods of time, sometimes coming in and out of the research process whilst participating in other concurrent play activities. It was also felt that storytelling, particularly in the context of a parent going away, could unwittingly elicit emotions of distress. The three methods used for data collection with the pre-school children will now be discussed in more detail.

5.4.1.1 Photography

Photographs offer an alternative to the dominance of the spoken and written word in conventional research methods. Taking photographs can be a fun activity for young children and provides a finished product which can be used to facilitate further discussion (Clark & Moss, 2011). Permission for children to participate in photography was first sought from parents and early years settings. It was outlined at the consent phase that parents would have the right to veto the final use of any photographs taken in the home and early years settings would have the same rights for photographs taken within the early years settings, due to the possibility of background imagery or information that may be captured within these photos.

As the data generation continued, a theme quickly emerged of the early years setting being a stable environment during the deployment with the changes that the children were experiencing occurring predominantly at home. It was therefore decided that photography would only be conducted in the home and not the early years setting in order to gain a richness of understanding regarding the deployment-related changes within the children's lives. Eight out of the ten mothers were interviewed outside of their home environment, therefore at this stage a camera was offered to them to give to their child in which they could explore *things that are different at home whilst Daddy is away*. Recognising the availability of cameras on smart phones, an option was also given for the parent to choose this technology to use with their child and then email the photographs to the researcher. Some mothers noted at the consent stage that they did not feel that their children would necessarily take pictures of anything of significance, with one mother remarking that we might see nothing more than 'nostrils and feet' (Alfie's mother, individual interview). In total, two out of seven children participated in photography. This relatively low number reflected the low return rates from the mothers, the given reasons for this were due to the child not wanting to take part or the mothers not wanting the child to take part in case it caused distress surrounding the absence of the father. It may also be reflective of a certain level of scepticism outside of academia of this as a research method with young children, as was sometimes apparent at the consent phase.

In this study, data collection was predominantly conducted in either the early years setting or in a third-party space (such as at an Army welfare coffee morning). Future research employing photography may benefit from being more embedded in the home environment.

5.4.1.2 Drawing

Drawing is a further participatory method that offers an alternative to the dominance of the written word. It was recognised that not all children would want to engage in drawing and, for those that did, it would be important to be alongside the child during this process to engage in a process of talking and listening about their drawings. All of these sessions were conducted alongside a known or trusted adult which was felt to be important so that the child felt at ease. These sessions were audio-recorded and notes were taken afterwards. Children were asked to draw a picture of their family and discussions were then centred around the drawing. I asked questions such as *who is part of your family?*, *where is Daddy at the moment?* and *how do you feel about Daddy being away?* during the drawing activities.

5.4.1.3 Interviews alongside a trusted adult

As Clark (2017 p.28) notes, 'listening to young children is a key element in approaches to learning which view children as active participants'. To hear young children's perspectives, we have to choose methods that are both suitable and ethical (Eide & Winger, 2005). At the beginning of my research I had assumed that the children would not necessarily be able or willing to represent their experiences verbally and that the data generation with the children would be more reliant on non-verbal methods. In reality, all six of the children who took part in the research were both able and willing to do so. This supports the view of Eide and Winger (2005) who note that children from the age of approximately three years can be interviewed. This was different to the semi-structured

interviews employed with the adult participants. Eide and Winger (2005, p.80) provide a useful definition of interviews with young children:

A semi-structured interview, or a conversation with a special purpose: where the questions are planned according to children's way of thinking. The questions are open and guiding. The interview guide and interpreting the answers are based on a certain theoretical frame of reference and understanding that the interviewer has to be conscious of.

The interview questions (see Appendix B) were purposefully specific yet designed to avoid distress. Children were asked to firstly think back to our discussion during the assent phase (see section 5.6.1) and asked to remember what we were going to talk about together. Examples of other opening questions were 'who is at home at the moment?' and 'has somebody from your house gone away somewhere?' Subsequent questions were then tailored to the responses of the children, often first reflecting back what they had said. For example, in response to Toby remarking 'I was scared', I responded 'You were scared, what made you scared?' Talking alongside a trusted adult (in each case either the mother or their pre-school keyworker) was found to lead to a greater depth of discussion as the child and their trusted adult engaged in often detailed conversations surrounding their shared experiences of that deployment.

Research activities with the children were not conducted in a linear fashion and the two other activities of photography and drawing often took place at the same time as talking alongside their trusted adult. This was determined by the children, who often chose to come in and out of the research activities. This is described in more detail in section 5.4.1.4 below.

5.4.1.4 Challenges encountered in the data generation with children

Methodological challenges arose when conducting the research activities with the young children in my study. In some of the research situations, environmental factors appeared

to influence the engagement and responses of the children. For two of the children at separate pre-schools (Joshua and Alfie), data generation occurred alongside the child and keyworker within the garden area of the pre-school as part of the normal daily timetable. Both of these children came in and out the research activities of their own accord and other children within the pre-school were able to come over to engage in conversation with me. Both Joshua and Alfie were very energetic and chose to only stay alongside me for a few minutes at a time, often preferring to play alongside their peers on a warm sunny summer's day. As a result of this, interactions with these children were more fleeting.

In contrast to the research activities with Joshua and Alfie, for Toby the research activities of photography, drawing and talking were combined with discussions with his mother and took place over a two-hour period in his home garden. Toby appeared to be comfortable and settled in his surroundings and was able to come in and out of discussions of his own accord. The reciprocal nature of discussions between Toby and his mother, based on their shared experience of his father's deployment, also led to a greater depth of responses. This was similarly the case for Charlotte and Daisy, who were involved in data collection alongside their mothers and were able to come and go and engage in the research conversations and drawing activities at their leisure when we met at a coffee morning in a local Army Welfare centre. In all three of these examples, the shared experience of the fathers' deployments appeared to facilitate a depth of conversation that would have been less likely in the absence of the mothers or in the presence of their pre-school peers. In the case of Tom, the relationship between him and his keyworker similarly appeared to facilitate a greater depth of research conversation, particularly where his keyworker felt comfortable in prompting Tom in discussing a specific time or element of his father's deployment. It was, however, apparent at several points in the conversation with Tom that he was potentially unwilling to talk about his emotions at his father's absence and that this was something that ethically I should not pursue further. At the same time as being aware to afford children the right to represent their own subjective experiences, children must also be allowed not to speak, not to inform and not to express themselves (Eide & Winger, 2005).

My reflections on the research activities with the children led to some important conclusions. Whilst I believe it is essential to give pre-school children an opportunity to represent their perspectives on their fathers absences, a deeper sense of understanding emerged when this was combined with the perspectives of the adults around the child, particularly the at-home parent (or potentially another close family member) or the educational professionals who work with these children. Furthermore, I found that the authentic voice of the child surrounding their emotions at being separated from their fathers were perhaps most reliably represented when I was in more of an observer role, such as on the peripheries of a conversation between the child and a keyworker or parent. This was particularly highlighted by the case of Toby and his mother and will be considered in more detail in Chapter 7. In these situations, it appeared less likely that the child was simply giving me an answer that they may feel I expected. Researchers frequently meet children from an outside position; we do not know them and they do not know us (Eide & Winger, 2005). In my research, the more established social relationships between the child and their parent or other trusted adult appeared to facilitate the child's authentic voice within a conversation relating to a shared experience. I therefore agree with the principle that the pre-school children are capable human beings and have the right to be heard freely in matters that affect them (United Nations, 1989) but also that capturing young children's perspectives ethically and authentically is difficult (Colliver, 2017). They also have the right to not represent their voices if they choose to. Capturing the authentic voice of such young children relating to parental deployment is also found to be ethically challenging and perhaps richer in the situations where the child is actively feeling that way in the here and now and not being asked to reflect back on how they were feeling at a previous time, such as when their fathers were initially deployed. The significance of this finding is that parents and educational practitioners are well placed to hear the authentic and self-initiated voice of the child during these times and therefore their perspectives should be represented alongside those of the children.

5.4.2 Methods of data generation with adult participants

A single method of data generation was used with the adult participants: semi-structured interviews. At the beginning of the research it was intended that focus groups would also be utilised, particularly where adult participants indicated a choice of this particular method. In practice, no participants opted for this method, therefore all were interviewed individually with the exception of two early years settings where the managers and deputy managers shared an office and indicated that they would both like to take part in the interview. The absence of focus groups meant there were limited opportunities for shared meaning-making amongst the participants. The opportunity for shared meaning-making was, however, seen where the managers and deputy managers were interviewed together and where the pre-school children were interviewed alongside their mothers or keyworkers.

Semi-structured interviews were selected as they are beneficial in allowing the participant to develop their ideas on issues raised by the interviewer (Denscombe, 2010). Interviews are considered one of the most important sources of case study design, particularly where they 'resemble guided conversations rather than structured queries' (Yin, 2014, p. 110). Kvale (1996, cited in Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018) points out that, subsequent to the thematising of a study that will employ interviews for data collection, there follows the preparation of the interview schedule itself. This was primarily influenced by the cultural historical approach of my study which emphasises the importance of questions that look to explore individual, social and environmental factors on children's domains of wellbeing. A comprehensive review of the literature was also undertaken so that subsequent interview schedules would ensure both breadth and depth towards answering the overall research questions. In designing the semi-structured interviews, consideration was given to the language used, with neutral words and phrases used so as to not violate the 'law of non-direction' (McCracken, 1988, cited in Creswell, 2014, p.124). Creswell (2014) similarly refers to the importance of non-directional language to avoid the suggestion of an outcome that may or may not occur. For my study in particular, I felt it was important to approach the topic in a balanced manner to explore

the aspects of strengths during a deployment as much as the areas of difficulty (see Appendix C for the interview schedules).

For both the mothers and pre-school practitioners, consideration was given to the objectives of the interview and the kinds of information the participant was expected to have. Prior to the interviews, the language used in the schedules was scrutinised to try and maximise the opportunity for participants to openly explore their views and reduce the possibility of them feeling vulnerable or targeted which may lead to them acting defensively. After each interview I reflected back upon the questions and added or amended questions as appropriate.

Whilst questions were tailored to the different groups of participants, there were also some shared questions (see Appendix B). Interviews with adult participants took approximately one hour or less. The exception was Toby's mother, who took part in a two-hour interview which was largely due to Toby coming in and out of discussions of his own accord and the location for this interview being her own home. The environments that the interviews were conducted in were considered important to the cultural historical framework used within this study. All pre-school managers and keyworkers were interviewed within the pre-school settings. Four of the mothers were also interviewed within the pre-school settings, four were interviewed at coffee mornings held in the local Army Welfare Units and a further two were interviewed at home. All semi-structured interviews were recorded and transcribed for data analysis.

5.5 Data Analysis

Data analysis involves organising, explaining and accounting for the data; noting patterns, categories, themes and regularities in order to make sense of the data in terms of the participants' definitions of the situation (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018).

The analysis of case study evidence is one of the least developed aspects of doing case studies (Yin, 2014) and is, alongside the selection of multiple sources of evidence, a key

issue in case study research. In not having to seek frequency of occurrence, case studies replace quantity with quality and intensity, drawing distinctions between the significant few and insignificant many instances of behaviour (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018).

Qualitative enquiry can quickly produce vast quantities of data, therefore the decision was made to use qualitative data analysis software. Whilst qualitative analysis software tools do not analyse the data, they have features that can aid the research process; such as the facility to store and organise data, the assignment of labels or codes and the ability to search for keywords within the data (Creswell, 2014). NVIVO 11 was used as a tool to assist the organisation of data during the process of analysis. Data from interviews with both adult and child participants were transcribed verbatim and uploaded to NVIVO in files separating out the different participant groups. Data generated through the participatory research methods with children were also uploaded to NVIVO and annotated. Data were analysed as close to the end of each session/interview as possible.

An important element of the data analysis phase I employed was to simultaneously listen to the interviews alongside viewing them on a screen to give a sense of the expression, emphasis and intonation used. For example, in the interview with Isla's mother, the expression and tone she used clearly indicated that she considered the three month training deployment her husband was currently on in Canada to be much less significance in comparison to the longer operational deployment that her husband had served in Estonia the previous year. Listening to recordings whilst analysing the data re-introduced the nuances of humanity that transcribing had somewhat removed.

Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used to identify, analyse and report patterns within the data. The status of thematic analysis within qualitative research is one that has been debated, with some referring to it as a process for encoding qualitative information (Boyatzis, 1998; Ryan & Bernard, 2000) whilst others argue it should be considered as a method in its own right (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Despite this lack of consensus, it is generally agreed that thematic analysis possesses the theoretical freedom to be used as a flexible research tool that can be applied to both realist/essentialist and

constructionist paradigms (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Table 6 below outlines how the six phases of thematic analysis were applied to my research data:

Phase of Thematic Analysis	Process of analysis within my research
1) Familiarisation with the data	During this phase I transcribed the data and re-read the transcripts for accuracy whilst listening back to the audio recordings. These were then uploaded into NVIVO where initial ideas were noted down in the form of annotations within the transcripts.
2) Generating initial codes	Initial codes were generated by highlighting the text of interest within NVIVO and assigning a name to that code. Two examples of this were <i>emotional outbursts</i> and <i>rough and tumble play</i> . Working through the entire data set I created lists of codes referred to as <i>nodes</i> within NVIVO.
3) Searching for themes	At the end of the coding process, I revisited the individual nodes and started to group similar nodes together. Similar nodes were then coded in NVIVO under a <i>parent node</i> . For example, drawing upon the literature reviewed in Chapters 1 – 4, <i>emotional outbursts</i> were grouped with similar measures of behaviour such as <i>clinginess</i> .
4) Reviewing themes	Within this phase I reviewed the data to ensure that the groups of coded data

	<p>related to each other and could not either be merged or separated out further. For example, <i>clinginess, fear of abandonment and separation anxiety</i> became coded under <i>attachment behaviours</i>.</p>
5) Defining and naming themes	<p>In this phase I defined and refined the essence of what each theme was about. Within NVIVO this meant collecting together the nodes that were similar to each other and assigning them under a parent node. In order to do this, I referred back to the literature considered in Chapters 1 – 4. Indicators of emotion and/or mental health were encoded under <i>psychological wellbeing</i>. Indicators related to bodily health were encoded under <i>physical wellbeing</i>. Indicators of a child's relationships with others, particularly those outside of their immediate family, were encoded under <i>social wellbeing</i>. Finally, indicators of intellectual, educational or school-related factors were encoded under <i>cognitive wellbeing</i>. In an example of this process, the nodes of <i>attachment behaviours</i> and <i>emotional outbursts</i> became encoded under the parent node of <i>psychological wellbeing</i>.</p>
6) Producing the report	<p>In this phase I presented the key arguments and findings from my research within this thesis. I selected appropriate</p>

	extracts from my data to support my arguments, interweaving these with findings from existing literature.
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Table 6. Braun and Clarke's (2006, pp.16-23) six phases of thematic analysis applied to my research data

Data analysis is not necessarily a linear process, but instead can move backwards and forwards between data and interpretation and may occur both during and at the end of the process of data collection (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018). Transcribing and initial data analysis began immediately after the first interviews were completed and continued until it was consistently the case that no new themes were seen to be emerging, suggesting that saturation had been reached. In line with the remarks of Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018), data analysis in the current study was not linear, and I revisited transcripts and other data as themes and concepts continued to emerge before moving on to further data collection. Two steps were taken to ensure validity of the findings, 1) respondent validation whereby the transcripts were sent to the adult participants to check for accuracy and 2) researcher reflexivity (see section 5.7 below).

5.6 Ethical Considerations

An in-depth review of ethical considerations was undertaken prior to the research commencing to ensure that it fully complied with the ethical guidelines for educational research outlined by the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2018) and the ethical guidelines set out by the research committee of Bath Spa University (see Appendix C).

5.6.1 Informed consent

Free and informed consent was sought from all participants:

1) Adult participants

Adult participants were asked to read an information sheet outlining the true nature of the study and sign the consent form (see Appendix A). This was also discussed in person during the consent phase of data collection.

2) Child participants

Parent/s were asked to read an information sheet outlining how their child would be involved in the research and sign the consent form. Complying with Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child: allowing children to express their views freely in matters that affect them (United Nations, 1989), children were asked to give their verbal assent to take part. Age appropriate language was used to explain to the children what the purpose of the study was and how they would be involved. Following this they were asked if they wanted to take part. In the case of all six children involved in my research, they gave their assent to take part. Had they indicated that they did not want to take part, the data collection would have proceeded no further regardless of the parent having given consent.

5.6.2 Anonymity and confidentiality

All participants, pre-school settings and the wider research area were anonymised in the final report. Data were coded so as to not allow recognition by anyone other than myself and my two research supervisors.

Confidentiality was ensured to all participants. When working with child participants, it was explained in an age-appropriate manner that confidentiality was ensured unless disclosure was necessary due to a potential safeguarding issue. The rank structure of the Army was considered for the impact that it may have on parents' perceptions of confidentiality. For example, family members may have been unwilling or reluctant to

share information they feel may highlight them as a *welfare case*, particularly where they feel this may impact upon the serving member's prospects of promotion or postings. It was recognised that the sensitive nature of questions exploring family turbulence through frequent separations may leave the participants feeling vulnerable. It was particularly important to stress my independence from military agencies during the informed consent process to reduce the impact that such concerns may have. It was similarly important to ensure all pre-school settings and practitioners understood that the purpose of the study was not to scrutinise their current practices, potentially leaving them feeling vulnerable at the end of the research process.

Data was used and stored in accordance with the Data Protection Act (2018). Electronic data were stored on a password protected computer and hard copies were stored in a locked cabinet. All data were destroyed three months following completion of the research.

5.6.3 The Right to Withdraw Without Penalty

Participants were informed during the consent process that they had the right to withdraw their data at any point until publication without penalty and have any data regarding them destroyed. Where consent had been given by parents, the child retained the right to withdraw from the research at any point and I was mindful of behaviours that may indicate this throughout the data collection. Parents and pre-school settings were also informed that they would have the final veto regarding the choice of photographs taken in the home or early years settings respectively that could be used by the researcher in the final report.

5.6.4 Debriefing Participants

All adult participants will be debriefed in writing following completion of the research. A short report of overall findings will also be devised for the pre-school settings.

5.7 Reflexive Account

The qualitative researcher needs to systematically reflect on the biases, values and interests that they bring to the research process, recognising that the personal-self is inseparable from the researcher-self (Creswell, 2003). As qualitative researchers, the stories we are told, how they are relayed to us and the narratives that we form and share with others is inevitably influenced by our own position as a researcher in relation to our participants (Greene, 2014). Creswell (2014) notes that the interpretive nature of qualitative enquiry means that the researcher filters the data through a personal lens that is situated in a specific socio-political and historical moment. This presents a challenge to interpretive validity of a piece of research where the researcher seeks to comprehend phenomena based not on his/her point of view but from that of participants studied, that is, from an *emic* rather than *etic* perspective (Maxwell, 1992). Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) note how the researcher is integrally involved in the case, and the case study may be linked to the personality of the researcher. In this sense, the questions I approached the research with would have been influenced by my own conceptions situated within my wider experiences of the service community and as an educational professional. It is therefore important that these are acknowledged.

As a researcher, a number of my own insights and experiences may have not only influenced my interpretations of participants' account, but also my reasons for conducting the research. As a qualified teacher with experience of working with Army families, a service spouse to an Army Officer and as a mother to two service children, I am embedded within the type of community that I sought to research. Such insider research, or the study of one's own social group or society, is characterised by the researcher possessing a priori intimate knowledge of the community and its members (Merton, 1972). My own experiences of both the Army community and educational environment may have influenced my communications with the participants, characterised by a shared language. Reflecting on my own position in an Army community was vital to ensuring I was aware that the participants may attach different judgements to myself within that

seemingly shared language. For example, as the spouse of an Army Officer, my own experiences of mobility may have differed to that of the family of an other ranks service member, I may hold differing perceptions and priorities relating to the education of my own service children and my qualifications as an educational practitioner may mean that I hold more information on education than some of the participants. I have myself experienced both frequent mobility and the deployment of my spouse whilst parenting my own two young children. My position as the spouse of a senior officer could also potentially influence the participants' view of me as the researcher, as well as to their perceptions of confidentiality. Whilst I did not explicitly state to the participants that I was an Army spouse at the beginning of the research, many asked me during the interview process if I had experience of this and I felt it important at this point to answer such questions briefly but honestly.

As Creswell (2014) notes, the personal self is inseparable from the researcher self, therefore acknowledging these issues prior to the research and exploring ways to minimise the potential impact was essential. Firstly, the case study area was purposefully chosen as a different area to the one that my family were based in at the time. Whilst the participants may become aware of my status as a service spouse during the interviews, there was reduced potential that they may feel obliged to participate due to the rank of my husband. Having no experiences of living or working in the case study area also reduced my a priori understanding and knowledge of this area. Secondly, the initial sampling of children and their mothers was conducted via the early years settings so that the parents might appreciate the research was more educational-focused rather than military-focused.

The next three chapters will now present the findings and discussion relating to the two research questions:

- How do environmental and contextual factors impact upon different domains of pre-school children's wellbeing during a parental deployment?

- How do social relationships impact upon different domains of pre-school children's wellbeing during a parental deployment?

The three chapters of data analysis (chapters 6, 7 and 8) will present the findings, exploring evidence surrounding the different domains of pre-school children's wellbeing and discussing how these domains are impacted by the father's deployment. Chapter 6 will discuss the influence of environmental and contextual factors on the pre-school children's wellbeing during a father's deployment. Chapter 7 will then discuss the impact of the children's relationships with their at-home mothers on their domains of wellbeing during a father's deployment. Chapter 8 discusses the impact of other key relationships during this time. In line with the theoretical frameworks outlined in Chapter 4, the influence of the individual factors of the child within their social relationships and cultural environments will be considered. Following this, Chapter 9, the conclusion, will draw together the overall findings, contributions and recommendations emerging from my research.

Chapter 6

The influence of environmental and contextual factors

6.1 Introduction

Benbenishty and Astor (2014) argue that there is a lack of detailed discussion of the experiences of service children as defined not only by their service status, but also by the context of the schools and military communities that they inhabit and the data analysis will begin by exploring this factor. The importance of environmental and contextual features have also been highlighted within the wider field of wellbeing. Numerous researchers have criticised approaches that focus on the wellbeing of the individual detached from a focus on their environment (Ben-Arieh & Frones, 2011; Clack, 2012; Ereaut & Whiting, 2008; Fauth & Thompson, 2009; Roberts, 2010). The bioecological model of development (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994) and cultural historical theory (Hedegaard, 2008; Vygotsky, 1998) take a holistic view of human development; individual characteristics remain important, yet examination is also given to the social relations and material conditions that societies and institutions create. These then, in turn, either afford or do not afford opportunities for a person's development (Fleer, 2016). Time (in both the present and historical sense) is also an important component; a child's development is not a singular maturational process and does not exist without a historical basis (Hedegaard, Chaiklin & Jensen, 1999). This is a significant factor in the study of pre-school service children particularly in light of the argument presented in section 2.2, that the unique cultural context of Army families is significantly influenced by historical tradition and resulting cultural norms created within that community. It also provides the opportunity to explore wider environmental and contextual factors that may be influencing the wellbeing of pre-school children during the absence of a deployed parent.

This purpose of this chapter, therefore, is to address the following research question:

- How do environmental and contextual factors impact upon different domains of pre-school children's wellbeing during a parental deployment?

Two subthemes emerged within the data; the impact of the local Army community and the impact of the pre-school settings on the pre-school children's domains of wellbeing. These will now be considered in more detail.

6.2 The impact of the local Army community

Existing research on wellbeing has highlighted features of the community and neighbourhood as being important influences on the wellbeing of young children (Fauth & Thompson, 2009; Masten & Gewirtz, 2006; McNaught, 2011; Pugh, 2005; Roberts, 2010). In the context of service children's research, Benbenishty and Astor (2014) call for more emphasis to be given to the schools and military communities that service children inhabit. I therefore consider it important to begin this section by briefly describing some of the key features of the Army Garrison in which my research was conducted before analysing how these features impacted upon the wellbeing of the pre-school children.

The nature and characteristics of Middlesford Army Garrison (Middlesford is a pseudonym) held significance when exploring the theme of the environment and cultural context of the participants. Middlesford Garrison, at over 100 years old, comprises a collection of Army bases in and around the town and surrounding area of Middlesford. The Garrison is made up of a mixture of an Army and a civilian community. There is a very large presence around the Garrison of both traditional/historical and contemporary Army buildings separated into different regimental units, secured by fences, barbed wire and armed guards. Whilst there is also a civilian population within Middlesford, there is a visible presence of uniformed Army personnel throughout the Garrison, with shops and local amenities often being focused towards its main role as an Army Garrison town. The local leisure centre in Middlesford, for example, provides facilities for both the military and civilian population. Through observation at the time of data collection, I consider the Garrison to be limited in terms of other leisure facilities. For example, there are only a

number of small cafes and restaurants and no larger facilities such as cinemas or shopping centres.

Some participants considered the Garrison to be somewhat isolated, such as Deputy Manager B, '*we've got one bus an hour, maybe two if it turns up*' (Deputy Manager B, combined interview with Manager B). Two of the mothers described themselves as being less confident drivers and considered this to be problematic when lone parenting in a remote area. It is important, however, to avoid a potential crisis narrative surrounding the impact of such environmental and contextual factors during a parental deployment. In a 2016 survey by the Army Families Federation, three-quarters of respondents stated that they liked living close to other service families and being part of the community (Army Families Federation, 2016). The data in my study revealed that environmental and contextual factors of the local Army community were found to be facilitating elements of both risk and resilience to the wellbeing of the pre-school children during the fathers' deployments. This was firstly seen in how the community constructed a sense of shared identity and experience of military life. This was particularly influential to the psychological wellbeing of the mothers which, as will be discussed in Chapter 7, is found to have a direct impact upon the wellbeing of the pre-school children. Secondly, it was seen in how the types of deployments and available support shaped the experiences of the children and their families.

6.2.1 The shared identity of the Army community

A strong sense of being part of and/or belonging to an Army community emerged from discussions with the mothers and pre-school practitioners. This appeared to be influenced by historical and cultural factors that had led to the development of a shared sense of identity, bound by the common thread of service and characterised by certain cultural norms within the Army community. In this sense, this Army community could be seen to be an example of a *figured world* (Holland *et al.*, 1998), a community within which identities are socially constructed and developed, influenced by the social relationships and positions (such as rank) within that community. Service life for children and their

families is generally characterised by two particular circumstances that have been the case for centuries: mobility and deployment (MOD, 2018). Being separated from the service member for lengthy periods of time and/or having to move house regularly were acknowledged by all adult participants and some of the children as expected and anticipated aspects of service life. In similarity to the notion of figured worlds, this expectation and understanding of these two particular aspects can be seen to be arising from a *community of practice* (Lave & Wenger, 1991), whereby members of a community are informally bound by what they do together and what they learn through these activities.

Within my sample, this shared Army identity emerged to varying levels as a source of psychological support to the at-home family members during a period of deployment, particularly the mothers. This finding is important, as Chapter 7 will highlight that the psychological wellbeing of the pre-school children was inextricably linked to the wellbeing of the at-home mothers during the period of deployments. For the mothers of the ten focus children, living within the Army Garrison and sharing the experiences of service life appeared to strongly influence their identities and a sense of cohesion within the community. This, in turn, influenced their experiences of their spouses' deployments. All of the mothers were unique individuals from varied backgrounds, yet often appeared to have a sense of shared culture and identity, brought about by their similar experiences resulting from the role of the serving member of the family. Discussions with Lucy's mother, for example, highlighted a sense of *trustworthiness* amongst the community based on the common connection of the Army:

...it's quite an odd relationship, quite a transient relationship in some places, but you know, you do make friends for life, my neighbours, they will kind of be friends for life, but there are enough other people that you, everyone would do a favour and you also know that everyone's probably quite trustworthy because they're, you kind of understand where they're from and what they're about... (Lucy's mother, individual interview)

The terminology and vocabulary used by the mothers and pre-school practitioners to describe Army families further illuminated this sense of Army culture and identity, a factor that Wenger (1998) highlights is often developed over time within communities of practice as a shared communal resource. For example, many chose to use the phrases *Army family/children/wives* when referring to themselves or other Army families. This was done in a way that might not be similarly used to describe children and families from other professions, such as those from a medical, engineering or teaching background. Isla's mother appeared to value the shared identity resulting from her husband being part of a specific Regiment, *'...I think because a lot of us are the same Regiment here so a lot of us are all in the same boat, so we've all clubbed together'* (Isla's mother, individual interview). Interestingly, she also used the phrase *'civvy street'* - a common Army phrase used to describe living or working in the non-military/civilian world - again highlighting how Army culture was an aspect of her own identity. Charlotte's mother similarly identified the importance of shared experiences and understanding to her own psychological wellbeing, *'...I think what has helped me has been other Army wives, especially ones who are going through it or have been through it because you really do have that understanding'* (Charlotte's mother, combined interview with Charlotte). This sense of shared culture was likely reinforced by the fact that nine out of the ten focus families were currently living within service family accommodation (SFA) on purpose-built estates or patches within or around Middlesford Garrison which are only available to service personnel and their families. The only focus family not living in SFA (Alfie's family) had bought their own house, yet this was still within the town of Middlesford. The nature of a shared and socially constructed Army identity within the environment was also found to extend to varying levels into the pre-school settings and will be discussed in more detail in section 6.3.2.

For the ten mothers who took part in my study, this shared sense of identity and belonging within the community was found to provide an important element of psychological support during a deployment. Tom's mother, for example, reported that she did not receive support from her wider family but valued the support she received from friends and colleagues (the majority of whom were also service spouses) who understood the stresses and strains of deployment, *'I'm really lucky that outside of work,*

they are also my friends, so I've always got someone messaging me to make sure that, if we've had a particularly bad day, or whatever, just to message me to make sure I'm alright' (Tom's mother, individual interview). Lucy's mother referred to the Army community providing her with a sense of resilience during her husband's six month deployment to Afghanistan, *'there's a good sort of community and I also know there's enough people there that if I was in, like stuck somewhere, or needed help, then there's enough people around I could call, and I think it's having that resilience...'* Drawing on the notion of communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991), such strategies of support within the contexts of deployment can be seen to have been developed within this community over time, potentially affording the development of resilience to new members as they experience a deployment for the first time. This sense of resilience coming from within the Army community is similar to the notion of *community wellbeing* described by McNaught (2011, p.119), who notes that 'identification with and participation within localities and communities can often be a source of social, psychological, spiritual/moral and physical wellbeing'. This community, based on shared identity and experience, could therefore be seen to be providing an important source of resilience to the at-home mothers and, consequently, to their pre-school children.

Lucy's mother further described choosing to access support from members of her community rather than the Unit Welfare Officers during her husband's deployment, *'...we've got neighbours, you understand, they'll have been through it all and you know it'll be your turn to comfort them at some point...'* (Lucy's mother, individual interview). Dandeker *et al.* (2006) similarly found that UK service spouses favoured informal support (from family and other military wives) over formal support (from the regiment or other military sources) during periods of spousal deployment. Clifton (2007, p.194) refers to a 'stoical outlook' as being an engrained aspect of British Army life which may penetrate through the wider family system. Wenger (1998) notes how outside constraints can influence the perspectives within a community of practice yet their responses reflect their responses to such constraints. Lucy's mother indicated that she was aware of the potential support provided by the Unit Welfare Officers but felt the support of her community was sufficient for her needs at this point, *'I know where to find it if I want to, but actually, it's fine, like we're kind of busy enough and patch life always helps'* (Lucy's

mother, individual interview). The small-scale UK study of Verey and Fossey (2013) suggests a further potential reason for a lack of uptake of support from Unit Welfare Officers is related to perceptions of stigma in accessing such formal support, partly due to fears around the impact that this could have on their partner's career and perceptions around a lack of confidentiality. This may go some way to explaining the observations of Manager A, that some serving personnel were reluctant to involve the Unit Welfare Officers when experiencing family-related difficulties, *'the Unit Welfare Officers, I mean, I don't know with some serving soldiers they don't want the Unit Welfare involved because it might have an effect on career, I don't know, it's the political side of the Army and I'm not 100% sure. But some men are not happy to have the Unit Welfare involved, they want to keep it quite personal...'* (Manager A, individual interview). In the American context, Lowe *et al.* (2012) similarly reported that military spouses strongly perceived that having their family labelled as being *problematic* or *in need* could negatively affect the service member's career. More recently, Strong and Lee (2017) refer to the hierarchical culture of the military that may promote a reluctance to appear weak or in need and how this can extend to the family members. Future research would benefit from a greater exploration of the different types of support available to British Army families during a deployment from the perspectives of both the families and the Army itself.

Whilst the ten focus families in my sample found the Army community to provide varying levels of positive support I recognise, however, that other families outside of my sample may find this environment and context to be a more isolating experience, particularly if they feel that they don't identify with or want to be part of such a community. For example, as noted by Deputy Manager B, *'...because we are service we are all part of that one big family – which yes can work against you because if you don't fit in that family, you're stuffed...'* (Deputy Manager B, combined interview with Manager B). This is supported by the findings of Strong and Lee (2017), who found in a sample of American military families that social isolation was shaped by factors such as friends moving away, a perceived lack of unit support, not living on the base and feeling excluded from the *cliques* of other military spouses. Such examples of individuals either choosing to not be part of the Army community or not being afforded the opportunity to become full members may then lead them to being unable to draw upon the cultural tools (both in

the ideal and material sense) that have developed over successive generations to offer support and enhance resilience during times of deployment. My sample comprised of families living in and around the Garrison who chose to participate in my research. This self-selection possibly led to a larger sample of families with a more positive view of Army life. A family highlighted by one of the pre-school managers as experiencing difficulties during a deployment was approached but chose not to take part in my research. Many other Army families live in service family accommodation outside of the Garrison and others live in their own homes, often some distance from the Garrison. Further research is needed to explore the variety seen within British Army communities and environments and the impact of this on the wellbeing of young children and their families in the context of deployment. The next section will consider how specific contextual features of the Army deployments impacted on the wellbeing of the pre-school children.

6.2.2 Deployments and support

In 2018, the British Army considered both Afghanistan and Estonia to be *operational* deployments, whereby Canada was considered to be a *training* deployment (MOD, 2018). All deployments involved the serving father being away from the family home for what could arguably be seen as a considerable amount of time. Whilst the deployments experienced by the focus families in 2018 were not considered to be wartime or combat, they were still found to have an impact on the wellbeing of the pre-school children. In all cases across the ten focus families, it was the separation and length of that separation that presented as the main source of stress across the family unit within the deployment. Only one of the ten mothers referred to a sense of enhanced danger to her deployed spouse. This was seen within the only family in the sample to have a service member deployed to Afghanistan where there is an ongoing presence of the terrorist organisation the Taliban. In this case, the mother's reflections on her situation focused more on how she framed conversations about the deployment with her children than reporting a perceived direct threat to his safety:

...you kind of end up talking about it in terms of like goodies and baddies and making sure he's looking after people and stuff...she knows where he is and she knows the word but I don't, it hasn't, Afghanistan as a concept doesn't mean anything to her I don't think. (Lucy's mother, individual interview)

It is important to note, however, that families with a serving member deployed on operations where there is an ongoing presence of terrorist organisations such as ISIS/ISIL/DAESH and the Taliban may still experience enhanced levels of stress relating to the safety of the serving member. This, in turn, could potentially have a negative impact of the overall wellbeing of that family during this time in similarity to that seen within wartime-related deployments (see, for example, Waliski *et al.*, 2012). This is an area that would benefit from further research within the UK context.

Across the sample, the longest deployment was nine and a half months (Estonia) whilst the shortest was three months (Canada). Deployment lengths to Estonia were considered by all of the mothers and pre-school practitioners to be unusually long in the current context of deployment in the British Army. This appeared to be a social construct based on historical models of British Army deployments that had framed certain cultural norms relating to deployments. In this way, each generation can be seen to be making use of and transforming intellectual tools and traditions passed down from the previous generation (Hedegaard, 2009; Robbins, 2005; Rogoff & Chavajay, 1995). Mothers with partners deployed to Estonia, for example, frequently reflected on what they considered to be the unusual length of this particular operational tour (around nine months) which they felt was longer than the more traditional and recent six-month tours of previous/historical commitments, such as Iraq and Afghanistan. Alfie's mother reflected that she had found her husband's nine-month deployment to be particularly challenging, *'It's hard. (Pauses). Very hard. You can't quite see the light at the end of the tunnel. Even though they have their R&R, back in November, we're almost, way past half the new year and he's still not back. It's very stressful, this length of deployment'* (Alfie's mother, individual interview). In contrast, Isla's mother reflected that her husband's three-month deployment to Canada was *'...not a proper deployment'* (Isla's mother, individual interview) which, as will be discussed in section 7.3.2, was likely influenced by her

stressful experience of her husband's longer eight-month deployment the year before. It is important to note, however, that many families from both within and outside of the service community may still consider a separation from a family member of three months or less to be a significant period of time and may need support during such deployments.

The social constructs that framed the views of deployment within the families also appeared to influence the support provided by the Army during such deployments. Section 7.3.2 will highlight how the mothers perceived that the length and location of a deployment could influence the Army funding and resources that were available to the families during these times, with a greater focus on those deployments considered to be operational. This in turn led some families feeling that they could access Army-funded or focused support more readily than others. Mothers with a spouse deployed to Estonia or Afghanistan generally reported feeling a high level of accessibility to support from their Unit Welfare Officers (UWOs) which they believed was due to the length and operational nature of these deployments. For example, Owen's mother remarked '*...there's an amazing support network here (welfare)*' (Owen's mother, individual interview). This sense of support was echoed by Toby's mother, '*to be honest they have been absolutely amazing*' (Toby's mother, combined interview with Toby). In contrast, Tom and Isla's mothers, whose husbands were deployed on a three-month training exercise to Canada, reported feeling that there was less support available to them, '*there's no support as such like, I've never really asked them for anything but there's never any, there's not really anything apart from a coffee morning, I don't think they do anything*' (Tom's mother, individual interview). Tom's mother felt that this was possibly linked to a perception within the Army that families didn't need as much support on training deployments, '*I don't know if they feel like because it's not like Afghanistan or something like that that you don't really need it like for Canada, like not anywhere dangerous*' (Tom's mother, individual interview).

The ten focus families had various responses to the different lengths of deployments and it was not a hard and fast rule that only the longer deployments or those that were considered operational resulted in greater levels of family stress. Tom's mother and pre-school practitioners reported him experiencing severe distress and disruption in overall

family functioning during his father's three-month deployment to Canada (see sections 7.3.1 and 7.3.2). His mother's perceptions of there being less Army-related support available during this time could then have had an impact on her own psychological wellbeing which, as will be discussed in Chapter 7, could then have a negative impact on Tom's overall wellbeing. For Owen's mother, it was the uncertainty over the length of her husband's deployment that caused significant stress within her family. In Owen's situation, the length of his father's deployment to Estonia was originally set at between six to eight weeks but this was repeatedly extended to a total of five and a half months over the duration of his deployment. Owen's mother described this continued uncertainty - which neither she nor her husband had control over - as being a particular source of stress within the household during the deployment:

...it just kept extending and extending, so I found that really hard. And then we thought he would do four months and that would be it and we got a date for him to be coming back and then he said 'well it's good news and bad news, I'm coming back in April but now it's R&R' (meaning a return to deployment afterwards), so I lost my shit a little bit at that point... it's not fair because you feel that you are reaching the top of the hill and then there's another month and another month. (Owen's mother, individual interview)

Huebner *et al.* (2007, p.113) note how such 'ambiguity about returning contributes to the emotional roller coaster families experience', and further highlight how the inability to resolve this circumstance is an important element that may cause distress. Owen's mother further described feeling guilty at getting upset in front of Owen as a result of her husband's absence, '*he saw me quite upset initially when Rob (Owen's father) went, so that was bad*' (Owen's mother, individual interview), a factor that likely contributed to Owen's increased clinginess and increased concern for the psychological wellbeing of his mother (see section 7.2). Owen's mother's sense of uncertainty and lack of control over her situation highlights the all-encompassing nature of the service role on the lives of families and the sense of ambiguous loss that can accompany such deployments.

Having or not having had a historical experience of a deployment and the length of time that they had been in the Army community also emerged as factors influencing a family's deployment experience. Manager B felt that some of the younger parents were more vulnerable to the stresses of deployments due to not being as established/settled in the Army community, not being able to drive or having not experienced deployment before:

...some of our younger Mummies who haven't experienced it yet and it's all very new that can be, because we do have quite a lot of wives who don't drive who are really quite young who have just been plonked here and then they'll be here and their husbands have to go on deployment for four, five months and they're very anxious and they're very lonely...

(Manager B, combined interview with Deputy Manager B).

In contrast, Isla's mother described drawing on a previous difficult experience of her husband's lengthy deployment to Estonia to develop what could be considered as *resilient wellbeing* (Roberts, 2010). As will be discussed further in section 7.3.1, this was seen in how she framed her husband's current three-month deployment to Canada '*I know I keep saying it but it's only three months, it's not a huge deal, and I think because the last one was such a long time*' (Isla's mother, individual interview). It was also seen in her expressions of how she would now more confidently manage difficult situations in the relationships between herself and Isla during the current deployment '*I'd pack her off to my Mum's... I know that sounds terrible, but I do strongly believe that a lot of the behaviour came from because she was just fed of me and I was fed up of her*' (Isla's mother, individual interview). These findings support those of Lowe *et al.* (2012), who reported that at-home spouses who had been affiliated with the military for a longer period of time reported less stress within the parent-child relationship during a deployment. They posit that this may be due to the at-home spouse having learned to adjust their family communication patterns and having acquired techniques for managing the stresses of military life. They may have also had more opportunity to become full members of the community of practice within the Army community, within

which the cultural tools developed across successive generations of Army families in response to the stresses of deployment have been passed down.

Whilst I agree to some extent with the finding of Lowe *et al.* (2012), their findings do not take into account those families and children who do not develop resilience through the repeated experience of deployment. The manager at Tom's pre-school (also the employer of Tom's mother) believed it was the regular and repeated nature of Tom's father's three-month deployments to locations such as Canada that had a significant impact on the poor psychological wellbeing of Tom and his mother. From a cultural historical perspective, the past is present in the current moment (Fleer, 2016) and it should not be assumed that this is always in the positive sense. A child or family's previous exposure to deployment can lead to risk as much as it can lead to resilience, depending on the individual, social and environmental circumstances of the previous and current deployments. Supporting this, Lester *et al.* (2016) recently found that deployment exposure was not independently associated with primary caregiving parents' behavioural health, parental sensitivity or substance use, but that greater deployment exposure (i.e. longer and/or repeated wartime deployment) was associated with impaired family functioning, such as less healthy communication, reduced affective involvement and less effective problem-solving skills. Clearly there are many factors emerging from the deployment itself that can contribute to the wellbeing of pre-school children and their families. It should not be assumed that repeated exposure to deployments leads to family resilience, yet nor should it be assumed that it leads to risk. Individual, social and environmental factors will have a mediating impact on each child and their family.

Interestingly, some mothers reported instances where they felt the Army had recognised and positively responded to some of the issues associated with the longer lengths of deployments to Estonia. Within the Garrison, more than one regiment had personnel either currently or previously deployed to Estonia on operational tours of nine-months in length. Charlotte's mother reported how she perceived this particular length of deployment to have had a negative impact on some of the families within her community. She described how in the first wave of deployments the previous year, service personnel had been entitled to only one two-week period of Rest and

Recuperation (R&R) at home with their families. From the perspective of Charlotte's mother, this had led to an increase in personnel leaving the Army - referred to as *signing off*, *'the first exercise that went out there, they had one R&R and you couldn't do any visit, the sign off rate was horrendous I think, so many people signed off'* (Charlotte's mother, individual interview). She felt that this issue had then been recognised by the Army and had led to changes to the R&R package offered, such as arranging a weekend where families could travel to Tallinn in Estonia to be reunited with the serving member. Owen's mother felt that having the opportunity for her and her young children to travel to Tallinn had been beneficial to the psychological wellbeing of all her family members, including Owen, *'...it's a milestone to reach and it topped Owen up on Daddy time...'* (Owen's mother, individual interview). This example indicates that Armed Forces policy changes implemented within the context of the deployment can lead to increased wellbeing for pre-school children and their families. It may also have positive implications for the retention of personnel within the Army.

Section 6.2 has considered how the context of the culture and environment of the Army Garrison influenced the identity and cultural norms of the families and individuals within the community. This in turn influenced the support available to the families during a deployment which then had an impact upon the wellbeing of the pre-school children. A further important aspect of the pre-school children's environments was their pre-school settings. This will now be considered in more detail.

6.3 The impact of the pre-school settings

The pre-school environments were an important aspect of the pre-school children's contexts in terms of influencing their wellbeing during the fathers' deployments. Two dominant subthemes emerged from the data: the maintenance of stability and routines within the children's lives and the varying levels of an understanding of Army culture within the pre-schools.

6.3.1 The routines and stability of pre-school

Section 7.3.2 will highlight that the maintenance of daily routines mediated via the relationship with the at-home mother was a protective factor to the physical, psychological and social wellbeing of pre-school children during the father's deployments. This is in line with existing American literature which has highlighted that maintaining the predictability of daily routines can be a protective factor to the healthy developmental course of young children during a period of parental deployment (Lieberman & Horn, 2008; 2013; Osofsky & Chartrand, 2013; Riggs & Riggs, 2011). Further analysis of the data in my study highlighted how the stability and predictability of routines within the pre-school settings also acted as a protective factor to the pre-school children's psychological, physical, social and cognitive domains of wellbeing during a deployment.

Cognitive wellbeing is a domain identified as referring to intellectual, educational or school-related indicators (Fauth & Thompson, 2009; Pollard & Lee; 2003, Roberts, 2010). Cognitive wellbeing as a domain emerged less frequently via discussions with all participants than that of the psychological, physical or social domains. The managers and practitioners at the pre-schools did not independently highlight issues relating to educational indicators during a parental deployment, such as attainment against the Early Years Foundation Stage Curriculum (EYFS). All managers were asked to reflect on their own EYFS data and reported no significant changes within the children's progress during the periods of parental deployment. The manager at Joshua's pre-school did, however, note that she had seen a slowing down of his educational progress when I specifically questioned her on this point, *'...those first few months there was a definite stop in development, there was more of a stubbornness in there where he didn't want to do anything, we weren't getting anything from him...'* (Manager A, individual interview). The fact that cognitive wellbeing was not overtly raised does not necessarily mean that it was not an important domain of the pre-school children's overall wellbeing. In my sample, the children's cognitive wellbeing did not appear to be negatively impacted by the fathers' deployments and this may be partly due to it being supported by the maintenance of maternal wellbeing, as well as routines and stability within their homes and pre-schools during this time.

Many of the pre-school practitioners, such as Lucy's keyworker, recognised the importance of the maintenance of predictable pre-school routines during a period of change in the children's home environments '*...her routine has stayed the same, we've stayed the same...*' (Lucy's keyworker, individual interview). Interestingly, Lucy's keyworker also highlighted the importance of boundaries alongside such routine, '*I think when they're here, they are in their routine, they, once they've learnt our routines and our boundaries and what our expectation of is them*' (Lucy's keyworker, individual interview). This comment is interesting in light of the work of Roberts (2010) who highlights *belonging and boundaries* as being an important component of wellbeing in young children. In her model, belonging and boundaries refers to a child having an identity in relation to others. Roberts (2010) argues that this involves bonding with the primary caregiver but is also more than this, requiring attachments to another or others. Belonging, she notes, is about a sense of identity (in relation to others), attachment to others (including other children) and a sense of belonging to a place. Boundaries accompany belonging and refer to the set of rules within those relationships. In the case of Lucy, belonging to the overall pre-school environment, having her identity as an Army child understood and being a part of the daily relationships and boundaries within that setting could be seen to be supporting her *resilient wellbeing* during her father's six-month deployment to Afghanistan. Lucy's relationships with her pre-school practitioners are clearly also important in supporting this process (Section 8.3 will also highlight how specific friendships within this pre-school environment supported Lucy's psychological wellbeing during her father's deployment).

Reflecting on their Army children outside of the ten focus children, one of the pre-schools highlighted what they perceived to be detrimental changes to routines where children did not attend pre-school or attended less frequently during a parental deployment. Demonstrating the entangled nature of wellbeing, this was associated with both the psychological wellbeing of the at-home parent *and* environmental factors, such as the distance between the service family accommodation or *patch* and the pre-school:

...but equally if their attendance is a bit fluctuated because the Dad's gone away and Mum's not coping very well that can have an affect on them as well because obviously their routine and structure has gone out of the window, because we find that quite often because they don't drive and if they live down the bottom patch and if they have to walk down the hill in the rain, they won't come. And then you deal with the fact that that structure and those friendships that they have formed in the room have changed because they haven't seen them for a few weeks – that can affect them quite a lot. (Manager B, combined interview with Deputy Manager B).

Such changes to pre-school attendance and routine in the context of a deployment could therefore be seen to be having an impact on the social and psychological wellbeing of pre-school children. In a further example outside of the ten focus children, Manager B described the impact that such non-attendance had in the situation of two children with additional learning needs, *'speech and language is massive, it affected their speech and language and then their social skills because, there were speech and language issues there...but she wouldn't attend if Dad couldn't bring them'* (Manager B, combined interview with Deputy Manager B). In this case, the impact of non-attendance at pre-school could be seen to be impacting on those children's cognitive wellbeing. This supports the view of Fauth and Thompson (2009), who highlight *cognitive and language development and school performance* as one of four interlinked domains of wellbeing in children aged eight years and below. Deployment-related changes to children's attendance at their pre-schools can therefore potentially have an impact on their psychological, physical, social and cognitive domains of wellbeing. Experiencing a deployment within the pre-school holidays may then also impact upon the wellbeing of the children through a disruption to their predictable daily routines and social relationships. Equally, maintaining attendance at pre-schools during a parental deployment may go some way to supporting children's cognitive wellbeing during this time.

Further analysis of the data relating specifically to the ten focus children revealed that the routine of the children attending pre-schools also had wider benefits across the at-home

family unit. For example, Jessica's keyworker noted the benefits attending pre-school had on both Jessica and on Jessica's mother, *'I think they've got amazing routine, obviously with Jessica being here all day every day that helps her and also gives Mum the break which probably helps her'* (Jessica's keyworker, individual interview). This sense of pre-school allowing a beneficial short break between the children and the at-home mother was echoed by Isla's mother, *'I think that's a massive thing, like speaking to other Mum's as well, and it's not that we just want to get rid of our kids, or because we're bad parents, it's just a break'* (Isla's mother, individual interview). Toby's mother similarly valued the time her children spent at pre-school in allowing her to cope with the demands of running the household as a lone parent - a factor that will be identified as a source of deployment-related stress in Chapter 7 - *'it's not like I have time for myself and I go and watch soaps or anything, I just, it's a chance to catch up on things like shopping and cleaning'* (Toby's mother, combined interview with Toby). Several of the mothers referred to finding pre-school half-terms and holidays as a time of increased stress during a period of deployment, such as Toby's mother, *'...it's hard like half term when there's no nursery'* (Toby's mother, combined interview with Toby). Isla's mother identified the lack of separation between herself and Isla as potentially leading to increased stress within their relationship during her husband's deployment, *'it'll be me and her all the time... Isla and I are really close but I think we do clash. There's no point lying about it, we do clash, if we spend too much time with each other and, yes, we kind of need that time apart'* (Isla's mother, individual interview).

Many mothers appeared to value the short separation that their children attending pre-school allowed. This finding is significant in light of a finding that will be discussed in Chapter 7; that the psychological wellbeing of the pre-school children and the at-home mothers are inextricably linked. Dodge *et al.*'s (2012) model of wellbeing offers an interesting perspective on this finding. Their model conceptualises wellbeing as a see-saw with a set point of equilibrium or homeostasis; the fluctuating state of wellbeing being caused by challenges and resources of the individual. They note 'in essence, stable wellbeing is when individuals have the psychological, social and physical resources they need to meet a particular psychological, social and/or physical challenge' (Dodge *et al.* 2012). For the mothers in my sample, the short but regular amount of time apart from

their young children appeared to facilitate a return to equilibrium, particularly by supporting their own psychological resources in lone parenting during the deployment. It could also be seen to be supporting the at-home mothers in some of the practical elements of running a household alone, such as the food shopping and cleaning. In this way, the children attending pre-school indirectly impacted on their own wellbeing by supporting the wellbeing of the mothers.

Demonstrating the entangled nature of the domains of wellbeing, a further benefit of the routines of pre-school was seen in providing the children the opportunities to play socially with other children (see section 8.4 for further discussion). As discussed by Toby's mother, *'if he didn't get that play (with other children) I don't know what he would do, he needs that play'* (Toby's mother, combined interview with Toby). Section 7.6 will also discuss how four of the ten focus children were reported by their mothers to be missing the more energetic aspects of play in the absence of their fathers whilst the mothers were having to operate as lone parents. From my observations whilst talking alongside two of the pre-school children in particular, attending pre-school created a space for such energetic play to take place. In the examples of Joshua and Alfie, discussions and research activities took place outside in the gardens of their respective pre-schools. In both settings there was space for the children to run, climb and engage in other physical activities. Both of these children came in and out of discussions, frequently leaving to engage in activities with other children such as running or playing with the outdoor equipment. In this way, the routine of the pre-schools arguably supported the physical, social, cognitive and psychological wellbeing of the pre-school children during a time where such energetic/physical play may have decreased at home.

6.3.2 The understanding of Army culture within the pre-schools

Contextual and environmental factors appeared to have a strong influence on the levels to which the pre-schools understood and even embraced the Army culture of their service families. The data revealed that this was influenced by the proximity of the pre-schools to the Garrison, individual practitioner understanding and expertise of Army

culture and links between the pre-schools and the Army. These factors influenced the levels to which a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) emerged within the pre-schools, centred around an understanding of the experiences of Army children.

6.3.2.1 The impact of the proximity of the pre-schools to the Garrison

Five of the eight pre-school settings attended by the ten focus children were located within Middlesford Garrison. Two pre-school settings were located outside of the Garrison. A final setting that took part in the research was located next to a large Army base in Eastford (Eastford is a pseudonym) ten miles away from Middlesford Garrison. Participant responses indicated the strongest understanding of Army culture emerged in the settings that were located directly within Middlesford Garrison and within the Army base at Eastford. This appeared to be heavily influenced by the numbers of Army children attending the settings (the four settings that took part from Middlesford Garrison each comprised 90% military children or above). Toby's pre-school, three miles outside of the Garrison, comprised only 25% military children. In addition to the larger percentages of service children attending, the participating pre-school settings from Middlesford Garrison and Eastford Army base had a sponsor Regiment (an Army Regiment to whom they were affiliated), although communications between Regiments and pre-school settings were variable. All four of the settings in the Garrison and the setting by the Army base in Eastford were located on Crown land (i.e. belonging to the MOD) and some pre-schools were obliged to prioritise admissions to service children as a result of this. These five settings were also in very close proximity to the actual infrastructure of the Garrison; in two cases they were part of buildings housing other Army departments (such as Army Welfare Services) and in the other three cases were directly facing a part of the Army camp.

As briefly noted in section 6.2.1, several of the pre-school settings were influenced by an Army/service identity. The proximity of the pre-schools to the Garrison or Army base appeared to strongly influence the identity and ethos of the pre-school settings themselves, *'...actually because we're all in the environment and we've not, it's not kind of*

in a rural village, I think we are better placed to support that (deployment) because it's our everyday life' (Manager A, individual interview). Many of the pre-school practitioners that took part in my study were themselves service spouses or had been service children (see section 6.3.2.2 below for further discussion). As a result of this, the practitioners often had a dual identity as both a practitioner and as a member of the service community, bringing forwards their own cultural tools and resources from that community. Talking about the practitioners within Tom's pre-school, Deputy Manager B remarked *'...we're predominantly military wives'* (Deputy Manager B, combined interview with Manager B). This also extended into how she referred to their cohort of children and how she directed practices within the pre-school, *'we're 98% military, normally in our All About Me (part of the registration process) we're asking 'when Dad's going away, does he go away often, how does he respond, how can we help?''* (Deputy Manager B, combined interview with Manager B). Similarly, at Isla's pre-school approximately 90% of the children were from a military background. The manager here referred to the non-military cohort as *civilians* (a word commonly used across the Armed Forces to refer to non-military individuals), *'we are getting more a few more civilians come in actually than before...'* (Manager D, individual interview), again indicating that this setting had a strong military identity and reflecting how vocabulary emerges as a communal resource within a shared community of practice (Wenger, 1998).

The data revealed that the sense of an Army identity within the pre-schools could impact positively on the wellbeing of the pre-school children during a deployment. Many of the mothers from these settings felt that these pre-schools provided targeted and effective support for the children during the deployments due to being part of the Army community and therefore understanding the nuances of Army life and culture. Lucy's mother, for example, noted *'It's been brilliant. So because they're so used to it here, I suppose... they've got some resources in here and they were sort of reading like, I think My Daddy's Going Away sort of book...'* (Lucy's mother, individual interview). Other mothers strongly indicated that the proximity of the early years setting to the Garrison affected the levels to which they felt their Army culture was understood. As with Lucy's mother, for Jessica's mother this was a valued aspect of support during the repeated deployments that they had recently experienced as a family, *'because I think this nursery is obviously*

used to military families, so they know if she's a bit upset I can come in and say 'she's had a bad night, she was upset about Dad' and they'd be quite 'don't worry, we'll be ok with that' (Jessica's mother, individual interview). Interestingly, Jessica's mother indicated a concern that, due to an upcoming military posting out of the area, Jessica's new pre-school might not have the same understanding of the challenges of Army life, *'...when we do move back to Northshire (Northshire is a pseudonym), the concern is that they aren't going to know what to do... that's probably the main concern I've got moving back up'* (Jessica's mother, individual interview). The pre-school settings having a good understanding of Army culture could therefore be seen to be having a positive effect on the psychological wellbeing of both the pre-school children and their mothers during a parental deployment. These settings could be seen in many ways to be inhabiting the same figured world or community of practice as the families within the Army community, where cultural resources and traditions are shared.

Conversely, all mothers with children in pre-school settings outside of the Garrison indicated a feeling that these settings had a lesser understanding of their Army culture. Two miles west from the Garrison, Daisy went to a rural pre-school attached to the small primary school that her five-year-old brother attended. Daisy's mother felt that being outside of the Garrison had influenced what she perceived to be the low levels of support that both of her children had received during their father's five-and-a-half-month deployment. She referred to a sense that lower numbers of Army children meant that both the school and pre-school did not necessarily have a strong understanding of the challenges facing some of the children in their care, *'because they're not a military school, there's not many there, I think they don't, there's a new Headteacher, he doesn't understand he's never worked with military children before, he's still new to it all'* (Daisy's mother, individual interview). Attending a pre-school three miles south of Middlesford, Toby's mother reported a similar sense of their family's Army culture not necessarily being understood. When asked if the nursery had offered any support to herself of Toby during her husband's deployment, she replied *'no, I don't think there's anyone really military there...'* (Toby's mother, combined interview with Toby). Whilst Daisy's pre-school did not take part in the study, interviews with the manager and keyworker at Toby's school three miles outside of the Garrison indicated a lower sense of

understanding of Army culture. The manager referred to only having recently had higher numbers of Army children (now 25%) which she felt was linked to the next nearest pre-school in the Garrison having recently been put into special measures by Ofsted. Unlike the pre-schools in Middlesford Garrison, they reported having no links at all with any of the Army units in the area. Unlike the other five settings that took part, no members of their staff had the experience of having been a service child or being a service spouse themselves.

Overall, the data revealed that the proximity of the pre-school settings to Middlesford Garrison and Eastford Army base appeared to have an effect on the levels to which the mothers felt the Army culture of themselves and their children were understood. This was likely in part resulting from their proportions of Army children in the settings and the pre-school practitioner's levels of experience in working with this community. Both the mothers and the practitioners felt that this greater understanding of Army culture and deployment helped the pre-schools to better support their children during this time. This is not to say, however, that there was a negative impact of children attending the pre-schools who had a lesser understanding of Army life. As highlighted in sections 6.3.1 and 7.3.2, the maintenance of daily routines and attendance at pre-school had benefits to the psychological, physical, social and cognitive wellbeing of both the pre-school children and their mothers. This could be seen to be happening in all of the pre-schools that the children attended.

Further analysis revealed that differences across the settings was also influenced by a lack of third-party support to the pre-schools in terms understanding the characteristics of Army life and the impact this could have on the children in their care. Many of the practitioners in the pre-school settings referred to a lack of official training or documentation designed to enhance their understanding of working with young service children and their families. Pre-school settings should, therefore, not be expected to have an expertise of Army culture in the first instance. Supporting this further, many of the practitioners appeared to have gained the majority of their knowledge and expertise from their own experiences as either as service spouses and/or mothers. This will now be discussed in the next section.

8.3.2.2 Practitioner understanding/expertise of Army culture

The data revealed that much of the practitioners' understanding and expertise of Army culture came in large part from their own experiences of Army life or from working with Army children. I asked the managers and keyworkers at the pre-school settings to reflect on where they gained their understanding of Army life from and how supported they felt in working with the children from this community. Whilst some identified support from the local education authority and links with the local Army community, nearly all reflected on their understanding being predominantly a result of their experiences of working with young children from this community and/or the result of being a service spouse and mother themselves. As Manager C noted *'we've all either been service personnel or spouses, we're all really quite highly in tune to that'* (Manager C, individual interview). Joshua's keyworker similarly reflected *'...I think that in here we are about 90% of us (staff) are military with links to the regiment as well, so we're quite understanding...'* (Joshua's keyworker, individual interview). Many practitioners drew on their own experiences of military life to direct their practice during times of deployment, *'I think because I've got that military background, so it's different for me, I've got that both sides of it'* (Lucy's keyworker, individual interview). Three of the mothers that took part in my research also worked as practitioners in the pre-schools that their children attended, bringing forward their own experiences of deployment to their work with other children. In this way, these practitioners could be seen to be bringing forward their own cultural tools and resources (both ideal and material) from the Army community into the pre-school settings in which they worked.

For some of the mothers, the shared understanding, experience and identity of Army life between families and practitioners was a valued aspect of support, *'...Isla's last key worker, her husband was a 3 Loamshires husband as well (Loamshires is a pseudonym), so a lot of them up there are military wives. They know the area... I think their understanding is good'* (Isla's mother, individual interview). The manager at Isla's pre-school felt that this

shared understanding of the demands of service life helped her team to provide support, which in turn enhanced the resilience of the families currently experiencing deployment:

It's the resilience of the families that we have and I think it does come from knowing that they've got a good support network in the setting that their child attends, so knowing that you know they're not judged, that a lot of the practitioners know exactly how they're feeling or have felt at that exact same way... so they're not being judged when they come in here and they can open up and they can talk openly and honestly and I think that helps and knowing that we're here if they're having a bit of a tough time.

(Manager D, individual interview).

Both the pre-school practitioners and the mothers identified the importance of a shared understanding of Army culture and Army life in supporting families during a deployment. Comments from the pre-school practitioners, however, reflected a lack of specific training on the impact of service life on young children, leaving settings and practitioners to rely almost entirely on their own self-generated knowledge. Whilst two of the pre-schools indicated that there was some support available via the Local Authority, all felt that the majority of their expertise came directly from their own experiences as both settings and as individuals. When asked to consider the factors that had helped their settings to develop an understanding of working with Army children, one manager responded '*honestly, experience... I can honestly say I have never had training... or attended anything about how we can support those children or deployment or what comes from being a military family*' (Manager B, combined interview with Deputy Manager B). This is an example of a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991), where knowledge has developed within the pre-school community through the shared practice and collective process of learning rather than through direct instruction (Wenger, 1998). A perceived lack of cultural understanding in third party educational organisations - particularly Ofsted - was raised as a concern by four of the six participating pre-schools.

All of the pre-school settings located within the Garrison felt that Ofsted did not have a good understanding of the nuances and challenges of military life and how that impacted

on the pre-schools and their children, *'I've actually felt in my two Ofsted inspections that I've had here that I've educated Ofsted more than they have educated me with regards to military families'* (Manager A, individual interview). This stance was echoed by Manager B, *'we could inform them (Ofsted) actually, couldn't we!'* (Manager B, combined interview with Deputy Manager B). The stance taken here by two of the managers of being able to educate such authorities as Ofsted about the nuances of military life is an interesting one. Early years practitioner voices are underrepresented in literature even at the international level (Stites, 2016) and yet findings from my research indicate that they are well placed to help inform educational, social and Armed Forces policy and practice with this particular group of children. The different pre-school settings also repeatedly reflected a viewpoint that they felt that Ofsted did not fully appreciate the unique culture of the Army and that this had significant implications for the outcomes of their inspections:

They need a greater understanding of military background and the families that we have and what they are going through as families. I don't think they do. It would be a bit like going from doing a country inspection where you've got this really lovely cottage-box school or nursery that is absolutely wonderful and amazing and going to an inner-city one and absolutely ripping them to pieces because they're not the same as that lovely cottage one that's two miles outside the inner city. That doesn't happen, well, it shouldn't happen, yet it does in military nurseries and settings.

(Manager D, individual interview).

Manager A in particular felt that the lack of understanding of Army culture had had a profound impact on their recent Ofsted inspection, where they had been graded as inadequate and placed into special measures. This related to a scenario where a service child from a Foreign Commonwealth Fijian family had returned to Fiji to stay with grandparents. According to Manager A, the parents of this child had cited the reason as being the need for additional help with childcare due to both parents serving within the Army. Manager A felt that a lack of understanding of Fijian culture had contributed to how Ofsted then framed this situation:

So I tried to signpost (the family) to one (pre-school) with longer hours but it didn't work because Fijian culture is they send their money back home to help provide at home. So Ofsted came in and picked up on this child who was on our iLog system and asked about where she was so we explained the situation then I was told I was going to then get done for human trafficking, sexual exploitation and female genital mutilation... so they had no idea about the Fijian culture and I pulled up all the FGM documents and actually it wasn't in the Fijian culture, it wasn't an area like Ghana or places like that, maybe I needed to do more investigation but these were a very open family to see everything, and yet Ofsted went to town with all of this... They didn't understand the military way, they didn't understand Fijian culture, and they weren't for listening either... we were actually fighting the side that it felt like racism, coming in from like a racism side of it because they had just seen the colour of this girls skin and picked her and went to town with her and it was just awful this thing that we all went through. (Manager A, individual interview).

The corresponding Ofsted report does not detail the exact risks that they felt the child faced, but notes that they regarded the manager's failure to notify the relevant authorities of this as putting the wellbeing of the child at risk:

Safeguarding is not effective. The manager is aware of the signs that may indicate that children are at risk of harm. However, she fails to follow Local Safeguarding Children Board procedures to ensure children are kept safe.

(Ofsted Inspection Report, 2017)

Further comments from Manager A indicate that guidelines surrounding such situations remained unclear even after the Ofsted inspection, '...it was that I hadn't reported that to MASH (Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub) then when I did the day after Ofsted came in, I asked MASH for advice and guidance and they said 'No, we wouldn't have reported that'.

(Manager A, individual interview). This situation, whilst arguably extreme, highlights the importance of all those involved in working with Army children and/or inspecting/monitoring pre-schools with Army children having a thorough understanding of Army culture and the various sub-cultures, such as those of Foreign Commonwealth families, that can exist within it. Pre-school settings would also benefit from clearer official guidance on situations where a foreign commonwealth child leaves a setting to return to family in their country of origin.

6.3.2.3 Links between the pre-school settings and the Army

Arguably, the Army itself is one of the most knowledgeable organisations on the nuances of Army life which in turn could support pre-school settings in supporting children and their families. Highlighting the importance of links between educational settings and the Army, the DfE/MOD's recently updated version of the Service Children in State School's Handbook (2019) notes the importance of good lines of communication between schools and military bases. The data in my study, however, revealed variable levels of communication between the pre-school settings and the Army within the local area. This was the case regardless of the proximity of the pre-school to the Army bases. Of the six pre-school settings that took part in the research, only two described having a close working relationship with the Army (such as Unit Welfare Officers), with the other four reporting little or no contact. Interestingly, the two pre-schools that reported having a good working relationship with the Army shared a building with the welfare services of their sponsor regiment, appearing to strongly facilitate their close working relationships. The manager at one of these pre-schools placed an emphasis on this working relationship in terms of enhancing the support that could be given to the service families with children in the early years:

The units are really working with us in early years which has been great... we are really lucky, we've got the Unit Welfare here. They are downstairs and they provide community services for the children here. But yes, you know the Army welfare support, the Unit Welfare they are our nominated Unit... it's

that that I feel enables our families to come in. It also helps bridge that gap because it just becomes this place where everybody knows everybody and it's not this big scary place... (Manager D, individual interview)

Similarly, Manager B felt that the working relationship they had with their Unit Welfare team had a significantly positive outcomes in terms of their ability to support the wellbeing of their service families and young children, *'I don't think we would be the setting we are, I don't think we would be delivering the support and practice that we do if we didn't have the welfare officer, the health visitor...because we all work together and know each other'* (Manager B, combined interview with Deputy Manager B). Interestingly, Manager B and Deputy Manager B also felt valued on a wider level by senior officers within the Garrison management team, *'...I would say though that this nursery is incredibly lucky though, because the Garrison support us 800 million percent. The Deputy Commander, we call him, we say we have a problem, he sorts our problem. He is incredibly supportive'* (Deputy Manager B, combined interview with Manager B). Similarly, whilst one pre-school felt that their contact with the UWOs had *'dwindled'* over the last seven to eight years (Deputy Manager E, individual interview), she described how the support of the current Base Commander remained particularly positive, *'he's very welfare driven'* (Deputy Manager E, individual interview).

In contrast, Managers A and C reported having minimal contact with their welfare team, despite being in very close proximity to their sponsor regiments. As described by Manager C *'each nursery in, and school actually, in the military area has a sponsor regiment attached to them and that's supposed to be the link to provide any kind of support or help we could possibly need, but then when you do contact them, they are super, super busy, and don't have any time for you and it's just, yes, it's not really working'* (Manager C, individual interview). Some of the pre-schools felt that the regular turnover of Army personnel posted in and out of these roles could alter the dynamics of the working relationship between themselves and the Army. Deputy Manager E reflected on the variations in priorities and focus she had seen between different Base Commanders:

That's the other thing that sometimes you notice about a change of your CO (Commanding Officer), over the years, to varying degrees, they have been either very much out on a limb, or very much more active and that's been dramatic in its, has been in the past quite dramatic, you'd almost get a sort of potential sometimes for 'It's on my job description, but maybe there are other things that I might feel are more important.

(Deputy Manager E, individual interview).

Similarly, Manager D reflected on the high levels of Unit Welfare Officer turnover that she had seen in her four years at the pre-school, *'one thing I have noticed, I've been here four years, and this is the third Unit Welfare Officer and he's due to change as well, so it's kind of, they do change quite quickly'* (Manager D, individual interview). Such regular levels of change in personnel (often due to being posted out of the role after around two years on normal Army rotations) could lead to variations in communications between the pre-school settings and the Army. This should not necessarily be seen as a simple case of this being a result of Army-related factors. Manager B and Deputy Manager B described their belief that their successful partnerships with the wider Army community and services was a result of being *'proactive'* and of having *'pushed forward'* in their relationship (Deputy Manager B, combined interview with Manager B), highlighting the importance of pre-school settings instigating communications as much as Army Unit Welfare Officers.

Links between the Army and a pre-school were highlighted by one Manager as being important in deployment situations where a family was considered by the pre-school to be at risk of poor wellbeing. Manager A remarked that better communication between the pre-school and their nominated Unit Welfare Officers could have increased their ability to effectively address a serious safeguarding issue relating to the potential physical and psychological harm of children in their care during a father's deployment (see section 7.3.2), *'...it had lots of people involved with this family which is why it ended up opening absolutely everything (referrals to social services) and yeah, nothing from the Unit Welfare Team...'* (Manager A, individual interview). Manager A noted that this particular family had now been posted to a different part of the country and felt that an opportunity had been missed to work collaboratively with the Army to enhance the

overall wellbeing of that family, *'if welfare had have been involved and to say to the new unit welfare that they're going to 'if you keep sending that gentleman away, we'll have a few more personal problems'...*' (Manager A, individual interview).

Three miles outside of the Garrison, Manager F at Toby's pre-school reported having no links at all with Unit Welfare Officers or any other personnel from the Garrison, despite their setting currently comprising 25% Army children. The pre-schools who reported either lower levels or no contact with Army personnel such as Unit Welfare Officers felt that increased communication would be beneficial to supporting the wellbeing of their service children, particularly through periods of deployment or mobility. There is a lack of existing literature in this area, but the findings from this study would strongly suggest that increased communication between the pre-schools and departments such as Welfare Services within the British Army would help to facilitate better support to the wellbeing of pre-school children and their families.

6.4 Summary of findings

This chapter set out to explore how environmental and contextual factors impacted on pre-school children's domains of wellbeing. The data revealed that environmental and contextual factors had both a direct and indirect impact on the psychological, physical, social and cognitive domains of the pre-school children's wellbeing.

From the perspectives of the participants who took part in my study, the local Army context and environment had created a unique community that was bound by the common thread of military service and the shared experiences of Army life. All of the mothers who took part in my research felt that their experiences of deployment were both understood and supported by members of their fellow Army community. This is significant given a finding that will be presented in Chapter 7, that the psychological, physical and social wellbeing of pre-school children is inextricably linked to the psychological wellbeing of the at-home mothers during a deployment. In this sense, this particular Army community indirectly supported the psychological, physical and social

wellbeing of the ten focus pre-school children during their father's deployments by providing support for the mothers. As will also now be discussed in Chapter 7 however, practitioner perspectives on children outside of the ten focus families revealed that being within the Army community could at times be an isolating or negative experience for some families. This in turn could be a factor leading to a negative impact on the pre-school children's psychological, physical, social and cognitive wellbeing. It can not, therefore, be concluded that being part of this particular Army community leads to positive outcomes across pre-school children's domains of wellbeing during a deployment. Rather, it must be concluded that being part of this Army community, to varying levels, could impact either positively or negatively on the psychological, physical, social and cognitive wellbeing of pre-school children during a parental deployment.

A further aspect of the Army context that was found to impact the wellbeing of the pre-school children was the types and lengths of deployments. The commitments of the British Army are specific to a particular time and are influenced by global and political factors. The data for my study was collected in 2018 when the British Army was not engaged in wartime commitments although still maintained commitments to higher-risk locations such as Afghanistan and Iraq. The data considered over the three chapters of data analysis will reveal that the separation from a parent in the context of a peacetime deployment can still have a significant impact on the wellbeing of a pre-school child and their family. This was the case regardless of the length of the deployment. From the viewpoints of the mothers, however, the length and types of deployments influenced the Army-focused support that they felt they received during this time, perceiving there to be a greater focus on operational deployments or those of longer duration. Interestingly, this also appeared to influence how the mothers framed such deployments and the support they felt they were entitled receive during this time, even where a high level of need was apparent. I therefore conclude that educational, social and Armed Forces policy and practice should provide appropriate family-focused support to facilitate good overall wellbeing across a family unit during a deployment, regardless of its length or type.

The pre-school settings in my sample were found to be important environments in terms of supporting the children's psychological, physical, social and cognitive wellbeing during

a father's deployment. The pre-schools were found to provide environments where the predictability of routines, structure and boundaries supported these four domains of the children's wellbeing. Cognitive wellbeing - referring to intellectual, educational or school-related indicators - emerged to a lesser extent within the data. The fact that it was not overtly raised does not necessarily mean, however, that it was not an important domain of the pre-school children's overall wellbeing. In my sample of ten focus children, their cognitive wellbeing did not appear to be negatively impacted by the fathers' deployments and this may be partly due to this being supported by the maintenance of maternal wellbeing as well as the routines and stability within their homes and pre-schools during this time. A more noticeable impact on cognitive wellbeing was reported by one pre-school when referring to children outside of the ten focus children whose attendance had been affected by the departure of their father on deployment. This is an area that would benefit from further research in the UK context.

Different levels of understanding of Army culture emerged across the eight pre-schools that the ten focus children attended. This factor was found to particularly influence the level to which the pre-schools understood and supported the wellbeing of the children and their families during a parental deployment. Three factors were found to influence the pre-schools' understanding of Army culture 1) the proximity of the early years setting to the Army Garrison, 2) practitioner expertise and experience of Army culture and 3) links between the pre-school settings and the Army. Those settings in closer proximity to the Garrison were more likely to have higher proportions of Army children attending as well as practitioners who had experience of working with these children and/or were Army spouses themselves. This led to a greater sense of knowledge being generated through a community of practice within these settings in terms of understanding the nuances and culture of Army life. This is important, given their perceived lack of wider educational information or support in working with these children. It is also important given the underrepresentation of pre-school practitioner voice in research on early years service children and the lack of regular communication with Army Welfare Services that was reported by half of the pre-schools that took part in my research. Chapter 6 has focused on the impact of environmental factors on the wellbeing of pre-school children

during a deployment. Chapters 7 and 8 will now consider the impact of social relationships, beginning with that between the child and the mother.

Chapter 7

The impact of children's relationships with the at-home mother

7.1 Introduction

Chapter 6 found that environmental and cultural factors were found to have an impact on the pre-school children's psychological, physical, social and cognitive domains of wellbeing. Both cultural historical theory (Hedegaard, 2008; Vygotsky, 1998) and the bioecological model of development (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994) highlight how social relationships also play a key role in children's development. The purpose of Chapter 7 and 8, therefore, is to address the following research question:

- How do social relationships impact upon different domains of pre-school children's wellbeing during a parental deployment?

The most influential relationship on the pre-school children's domains of wellbeing during a parental deployment to emerge from the data is that between the child and the at-home parent, in this case the mother. This forms the focus of this chapter. The domains of pre-school children's wellbeing impacted within this relationship will be considered within the concluding section of this chapter. The impact of other key relationships is considered in Chapter 8.

7.2 Enhanced clinginess and/or anxiety at being separated from the at-home mother during the period of deployment

In seven of the ten focus children, both the mothers and educational practitioners had seen changes in the child during the father's deployment that they associated with enhanced clinginess to and/or anxiety at being separated from the mother. This was the

primary way that the impact of the fathers' deployment presented within the pre-school children. It must be recognised that clinginess to or anxiety at being separated from a primary caregiver may be considered as a developmental attribute not unusual in young children aged three to four years. The challenge was to understand if this was a change in behaviour, if it was associated with the fathers' deployments and what the factors influencing it were. This section will firstly describe how these behaviours presented in the pre-school children, followed by a discussion of this finding.

Three behavioural changes relating to enhanced clinginess and/or anxiety at being separated from the mother emerged from the data:

- Increased emotional distress when being separated from the at-home mother or when perceiving that they might be separated from her
- Increased co-sleeping or a wish to co-sleep with the at-home mother
- Increased concern for the safety of the at-home mother

As outlined in section 5.5, such indicators of emotion and/or mental health were encoded under the domain of *psychological wellbeing* within the analysis of the data.

Seven of the ten mothers identified that their child had become more clingy and/or emotionally distressed at being separated from them during the period of the fathers' absence. These behavioural changes occurred to varying extents across the seven children, with some of the mothers reporting this to be the most significant change within their child during the father's deployment. For example, Owen's mother reported '*he would just say 'I want to stay with you, I want to be with you' and that was the only way it manifested*' (Owen's mother, individual interview). Toby's mother similarly described how Toby suddenly displayed severe anxiety at being separated from her during his father's absence, '*...the only thing that changed was like being away from me, but that's been massive*' (Toby's mother, combined interview with Toby). Practitioners from the early years settings also reported enhanced clinginess to mothers/primary caregivers both in

the ten focus children and also when reflecting on their wider cohort of Army children. This could take the form of physically clinging to their mother when faced with the prospect of separation, as was the case for four of the focus children including Jessica, *'she won't speak to us sometimes, she'll just cling to Mum's leg and we kind of have to work her away'* (Jessica's keyworker, individual interview). Jessica's keyworker confirmed that this was a change in her behaviour seen since her father had deployed, noting *'very rarely does she do it if Dad's here'* (Jessica's keyworker, individual interview). Toby's mother described how Toby's sudden anxiety at being separated from her had led to new and risky behaviours. These had started in the weeks immediately following his father's deployment, strongly suggesting a link between his behavioural change and his father's absence:

Pretty much straight away, maybe not straight away, maybe three or four weeks, a month after when he just – (turns to Toby and adopts softer tone of voice) - Remember when you just ran across the car park when Mummy went to get the ticket? And that was the first time he'd even unbuckled his belt, I didn't even know he could do it. He unbuckled his belt, he got out of the car, and all I was doing, I was literally behind the car but across the road getting the parking ticket at Asda, he came running over and a blimming car had to slam on the brakes whereas I was just (shouts) 'Toby!'. And like popping out the door he would just hate it and scream 'Let me out!', paying for petrol and stuff like that, never had any problems before... (Toby's mother - combined interview with Toby)

A further behavioural change associated with increased clinginess to the mother was that of changes in sleeping patterns or routines. Five of the ten mothers reported an increase of their pre-school child wanting to co-sleep with them during the fathers' absence. Jessica's mother reflected on how she had seen this behaviour across two deployments that had occurred in quick succession, *'from the night he left till the night he came back she would not sleep in her own bed...the night he came back she walked straight into her own room and said 'night night' and got straight into her own bed'* (Jessica's mother, individual interview). Isla's mother similarly noticed a pattern of Isla wanting to co-sleep

more across her father's recent and successive deployments, *'last time she ended up in my bed every night. This time she has started coming in in the early hours of the morning, which she wouldn't do if her Dad was here'* (Isla's mother, individual interview).

A final way that increased clinginess and anxiety at being separated from the mother presented in two of the ten children was through an increased concern for the safety of the at-home mother. Both Owen and Jessica's mothers reported their children's increase in anxiety at being separated from them was accompanied by an increase in their children's concern for the mothers' safety during the period of their fathers' absence. Owen's mother reported how Owen was concerned for her safety whilst spending a weekend away from her at his grandparent's house during his father's deployment, *'he had to ring up to me every hour or two in the day to speak to me and to make sure that I was ok... and he'd ring up and say 'when you come and collect me drive carefully, come fast but don't come too fast' like he'd got really protective'* (Owen's mother, individual interview). Jessica's mother reported similar behaviours that indicated Jessica had developed an increased concern for her mother's safety. She reported that Jessica had not displayed these behaviours before her father's deployment:

You know I think somehow she's got it into her head that she now has to look after me... we'll be sat watching the tv and talking about what's on the tv and she'll go 'But it's ok Mummy, because even though there's a scary monster I will look after you, I will make sure the monster doesn't...' you know, on My Little Pony or something along those lines, 'They won't get you Mummy.' (Jessica's mother, individual interview)

The finding of increased clinginess and anxiety about being separated from the mother supports findings within American research which have shown that deployment is associated with significantly increased levels of general, separation and total anxiety compared to community norms in children aged three to five (Barker & Berry, 2009; Lester *et al.*, 2016; Mustillo, Wadsworth & Lester, 2016). They are also in similarity to the findings of Chartrand *et al.* (2008) who reported an increase in internalised behavioural symptoms - such as emotional reactivity or withdrawal - during a parental deployment. As

highlighted in Chapter 2, however, I argue that existing research often frames such changes in young children as problem behaviours rather than as valued and age-appropriate expressions of young children faced with the lengthy separation from one or both of their parents. Such approaches also often fail to adequately explore the reasons behind these behaviours or to represent the perspectives of the child. Further analysis therefore affords a greater depth of insight into the factors leading to these behaviours. Two findings emerge from the data that were associated with the increase in clinginess and/or anxiety at being separated from the mother during the father's deployment: 1) close attachment relationships were an important source of comfort and support during a time of stress and disruption in the children's lives and 2) increased clinginess and/or anxiety at being separated from the mother was associated with a sense of vulnerability or fear that the mother might also leave.

The behaviour of increased clinginess and/or anxiety at being separated from the mother was firstly found to be associated with an increased need for comfort during a time of disruption and stress within the children's lives. This, in turn, was primarily associated with secure and adaptive attachment relationships between the ten focus pre-school children and their mothers. Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969) proposes that children have a strong propensity to develop an emotional bond with their parents or caregivers from birth. A secure attachment relationship can provide children with a sense of security that they can obtain comfort or protection when feeling distressed or frightened. A vital element of the attachment relationship is associated with the parent's/caregiver's ability to act as an external source of emotional regulation for the child and to provide support through which the children can overcome and master challenging situations (Paley, Lester & Mogil, 2013). Masten and Gewirtz (2006) similarly stress the importance of healthy attachment relationships and good internal adaptive resources to give children a good start in life and to equip them with the human and social capital needed for success during new or stressful experiences. The finding that the pre-school children displayed increased clinginess and/or anxiety at being separated from the mother during the fathers' absences should therefore not necessarily be framed through a deficit lens. All participants who took part in the study, including the pre-school children such as Toby, confirmed that the period of the deployment-related absence of the fathers had to

varying degrees caused sadness and emotional distress within all ten of the focus children, *'good when Daddy's here but not when just Mummy's here'* (Toby, combined interview with Toby's mother). Young children retreating to a primary caregiver or trusted adult in times of sadness or distress is a behaviour associated with healthy attachment relationships (Bowlby, 1969). It also highlights how a child has a sense of agency through drawing upon the memories of their own previous experiences, developed socially with others, of what has brought them comfort in the past (Goncu, 1999; Stetsenko, 2017; Vygotsky, 1981, 1989). In this sense, they are an active agent in the creation of circumstances that promote their health and wellbeing (Fleer, 2003; Rose, Gibert & Richards, 2016). In the examples presented above, an increased desire to be near the mother during a father's sudden absence can be seen to be indicative of a secure and adaptive attachment behaviour; the child needs comfort and knows it can be accessed from their mother during this time of distress.

Whilst the sudden absence of a parent was found to cause emotional distress and sadness, it is not a foregone conclusion that this in itself would then lead to poor psychological wellbeing. The philosophical discourse of wellbeing offers an interesting perspective here, highlighting how the emotion of happiness can not realistically be maintained at all times and feeling sad in response to losses within one's life is an entirely appropriate emotion (Clack, 2012). Ancient philosophical approaches acknowledge the importance of cultivating mental resources that enable individuals to cope with all of life's eventualities, good and bad (Clack, 2012). Clack (2012, p.501) notes how this position recognises that the fulfilling life requires both the 'cultivation of an appropriate disposition *and* a supportive external context in which such an outlook might flourish' (original emphasis). Feeling sad at the sudden absence of a father and seeking the support of the mother (or other trusted adult) can therefore be seen as a normal behaviour. For the pre-school child, knowing that they can access the comfort and support of their mother during this time can help them to come to terms with and adapt to the changes in their home situation. In this sense, healthy attachment relationships between the children and their mothers were a protective factor and a pre-requisite for positive psychological wellbeing during the fathers' deployments. This can be seen to be

an important component of what Roberts (2010) refers to as *resilient wellbeing*, in which normal development occurs under difficult conditions.

Taking a psychological approach, Dodge *et al.*'s (2012) model of wellbeing offers a further interesting perspective on this finding. Their model conceptualises wellbeing as a see-saw with a set point of equilibrium or homeostasis; the fluctuating state of wellbeing being caused by challenges and resources of the individual. Dodge *et al.* (2012, p.230) note 'in essence, stable wellbeing is when individuals have the psychological, social and physical resources they need to meet a particular psychological, social and/or physical challenge'. Having a supportive and close attachment bond with a mother can be seen as an important psychological resource in helping the child to return to a state of equilibrium during or following a time of distress. It must be acknowledged, however, that not all pre-school Army children experiencing deployment will have a secure attachment relationship with their non-deployed parent (Riggs & Riggs, 2011). The cultural historical perspective highlights how detrimental developmental effects can occur where a child remains in conflict that cannot be transformed into positive development (Fleer, 2010; Hedegaard, 2009). This is an area that would benefit from additional research within the UK context.

For the majority of the focus children, the increase in clinginess to and/or anxiety at being separated from the mother was either short-term or was more likely to occur at specific trigger points of increased stress during the deployment, such as the initial period of deployment or when a father returned to operations following a period of rest and recuperation (R&R). This supports my finding that the comfort of and attachment bond with the at-home mother helped the children to adapt to the changes within their home environment. For three of the ten focus children, however, the increase in clinginess and anxiety at being separated from the mother during their father's deployment occurred over a longer and more sustained period of time. In all three of these cases, there was strong link between this behaviour and a fear that the mother might also leave. This in turn was linked to individual factors within the children (see section 7.3.2) and to the dyadic nature of relationships (see section 7.2.2).

Owen's mother described how it had taken a large proportion of her husband's five and a half month deployment for Owen to feel confident that she was not going to leave as well, *'it took months, four and a half months maybe, for him to click that it was ok me being downstairs, that I wasn't going to disappear'* (Owen's mother, individual interview). Jessica's mother felt that Jessica's increased clinginess was influenced by Jessica's uncertainty about the difference in professional roles between her mother and her father (see section 7.3.2) and was subsequently concerned her mother might also be sent away, *'I think for some reason she thinks when I drop her off here I'm not gonna come back to get her...I kind of pick up that she always says 'I don't want you to leave me Mummy, I don't want you to go to work' so I don't know if she thinks me going to work is the same as Daddy going to work...'* (Jessica's mother, individual interview). Interestingly, as discussed above, both Owen and Jessica had also displayed an increased concern for the safety and wellbeing of the mother during their fathers' absence, again indicating that they felt a sense of vulnerability that they could be left alone if something were to happen to the mother. As detailed in Chapter 5, Jessica and Owen did not take part in the research, therefore it is difficult to fully understand the subjective experiences of their father's deployments. Talking alongside his mother, Toby was able to offer some valuable insight into the feelings that were possibly motivating the extreme anxiety he felt at being separated from her that, in turn, were leading to new and risky behaviours:

Toby's Mother - (turns to Toby) *I went in the shower and I was washing my hair and I took too long didn't I? And you didn't like the fact that you couldn't see me so you went to Angela's house didn't you, she lives right there (points to the house next door), so he went out the back gate and round there – I thought he was watching tv so I came out the shower and she was just like 'You do know Toby's here?!' And he's never, ever, run out of the gate before. And another time I was just in the bathroom and he got the, (turns to Toby) what did you get from the drawer downstairs? He got a knife from the drawer downstairs, it was just to get through the door wasn't it, as a tool, I think if you had a hammer you would have got a hammer wouldn't you? Do you think a hammer would be better to get a door down or a knife?*

Toby - *A hammer! A laser!*

Georgina - *Do you remember why you wanted to get into the bathroom?*

Toby - *For a Mummy cuddle!*

Georgina - *You wanted Mummy cuddles! Why did you want Mummy cuddles?*

Toby - *I was scared*

Georgina - *You were scared. What made you scared?*

Toby - *I thought my Mum had runned away*

(Toby's mother & Toby, combined interview)

Toby's comments of *'I was scared....I thought my Mum had runned away'* alongside his mother's descriptions of his new behaviours give a strong indication that he was experiencing a fear of his mother leaving him during his father's deployment. This was then associated with his severe anxiety when faced with the prospect of being separated from her. This was supported by further comments that Toby made at various points about not liking the situation of his father being away from the family home such as *'I like it when my Daddy and my Mummy's just here and not when my Daddy's not here and my Mummy's not here'* (Toby, combined interview with Toby's mother). Toby clearly felt more secure when both his mother and his father were in the family home. This was reinforced by the viewpoint of his mother who reported *'I think that's just his worst nightmare, if he didn't have me or Daddy'* (Toby's mother, combined interview with Toby).

Further analysis of the data strongly indicated that dyadic relational processes were at work in shaping the deployment experiences of Toby, as well as in the experiences of the other children. This will now be explored in more depth.

7.3 The dyadic nature of attachment relationships

7.3.1 The dyadic nature of attachment relationships between the child and the at-home mother

The dyadic nature of the attachment relationship between the child and the at-home mother and the impact of this on the overall wellbeing of the pre-school child was clearly evident throughout the data. In short, the wellbeing of the mother impacted on the wellbeing of the pre-school child, just as the wellbeing of the pre-school child impacted on the wellbeing of the mother in a recurring cyclical action. This finding strongly supports that seen in American literature which has highlighted the dyadic nature of relationships on young children's experiences of a parental deployment (Barker & Berry, 2009; Lieberman & Horn, 2013; Paley, Lester & Mogil, 2013). It also highlights the significance of individual characteristics of the children on their own wellbeing during a parental deployment (see section 7.3.2). From the cultural historical perspective, the child is an active agent in the creation of the circumstances that promote their health and wellbeing and contextual factors should not only be envisaged to be having an effect *on* the child (Fleer, 2003; Rogoff, 2003; Rose, Gilbert & Richards, 2016). Importantly, the relationship between the mother and the pre-school child could offer both aspects of resilience and risk to the overall wellbeing of the child during the father's deployment. This finding helps to avoid a potential crisis narrative (Riddell, 2009, see Chapter 1) surrounding the at-home parent/caregiver during this time.

The dyadic nature of attachment relationships and the impact of both mother and child's psychological wellbeing was evident in Toby's situation. His mother reported feeling more stressed, in part due to Toby's heightened separation anxiety, but simultaneously recognised that her heightened stress levels were then having an impact on his psychological wellbeing:

So yeah he's just like to the point where it's every five minutes, just checking that I'm there. I think the stress of things, I've probably not helped the situation at first where I'm stressed out and I'm like 'this is really hard for

Mummy', you know, little things...because when it's just constant. (Toby's mother, combined interview with Toby)

She recognised that her stress had potentially combined with Toby's distress at his father's absence to impact on his psychological wellbeing, *'it's hard to know if it was to do with how stressed I was, the fact that Matt's away, I think it's also not knowing why Daddy's away, the fear of them not being there'* (Toby's mother, combined interview with Toby). Discussions alongside Toby highlighted the significance of this relational process further when he recalled a situation where he had been concerned that his mother might leave in reaction to her elevated levels of stress:

Toby - *She has (left) before though, when I was crying*

Toby's Mother - *Where did I go though?*

Toby - *I don't just*

Toby's Mother - *Did I go in the bathroom, where did I go?*

Toby - *In your bedroom and locked the door and said 'I will never come out again' and you gone out the gate without us*

(Toby's mother and Toby, combined interview)

Continued discussion with Toby's mother gave further insight into the dyadic relational processes at play in this situation:

That was the time when, I mean. (Pauses). It's been hard. They were playing up, Matt wasn't here and I found out I was pregnant and they knew something was going on and it was really difficult and I, yeah, I did have those moments where it's just - I can't take this, it's really hard. And I think it was one of them when I was, you know, when you tell them ten times and then they just do it anyway, and I'd just gone oh my God I can't take this. And I'd just gone upstairs to get ready then and he was just following me up the stairs, literally just going 'Don't go Mummy, don't go!' and I was like 'I'm just going to get ready' and he's going 'But don't go!' And then I was like 'I'M

NOT GOING ANYWHERE!’ and that just stressed me out even more and he was ‘Mummy! (indicates crying) I want a cuddle’ but the last thing you want to do when they have stressed you out is that. But obviously that’s all they need and I just thought ‘I need to go in the bathroom’. So I just shut the door then / It was literally in a split second he must have run downstairs, I thought he’d gone into his room and it was like ‘whack, whack’ on the door so I opened the door and said ‘stop that’ and he had a big kitchen knife.
(Toby’s mother, combined interview with Toby) ⁵

Reactions of young children are closely attuned to the reactions of the significant adults around them and a parental deployment may disrupt attachment relationships by affecting the stability of the at-home parenting (Lieberman & Horn, 2013; Paris *et al.*, 2010; Posada *et al.*, 2015). Challenging behaviours from children can in turn affect the at-home parent’s experience of deployment (Paley, Lester & Mogil, 2013; Palmer, 2008) and this cyclical process was apparent in Toby’s scenario. An attachment perspective (Bowlby, 1969) offers further insight into Toby’s situation. When a primary attachment figure (such as a father) leaves on a deployment, some of a child’s usual resources for dealing with stressful events (from the relationship with the absent parent) may be no longer available. The child may then rely on the at-home parent for more reassurance and comfort to cope with the distress of the absence of the other parent. The increased need for comfort and reassurance may occur at a point where the at-home parent is less equipped to provide this – more tired, more stressed and having difficulties in caring for themselves (Lowe *et al.*, 2012; Strong & Lee, 2017). As a result, even the most sensitive and responsive parent may become less closely attuned and available to their child’s emotional needs (Paley, Lester & Mogil, 2013). Dyadic relational processes such as these are clearly at work in Toby’s situation. The psychological wellbeing of Toby’s mother was being impacted by Toby’s anxiety, alongside other factors such as her pregnancy, her

⁵ Whilst this situation could be interpreted as a potential safeguarding issue, I was confident that this was a one-off situation and neither observed or became aware of other markers of safeguarding concern during my research with Toby, his mother or his pre-school setting. This situation was discussed in full with my research supervisors at Bath Spa University.

husband's absence and the lone parenting of two young children. This in turn was having an effect on Toby's psychological wellbeing in a cyclical pattern.

Having to operate as a lone parent to young children during the period of deployment was a factor identified by all of the mothers as being a source of increased stress. Joshua's mother reported how she felt the strains of lone parenting following her husband's return to Estonia after a period of R&R, '*...he was back and I could go, not go and do things but I could go to Tesco on my own and he'd have the kids and we'd share the bedtime so he'd put Joshua to bed and I'd put Millie to bed, it was the extra hands basically*' (Joshua's mother, individual interview). Others highlighted the difficulties of having to be a lone parent to young children at the same time as continuing to cope with the usual demands of everyday life. Bedtimes and mealtimes were highlighted as especially difficult times, such as for Daisy's mother who described it as '*pretty stressful, like bouncing from bedroom to bedroom 'Alright you be quiet whilst I go and sort you out, and then I'll sort you out and come back to you', up and down the stairs*' (Daisy's mother, combined interview with Daisy).

Isla's mother reflected on how her husband's eight-month deployment to Estonia the previous year had had a negative impact on the dyadic relationship and psychological wellbeing of herself and Isla during that time:

I think with Daddy going away obviously I was stressed because Daddy was going away, that rubbed off on her and it was just terrible, her behaviour was terrible, like she is a good kid on the whole, obviously she has her moments and I know I'm Mum but on the whole she's a really good child and she was just horrible and we clashed. I think by the end of it we'd had so much of each other that neither of us wanted to be around each other anymore. (Isla's mother, individual interview)

Interestingly, whilst now experiencing a three-month training deployment to Canada, Isla's mother drew upon these historical experiences to foster a sense of resiliency. In this sense, the past is also present in the current moment (Fleer, 2016) and the various

aspects of individuals' lives can be seen to be interacting dialectically, shaping and reshaping each other continuously (Vygotsky, 1998). This was seen in how she framed the current deployment, *'I know I keep saying it but it's only three months, it's not a huge deal, and I think because the last one was such a long time'* (Isla's mother, individual interview). It was also seen in her expressions of how she would now more confidently manage difficult situations in the relationships between herself and Isla during the current deployment, *'I'd pack her off to my Mum's... I know that sounds terrible, but I do strongly believe that a lot of the behaviour came from because she was just fed up of me and I was fed up of her'* (Isla's mother, individual interview). These experiences also support the findings of Lowe *et al.* (2012) who found that the relational attachment between the at home parent and child is negatively impacted by a greater length of deployment. Lowe *et al.* (2012) discuss their findings in terms of the attachment bond becoming weakened when parental figures (both deployed or at home) become unavailable or unresponsive due to being away from the family home or due to the stresses of maintaining the household in the absence of the other parent. Where Lowe *et al.*'s (2012) findings are more limited, however, are in their failure to consider the dyadic nature of relationships during a deployment. Isla's mother recognised that her own increased stress during the absence of her husband impacted upon Isla's psychological wellbeing but also clearly felt that the behavioural changes in Isla were challenging for her and had contributed to increased overall family stress and poorer psychological wellbeing during this time.

Dyadic relational processes were also apparent in shaping Tom's psychological wellbeing during his father's deployment. The manager and deputy manager at Tom's pre-school reported that Tom was displaying significantly increased levels of challenging behaviours which they believed was linked to his father's deployment the previous week, *'anxiety and stress levels are accelerated which is why I think we're seeing the anger because he's very violent to staff'* (Manager B, combined interview with Deputy Manager B). Tom's mother reported similar behaviours at home, *'he just kicks off, like, if he's been told to do something, he doesn't want to do it, and you try and move him, then he starts hitting and kicking and / but yes, but maybe it's got worse because it's been more stressful because it's just been me dealing with it'* (Tom's mother, individual interview). Unlike the other

nine focus children, Tom was also displaying what could be categorised as poor social wellbeing. NICE (2012, p.1) defines social wellbeing in the early years to be when a child 'has good relationships with others and does not have behavioural problems, that is, they are not disruptive, violent or a bully'. Further discussions with Tom's mother and the practitioners at Tom's pre-school (also the employer of Tom's mother) strongly indicated that Tom's poor social and psychological wellbeing were being heavily influenced both by the impact of his father's deployment (see section 8.2) and by the impact of his father's deployment on his mother's psychological wellbeing. The impact of the mothers' psychological wellbeing on the pre-school children during the period of deployment will now be explored in more depth in section 7.3.2 below. Section 7.3.3 will then consider the impact of individual factors relating to the child within the context of a mother-child relationship during a father's deployment.

7.3.2 The impact of the at-home mother's psychological wellbeing

The data revealed that the dyadic nature of the attachment relationships between the child and the mother was influenced by the psychological wellbeing of the mother during the period of the fathers' absence. This finding supports that seen in existing American research which has highlighted the significance of the non-deployed parent/caregiver's ability to cope with the stresses of a deployment on the overall wellbeing of young children during this time (Barker & Berry, 2009; Lester *et al.*, 2016, Osofsky and Chartrand, 2013). It is also in line with the following statement of the UK's National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE, 2016, p.2) surrounding children's wellbeing in the context of their relationships with their main carers:

A child's relationship with their main carers has a major impact on the child's social and emotional development. In turn, their carers' ability to provide a nurturing relationship depends on their own emotional and social wellbeing. This can be affected by a range of factors, for example, the family environment, their social networks and employment status.

From the perspectives of all of the early years practitioners who took part in the study, there was a clear and important link between the psychological wellbeing of the mother and the impact that this had on the psychological, physical and social domains of the pre-school children's wellbeing. In this sense, the psychological wellbeing of the mother strongly influenced multiple domains of the pre-school children's wellbeing during the period of the fathers' deployments, further demonstrating the interlinked and holistic nature of wellbeing. In the majority of cases, the practitioners identified a positive sense of resilience in the mothers during the deployment and felt that this was being emulated in the pre-school children. This was important from the perspective of the manager at Joshua's pre-school, *'...Joshua is a prime example of one who I feel that throughout life will get on with things because he's got that nucleus of Abbie (Joshua's mother) there'* (Joshua's pre-school Manager, individual interview). It was also evident in Lucy's relationship with her mother:

Mummy's very confident with her and it's that, 'Okay, Lucy, you're going to have a lovely day here, I know that, and I'll see you later', so it's all imbued in her and she takes that confidence and uses it, so there's a great sense of she's naturally empowered by the confidence in Mum as her main carer.
(Deputy Manager E, individual interview).

Isla's pre-school similarly felt that her mother's psychological wellbeing had a positive impact on the overall wellbeing of Isla, *'she's got a very stable Mum which is massive, it's huge, so Mum is such a stable influence and stable force for her, which is great'* (Isla's pre-school manager, individual interview). In the American context, Riggs and Riggs (2011) highlight the importance of a stable family structure and secure attachment relationships between the at-home parent and child to adaptive family coping during a period of deployment. Pincus *et al.* (2004) note that, on a practical level, reorganising family routines facilitates the family's functioning in the absence of the service member. Building on this, the data in my study also revealed a strong relationship between the mothers' ability to maintain routines during the deployment and overall wellbeing across the family unit. From the perspectives of the majority of the educational practitioners and the mothers, the maintenance of routines was associated with a sense of resilience,

coping and strength within the mothers and, consequently, their children. Conversely, not maintaining routines was identified as both a cause and a symptom of poorer psychological wellbeing within some children and their families.

All six of the pre-school settings that took part in the research noted the significance of routines during a deployment. Of the seven focus children that attended these settings, six (Alfie, Jessica, Lucy, Toby, Joshua & Isla) were identified as maintaining good overall wellbeing in large part due to the mothers' ability to maintain routines within their day to day lives. The exception was Tom, whose pre-school setting observed a change of home routines and boundaries during deployments. For the majority of the focus children, maintaining routines was seen to be a positive factor in coping well with their father's deployment, as illustrated by the comments of Lucy's keyworker, *'when he first went she was a little bit unsettled but I think once she realised her world was going to stay as it is, nothing in her little routine was going to change, then she was absolutely fine'* (Lucy's keyworker, individual interview). This finding of the importance of routines support those seen in American research which have highlighted that maintaining the predictability of daily routines can be a protective factor to the healthy developmental course of young children during a period of parental deployment (Lieberman & Horn, 2008; 2013; Osofsky & Chartrand, 2013; Riggs & Riggs, 2011).

Many of the mothers recognised the significance of their own psychological wellbeing on that of their children. Charlotte's mother reflected on the impact of her own resilience on Charlotte's psychological wellbeing during the period of her husband's nine and a half month deployment, *'I'm sort of quite a strong character and I'm quite independent myself, and I'm a professional, so I'm used to being 'just get on with it'* (Charlotte's mother, combined interview with Charlotte). Charlotte's mother's emphasis on maintaining her own resilience during the period of parental deployment also appeared to be influenced by her wider observations of Army families in her local community, *'I know that a lot of other Army wives really struggle and then it reflects on the children because they see how much they (the mothers) are struggling'* (Charlotte's mother, combined interview with Charlotte). In this *figured world* (Holland *et al.*, 1999) of the Army community, Charlotte's mother could be seen to be drawing upon her socially

constructed understanding that the psychological wellbeing of at-home mothers has a direct impact on the overall wellbeing of their children during a time of deployment. In contrast to Charlotte, the psychological wellbeing of Tom's mother was linked to poorer outcomes of psychological and social wellbeing in Tom, which in turn impacted upon the psychological wellbeing of his mother in a cyclical process. Importantly, this was not exclusive to the period of her husband's deployment, yet both Tom's mother and Tom's pre-school (also her employer) felt that she was less resilient to the challenges of lone parenting during a deployment. Tom's mother herself identified her own mental health and psychological wellbeing as a contributing factor to her family's experiences of her husband's deployment:

...it's a struggle to do it on my own sometimes, like I have suffered from depression in the past and sometimes I feel like I might need to just go and speak to the doctor for a bit of reassurance and sometimes when it gets so bad I just worry that I don't really want to be on my own...

(Tom's mother, individual interview).

From the perspective of the manager and deputy manager of Tom's pre-school, the lowering of Tom's mother's psychological wellbeing was linked to her husband's regular and repeated absences. In their opinion, this had more of a direct influence on Tom's psychological wellbeing than that of the absence of his father itself, *'I think it's Mum's dip as a result of Dad going away, because I don't think he knows where he stands but more so now I think she's (Tom's mother's) in a tail spin. I saw her this morning and she looked really quite low'* (Deputy Manager B, combined interview with Manager B). From the perspective of Manager B, a change to the dynamic in parenting styles at home had contributed to this situation via a *'lack of consistency, lack of boundaries...'* (Manager B, combined interview with Deputy Manager B). They believed that this, in turn, led to a deterioration of Tom's psychological wellbeing which then impacted on his social wellbeing in the form of aggression towards other children within the pre-school. Illustrating the dyadic nature of wellbeing, Tom's mother also reflected on the challenges of maintaining boundaries whilst lone parenting:

I think the stress levels in the house get a little bit higher on my part when Dad goes away because I'm dealing with it all. When he's here it's easier because obviously if he hits his sister one of us can deal with him and one can deal with her and it's just it's the dealing with both of them, one's really angry and one's really upset and it's just, it is hard work.

(Tom's mother, individual interview).

Boss (1999) notes that such boundary ambiguity can occur where a family struggles to reorganise as members flow in and out. From the perspective of Roberts (2010), boundaries are important in terms of promoting wellbeing in young children and a change or ambiguity in boundaries appear to be influential in Tom's poor psychological and social wellbeing. The manager at Tom's pre-school also noted how she felt this regular and repeated nature of his father's deployments had an impact on Tom's ability to develop a secure attachment relationship with his father:

Deployment has rounded the family, because he's deployed a lot, and the way the family unit has had to progress as a family and I also feel if we also look at attachments and things like that those have played a massive part...

(Manager B, combined interview with Deputy Manager B).

Riggs and Riggs (2011) highlight how insecure attachment styles within a primary caregiver create a vulnerability for dysfunction within the context of a military deployment. The theme of Tom's attachment relationship with his father was echoed in a separate conversation with Tom's mother, who noted the long-term impact of a deployment early in Tom's life:

...so the first time he went away, Tom was six months old, so he (Tom's father) was just sort of getting to know him (Tom) properly ...when I first had him, like Ava was more of a Mummy's girl whereas, at first, Tom was a Daddy's boy. And then he went away and then when he came back he was like 10 months old and he was just like, he just wouldn't go to him, and from then on he's just stuck with me really. (Tom's mother, individual interview)

This finding supports those seen in American research which propose that a deployment can affect attachment relationships via two pathways; firstly, via the physical and prolonged separation from a parent and secondly, via the impact that it has on the parenting styles of the at-home parent (Lieberman & Horn, 2013; Paris *et al.*, 2010; Posada *et al.*, 2015). In the UK context, Nolan and Misca (2018, p.443) recently noted ‘it may be that these children are less affected by the absence of a parent than by the fluctuation in the parenting capacity of the home-front parent, usually the mother, owing to the strain of separation’. Whilst Nolan and Misca’s (2018) argument is indeed a valid one, I do not believe that this statement goes quite far enough. What is needed is a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that then lead to such fluctuations in the parenting capacity of the home-front parent, including those that promote resilience. This is not only important to avoid a crisis narrative surrounding the at-home parent, but also to better understand how educational, social and Armed Forces policy and practice can support the wellbeing of the at-home parent which, in turn, will support the wellbeing of their children.

Further analysis revealed that the relationship between Tom and his mother appeared to have areas of maternal *risk* which were associated with poor psychological and social wellbeing in Tom during his father’s deployment. These were poor mental health, struggles in lone parenting, challenging behaviour of the child, a lack of driving confidence and a lack of wider family support. Tom’s mother did, however, also have protective factors within her life, most notably in the support she felt she received from her friends and colleagues within the pre-school, *‘I couldn’t fault them when it comes to supporting me, because they are so good, like if I got upset about something I could, they are quite happy for me to just sit in there for half an hour and tell them’* (Tom’s mother, individual interview).

Wider analysis of the data revealed factors of both resilience and risk linked to the wellbeing of all of the mothers. All of the mothers and early years practitioners, for example, referred to the importance of support networks to the psychological wellbeing of the mother during times of deployment. The nature of mobility within the Army meant

that all of the mothers in the sample had moved away from their home towns where they may have been more able to access support from family members. All of the mothers referred to the importance of having friends, neighbours or colleagues at hand to provide help in situations where otherwise they would have been on their own. Owen's mother described how she valued the support of her neighbour (also an Army spouse) during her husband's deployment, *'...when Rob first went we had that terribly cold weather and my boiler was breaking and I was on my own and feeling a bit claustrophobic with the snow rising and she would come in and help me because she's got four kids of her own so understands all too well'* (Owen's mother, individual interview).

For many of the mothers, support was found within the community that they inhabited and was influenced by a sense of shared identity and experience in their figured world of the Army community (see section 6.2.1). Isla's mother remarked *'we've got our friends, and that's kind of the main thing really I think is our support network...I think because a lot of us are the same Regiment here so a lot of us are all in the same boat, so we've all clubbed together'* (Isla's mother, individual interview). Joshua's mother similarly referred to the importance of social relationships with people around her who were experiencing the same nine-month deployment to Estonia, *'I think like friends understanding how you feel because they're going through it or not going through it, so I've probably clicked more with the people who are going through it...'* (Joshua's mother, individual interview). For Charlotte's mother, the support and understanding of fellow Army spouses experiencing the same spousal deployment had been key to her own psychological wellbeing, *'...but I think what has helped me has been other Army wives, especially ones who are going through it or have been through it because you really do have that understanding'* (Charlotte's mother, combined interview with Charlotte). Interestingly, Isla's mother referred to a sense of threat to the community that the current Army restructuring under the *Army 2020* agenda may bring in the form of planned changes to Service Families Accommodation, whereby families will be encouraged to be dispersed into their own homes within civilian communities (often referred to as *civvy street* within service communities), *'...if we were on civvy street or like with the whole 20/20 thing that they're bringing in, I think that will disperse and it (support from the Army community) won't happen'* (Isla's mother, individual interview).

The comments of the mothers here highlight the importance that they placed on feeling understood in the context of their husbands' deployments, especially by other Army spouses who were or who had previously been in a similar situation. It appeared that this shared culture of experience and identity provided a source of support to the psychological wellbeing of the mothers which in turn supported the overall wellbeing of their children. These findings raise interesting questions for future research about the experiences of pre-school Army children who live away from the Army community during a parental deployment, where families can sometimes feel isolated from the shared experiences of the military community (Verey & Fosse, 2013). Yet caution must be given to not make a definitive conclusion that being part of an Army community will always enhance the psychological wellbeing of the at-home parent during a time of deployment. Wider comments from both parents and educational practitioners highlighted that Army life could be an isolating experience for some individuals and families. For example, drawing on her experience both as an Army spouse and educational practitioner within the Army community, the deputy manager from Tom's pre-school referred to the problems of those spouses who might not identify with this unique culture, *'...but because we are service we are all part of that one big family – which yes can work against you because if you don't fit in that family, you're stuffed...'* (Deputy Manager B, combined interview with Manager B) (see section 6.2.1 for further discussion). Similarly, Manager C drew upon her personal and professional experiences to refer to social stigma and social hierarchy that she observed within the community, *'...sometimes wives don't want to be part of an Army group, because of the social stigma that is attached, or if people have been in the Army longer, there is a bit of a social hierarchy. There can be wives that take their husband's rank and lord it over the troopers and things like that'* (Manager C, individual interview). Drawing on the figured worlds perspective of Holland *et al.* (1998), Cogan (2015) notes how rank and job title in the Armed Forces makes one's positional identity very clear, something that in the example above could be seen to be extending across the wider family unit.

For the majority of the mothers in the sample, Unit Welfare Officers (UWO) - as part of the Army Welfare Services (AWS) - were highlighted as positive sources of support during

the period of deployment. This was especially the case for the families currently experiencing a deployment to Estonia, where support from welfare took the form of organised trips to attractions both near and far and meals in local restaurants. Mothers in this group commented that there were psychological and social benefits of such trips to both themselves and their pre-school children, *'it's hard when you're on your own but 'cos there's a group of us going, like Joanne goes with her two and Joshua then plays with, you know, he's got someone to play with'* (Joshua's mother, individual interview). All of the mothers in this study with a spouse currently deployed to Estonia referred to the sense of support they felt from the physical presence of the UWOs and the coffee mornings that were hosted at the Army Welfare centres. Variations were noted, however, firstly in the levels support that they might get from these services and secondly, between families who might choose to not engage with the support offered. Toby's mother indicated that she felt members of AWS staff other than the welfare officers were more engaging and sympathetic to the situation of the families, *'...the welfare officer is just a bloke who's a soldier, they're not counsellors, they don't genuinely have compassion or naturally have compassion in scenarios'* (Toby's mother, combined interview with Toby). Alfie's mother had observed that a high proportion of the families may choose not to engage in the Regimental days out that were offered during the deployment to Estonia, *'yeah, lots of people don't go to that. If you try and work out how many families are away there's probably at least 30, if not more, but you only see the same five or six people'* (Alfie's mother, individual interview).

The data revealed that there may be various reasons for this lack of uptake on the support offered by Army welfare. Lucy's mother, for example, reflected that she did not feel the need to access these services during her husband's six-month deployment to Afghanistan due to feeling enough support from within her community, *'I mean in terms of emotional support I know where to find it if I want to, but actually, it's fine...and patch life always helps, we've got neighbours, you understand, they'll have been through it all and you know it'll be your turn to comfort them at some point...'* (Lucy's mother, individual interview). Dandeker *et al.* (2006) similarly reported that UK service spouses favoured informal support (from family and other military wives) over formal support (from the regiment or other military sources) during periods of spousal deployment.

Whilst there were variations across the sample in terms of the mothers' uptake of support from AWS, what did appear to be important was the perception that it was readily available if needed.

The variations seen in the uptake of support from the UWOs may also be due to the qualitative differences between the deployments in terms of lengths and locations (see section 6.2.2 for further discussion). The families with a service member in Estonia indicated the length of this deployment to be a factor in their accessing the support of Army welfare. The pre-school practitioners and mothers indicated that individuals and organisations within the area seemed to place different levels of emphasis on different types and lengths of deployment. For example, according to some mothers, the support that AWS offered differed between those deployments that were considered operational (e.g. Estonia, Afghanistan) and those that were still relatively lengthy but were in more of a training capacity (e.g. Canada). Tom's mother felt that there was little support on offer from the UWOs during her husband's current training deployment to Canada, *'there's no support as such like, I've never really asked them for anything but there's never any, there's not really anything apart from a coffee morning, I don't think they do anything'* (Tom's mother, individual interview). Isla's mother believed the differences in UWO support offered between her husband's previous deployment to Estonia (eight months) and his current three-month deployment on training in Canada was due to the type of deployment he was on, *'I guess because it's not a proper deployment'* (Isla's mother, individual interview) (See section 6.2.2 for a more detailed discussion of support available during a deployment and the community conceptualisations of such deployments).

As well as having support within the community, having the support of wider family members was also found to be an important protective factor to the mother's psychological wellbeing during the period of spousal deployment. Isla's mother felt that the support of her own mother was vital to her psychological wellbeing during her husband's current and previous deployments, *'I think we're very lucky so my home town is an hour away, and I think we've very, very lucky in that I can still go home to my family, whereas a lot of people can't'* (Isla's mother, individual interview). Joshua's mother similarly identified the regular visits from her parents as being important to the

psychological wellbeing of herself and Joshua during her husband's nine-month deployment. This was particularly due to the practical support they provided in terms of helping with the tasks that her husband would have usually undertaken around the house and also in helping with the childcare of her two young children. Other mothers experienced less support from wider family members which could lead to a sense of isolation within the deployment. Living 250 miles away from her family, Tom's mother felt this distance contributed to her having less support during this time, *'because I don't have any support, like apart from friends here, I have no family that come to help me out, so literally when he goes away, I am on my own'* (Tom's mother, individual interview). These findings are similar to those of Charuvastra and Cloitre (2008) who argue that the most robust protective factors to various life adversities are a supportive family and/or other social networks amongst adults and sensitive and responsive parenting amongst children. This finding is also significant in light of Bronfenbrenner's (2005) assertion that the attachment bond between a parent/carer and a child is bolstered by the support given to the single parent by another or others.

In line with the statement of NICE (2016) quoted at the beginning of this section, employment was also identified as a source of support to the mothers' psychological wellbeing and to positive family functioning during the period of their spouses' deployment. Half of the mothers referred to the importance of their work in maintaining their own psychological wellbeing during a deployment, such as was the case for Jessica's mother, *'...I use work as my adult time, you know a bit of adult conversation...'* (Jessica's mother, individual interview). Tom's mother described how her social friendships at her place of employment (which was also Tom's pre-school) were of benefit to her psychological wellbeing during her husband's absence, *'I'm really lucky that outside of work, they are also my friends, so I've always got someone messaging me to make sure that, if we've had a particularly bad day, or whatever, just to message me to make sure I'm alright'* (Tom's mother, individual interview). Charlotte's mother similarly attributed her resilience and independence to being a highly skilled professional nurse, although the nature of shift work within nursing meant that she had had to give this up during her husband's nine and a half month deployment to Estonia. Charlotte's mother had now chosen to work in Charlotte's pre-school during her husband's deployment, citing the

importance of working for maintaining her own wellbeing alongside the need to work hours that allowed her to take care of Charlotte during this period of lone parenting. She remarked that this decision had, however, had financial implications for the family, *'...I was on a very good salary actually private nursing at the time – so now I've gone into childcare so, as you can imagine, that's not paid very well, very, very minimal, but that's the choice you make isn't it'* (Charlotte's mother, combined interview with Charlotte).

Discussions with the pre-school practitioners regarding families outside of the ten focus children highlighted that the poor psychological wellbeing of an at-home parent could have significant implications to the overall wellbeing of young children in the context of a deployment. Two early years settings described scenarios whereby they considered a parental deployment to have been a significant factor contributing to a serious safeguarding concern relating to the physical and psychological wellbeing of pre-school children in the form of neglect/maltreatment. In both cases there was a strong link to the psychological wellbeing of the mother during the period of deployment. These scenarios were outside of the ten focus children, yet I consider it important to draw upon this data in view of the link between maltreatment and deployment highlighted in the American research (Gibbs *et al.*, 2007; Taylor *et al.*, 2016). Both scenarios described by the early years settings were complex and it is important to note that they were considered by these settings to be relatively rare within the context of deployment.

Manager A described having recently experienced a situation where she perceived the deployment of a father to have significantly contributed to serious safeguarding issues surrounding the physical, psychological and social wellbeing of three siblings aged four years and below. She believed that a key element of this family's situation was the poor psychological wellbeing of the mother and that this was in large part linked to the stress of her husband's deployment. The pre-school manager described how, following the deployment of the father, there was a noticeable change in the physical appearance of the family's three youngest children which led to serious concerns surrounding the home environment. Alongside other issues of concern - including those indicating poor psychological and social wellbeing - the pre-school had then actioned referrals to the

Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and to Social Services. Manager A described her concerns in some detail:

So children coming in in an absolute state, so their clothes, appearance, hygiene, so everything had dipped. Mum wasn't coping as well so Mum dipped as well. Coming in with a lot more pre-existing, sustaining many more injuries, there was a lot more noticeable things going on so it was a much bigger picture and it was a complete depletion of Dad going away, he'd gone, that was it and Mum couldn't physically cope so just went to pot and the impact that that had on those three children was unbelievable.

(Manager A, individual interview)

It is important to note that the deployment in itself should not necessarily be considered as the cause of the safeguarding issue in this scenario. Further discussion with the pre-school manager led to an emerging picture of poor psychological wellbeing in the mother and the children that would indicate that this family were at risk before the actual deployment. For example, she referred to the mother being isolated within the community and lacking in social support, a factor which has been shown to be a contributory factor in maternal depression, poor quality child rearing, child abuse and neglect in non-service communities (Scott, Brady & Glynn, 2001). She also noted that the pre-school child's social behaviour had led him to be similarly isolated amongst his peers. She believed that the father was a stabilising force in this family, '*...Dad was that rock really*' (Manager A, individual interview), and that his deployment had acted as a catalyst to the events which unfolded, '*literally where Mum wasn't that strong nucleus there for those children they were literally clawing each other...*' (Manager A, individual interview). An attachment perspective highlights how a vital element of the attachment relationship is associated with the parent/caregiver's ability to act as an external source of emotional regulation for the child and to provide support through which the children can overcome and master challenging situations (Paley, Lester & Mogil, 2013). The cultural historical perspective also highlights how detrimental developmental effects can occur where conflict cannot be transformed into positive development (Fleer, 2010; Hedegaard, 2009). In this situation, the ability of the mother to provide a stable *safe base* for her children

during the deployment was being compromised by the factors that were leading to her own poor psychological wellbeing during this time which, in turn, was impacting on the overall wellbeing of her young children.

Manager C described a similar scenario at her pre-school, where the practitioners perceived a child's overall wellbeing to be at greater risk from potential safeguarding issues linked to the psychological wellbeing of the mother during her partner's deployment, *'Dad was deployed and Mum was ill and we were, the family was at crisis and I spent the whole day ringing around everywhere saying someone needs to get out now and support this family'* (Manager C, individual interview). In similarity to the situation at the other pre-school, the manager described how she felt that the mother had been vulnerable and at risk in the first instance which had contributed to poorer outcomes across the family when the husband was then deployed. In this scenario, the pre-school had not seen any indications of physical maltreatment but felt there were serious indicators of risk which they were monitoring and attempting to get support for. This was particularly in terms of the mother's ability to cope as a lone parent and the impact of this upon her psychological wellbeing during the deployment, *'...and actually Mum cannot cope... she rings me a lot, cries'* (Manager C, individual interview). In similarity to the situation described by Manager A, the deployment again appeared to be a catalyst to unfolding events, although in the absence of the family's perspectives on this it is difficult to explore to what extent this and previous deployments had contributed to the scenario. From both of the managers' perspectives, the psychological wellbeing of the two mothers meant that they were not resilient enough to cope with the demands of deployment in the first instance which was leading to a risk to the children's overall wellbeing in terms of physical, psychological and social outcomes. Riggs and Riggs (2011) note how, in extreme cases during a parental deployment, child abuse or neglect can occur in overwhelmed parents particularly when characterised by the presence of high attachment avoidance and anxiety. The increased need for awareness in safeguarding children during a parental deployment is also highlighted in the DfE/MOD's (2019) Service Children in State Schools Handbook which notes that being separated from one or both parents can place a child at additional risk. This is an area that would benefit from future research in the UK context.

Whilst arguably extreme, these two scenarios highlight that at-home parents who are less resilient to the demands of deployment may lead to a higher risk of poor physical, psychological, social and cognitive wellbeing in their young children. Significantly, both of the pre-school settings reported little or no contact with Army Welfare Services/Unit Welfare Officers and believed there were limited options for deployment-related support within the educational or healthcare contexts. Where deployment is seen to be a contributing factor to the poor wellbeing or potential harm of a child, I conclude that it is imperative that a multi-agency approach includes representatives from the Regiment/Unit that has deployed the serving parent. It is also important that social, educational and Armed Forces policy and practice recognises the impact that the wellbeing of the at-home parent can have on the wellbeing of young children during a deployment and acts to bolster this.

7.3.3 The impact of individual factors of the child

The child is an active agent in the creation of the circumstances that promote their health and wellbeing and, whilst contextual factors are influential, such factors should not only be envisaged to be having an effect *on* the child (Fleer, 2003; Rogoff, 2003; Rose, Gilbert & Richards, 2016). Both cultural historical theory (Hedegaard, 2008; Vygotsky, 1998) and the bioecological model of development (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994) emphasise the dialectical interrelatedness of biological, psychological, social, cultural and historical influences that influence the development of the child (Robbins, 2005; Rogoff, 2003). The data revealed that each child was a unique individual with their own personalities which, in turn, was associated with differences in that child's experience of their father's deployment. The data further revealed that the children's awareness and understanding of their fathers' deployments was influenced by the developmental levels of the children.

The personalities of the children emerged as an important factor. Three of the ten focus children (Daisy, Lucy and Charlotte), for example, experienced very little or no increased clinginess or anxiety at being separated from the mother during the time of parental

deployment. This was in contrast to the other seven focus children who had displayed increased clinginess as discussed in section 7.2 above. Whilst these differences were undoubtedly influenced by social and environmental factors surrounding these three children, the mothers also believed that the personalities of their children influenced their responses to the deployment. Drawing on a comparison of her two children experiencing the same parental deployment, Daisy's mother remarked *'I think she's pretty chilled out, she's so laid back, I'm lucky with her!'* (Daisy's mother, individual interview). This was in contrast to Daisy's five-year-old brother Jack who had shown much greater levels of clinginess and anxiety at being separated from his mother during his father's deployment, *'he's very much a stresser and a worrier, so he would sit at night and worry about Daddy'* (Daisy's mother, combined interview with Daisy). Lucy's mother similarly felt that Lucy's personality was more resilient to her father's deployment in comparison to her six-year-old sister, Flora, *'Lucy is not the most emotional of people, like she's not a sensitive soul particularly and I think it would be a very different sort of story talking about, if I looked at Flora two years ago, during this, I think it would have been very different'* (Lucy's mother, individual interview). Charlotte's mother described Charlotte to be *'...a very confident child...'* (Charlotte's mother, combined interview with Charlotte) indicating that she felt this had bolstered Charlotte's resilience to her father's deployment. This finding, that a child's individual personality influences their psychological wellbeing during a deployment, is in line with that of Lieberman and Horn (2013), who posit that the reactions of different children to deployment-related separations and reunions will be mediated by their proclivity of their temperament to distress versus resilience. Barker and Berry (2009) similarly found an association between difficult or anxious child temperament and increased behaviour problems during deployment. The psychological discourse argues that wellbeing can be subjectively defined and two individuals in the same circumstance may experience different wellbeing (Fegter, Machold & Richter, 2010). Individual differences in children's dispositional tendencies means that some children may be more vulnerable to stress in undesirable conditions than others (Chen & Schmidt, 2015). It is therefore not possible to assume that all Army children, even those from the same family, will experience a parent's deployment in the same way (see also section 8.4).

Developmental influences also emerged as an important individual factor, particularly influencing the children's psychological domain of wellbeing. The data revealed that the pre-school children's concepts of time, locations/distance and of the professional roles of their parents influenced the understanding they formed of their fathers' deployments. The deployment lengths of the ten focus children's fathers ranged from three months to nine and a half months, largely depending on the location of the deployment (see section 5.3). Across the whole sample of ten focus children, time emerged as a difficult concept for the pre-school children to fully understand. This was largely due to the young age and developmental stage of the pre-school children and the somewhat abstract and intangible nature of time. Distance and the roles of their fathers were similarly difficult concepts for the pre-school children to fully conceptualise. The deputy manager at Tom's pre-school summarised the difficulties she observed pre-school children facing when trying to understand the changes in their home situation, *'...they don't understand if you say 'your Dad's in Canada, he'll be back in three months', that means nothing – where's Canada, how long is three months? And those children just think 'oh my word, where has this massive part of my life gone'...'* (Deputy Manager B, combined interview with Manager B). Lucy's mother described how Lucy's understanding of time led to difficulties in her forming an understanding of her father's absence after he first deployed, *'there was some initial like 'oh is Daddy coming home next week?' I was like, well no, it's six months'* (Lucy's mother, individual interview). For some children, this uncertainty of time relating to their father's deployment led to psychological distress. Daisy's mother noted how she felt that both Daisy and her brother did not have a firm understanding of time relating to their father's six-month deployment. She felt that this inability to conceptualise time contributed to psychological distress within her five-year-old son:

...he's aware he's away but not that sure when he's coming back. Like he'd sit in bed and say (adopts an upset tone) 'It's been a hundred years since Daddy's been away and he's not coming back for another hundred years!' They have no idea of tomorrow, three weeks, six months, kind of thing.
(Daisy's mother, combined interview with Daisy).

Similarly, Tom's mother believed that whilst Tom knew his father was returning home in August, he could not fully conceptualise what this meant in terms of the length of time and this led to uncertainty and distress within his situation, *'he just keeps asking if it's August, he wants Daddy home, and he gets a bit upset'* (Tom's mother, individual interview). The pre-school children's uncertainty surrounding the deployment-related absence of their fathers is potentially a situation of ambiguous loss, a factor found by Huebner *et al.* (2007, p.121) to '...potentially impede successful adolescent development in the context of a military deployment'. By definition, an ambiguous loss is uncertain, vague, unclear and indeterminate (Boss, 1999) and strongly appeared to be influencing the psychological wellbeing of the pre-school children in my sample. This also links to Roberts' (2010) construct of agency in her model of wellbeing; the feeling of empowerment that we can make a difference for ourselves and for others.

Such findings have implications for supporting young children's psychological wellbeing during a parental deployment. Involving young children in preparations for a parental deployment can facilitate a more accurate understanding of the deployment, yet a potential barrier to this is where parents avoid this in the belief that their children are too young to understand (Louie & Cromer, 2014). Whilst this is a valid notion, preparing young children before a parental deployment can be challenging where it involves the difficult and somewhat abstract concepts of time. Lucy's mother, for example, described how discussions to prepare Lucy for her father's upcoming absence did not necessarily focus on the specific length of time that he was away, *'I don't think Lucy would have got it, particularly, if I'd sat her down and sort of said you know, because they still, you can still see now she doesn't have a brilliant concept of time, like, because they don't, a week and a month are all much the same'* (Lucy's mother, individual interview). She felt that strategies that facilitated a more tangible understanding of time throughout the deployment were more useful to Lucy. She described having a countdown jar that she filled with chocolates relating to the same number of *sleeps* that Daddy was still away. This allowed a more age-appropriate understanding of the length of the deployment on two levels; the quantity of chocolate provided a visible representation of the quantity and the notion of sleeps was something that the children could relate to from their everyday lives. This idea of sleeps was also referred to by two other mothers as a strategy used to

help the children develop an understanding of the length of their fathers' deployments. Whilst such strategies to help pre-school children understand time may be useful, each child is different and a strategy that works for one may not work for another. This was highlighted by Owen's mother who remarked *'...at the age of three they don't really know how long the time period is so somebody had said fill up a jar of sweets and take one out every day so we did that but he lost interest, he was like 'I don't really want a Haribo every day do I?''* (Owen's mother, individual interview). Drawing on a cultural historical perspective, DeLoache (1995) argues that for such symbols to be beneficial for young children, they must represent them both as a real, concrete object and as an abstract symbol, representing something other than it itself. Adults who are already skilled and experienced with symbolic reasoning may wrongly assume that children share the same symbolic relationships as themselves. DeLoache (1995) notes the importance of the social context of such symbol use, particularly the role of the more experienced or knowledgeable other who can help the child to achieve representational insight. A child's ongoing experiences with symbolic relations then allows them to become more capable of detecting them without support. This perspective highlights how families and pre-school settings may benefit from having an array of strategies in order to help pre-school children develop a workable and less ambiguous sense of time relating to a parents' deployment and that the explicit discussion of these symbols with the children themselves is an important process that should not be overlooked.

The roles of the deployed fathers also emerged as a concept that was difficult for the children to fully understand. Jessica's mother remarked *'I think she doesn't understand what he does, she knows obviously he's a soldier but that's about it. She thinks he works with fish tanks because he's shown her pictures of his tanks and she thinks that, 'Daddy I want to see a picture of your fish tanks again' so we just call them fish tanks'* (Jessica's mother, individual interview). Lucy was the only child to have a father deployed to a potentially hostile environment in Afghanistan. In contrast to the other locations of Estonia and Canada, this appeared to frame how her mother discussed his role with her, *'...you kind of end up talking about it in terms of like goodies and baddies and making sure he's looking after people and stuff...she knows where he is and she knows the word but I don't, it hasn't, Afghanistan as a concept doesn't mean anything to her I don't think'*

(Lucy's mother, individual interview). In similarity to the strategies employed by some of the parents to support an understanding of time, Daisy's mother described using a map to help her develop an understanding of her father's location, *'she'd talk about Daddy being away and we've got a map at home and we've pointed to where we're at and where Daddy is, and Daddy's in the pink, on the map it's pink where he was, so Daddy's in the pink place'* (Daisy's mother, combined interview with Daisy). This use of a map further exemplifies the use of symbolic tools (Vygotsky, 1978) in supporting pre-school children's awareness of a parental absence. All six of the pre-school children who took part in the research could name the location of their father's deployment. Interestingly, discussions with the children led to an emerging picture that whilst they might not fully understand the nature of the deployment, they did understand that there was a significant distance involved and often conceptualised this in terms of being *far away*. Alfie, for example, referred to his father's *'far away work'* (Alfie, combined interview with keyworker) whereas Joshua referred to it being *'a long way'* (Joshua, combined interview with keyworker). Tom identified his father's current location as Canada and indicated an understanding that he was in a different country to the one that he himself was currently in, *'It's far, far away. It's far, far away from England. It's really, really, really far away'* (Tom, combined interview with keyworker). Similarly, Charlotte could identify the distance associated with Estonia and recognised that it was far away and involved an aeroplane journey to get there:

Georgina - *How far away is Estonia?*

Charlotte – *Very far.*

Georgina - *Very far.*

Charlotte – *Yeah, he's going on an aeroplane to get to there.*

(Charlotte, combined interview with Charlotte's mother)

Interestingly, Alfie was also able to draw a distinction between his father's current deployment role and his normal role when in the Garrison by drawing reference to the concept of *far away*:

Alfie - *Yeah and we've got far away work and his near work. He always does work there.*

Georgina - *Where is he now, is he in near work or far away work?*

Alfie - *Far away work.*

(Alfie, combined interview with keyworker)

Toby, was able to say the name of where his father was deployed but it was apparent that he did not fully understand where this was:

Georgina - *Where is Daddy?*

Toby - *In Estonia.*

Georgina - *In Estonia, so he is! Do you know where Estonia is?*

Toby – *No.*

Georgina – *What's Daddy doing in Estonia?*

Toby – *Working.*

(Toby, combined interview with Toby's mother)

Toby's mother expressed her surprise that Toby did not actually understand where Estonia was, '*because he can talk about it, he's in Estonia, but the reason actually why, what's he actually doing there*' (Toby's mother, combined interview with Toby). This suggests that his ability to name the location of his father had possibly led his mother to assume that he had a firmer idea of where his father was and why he was there. Similarly, a conversation between myself, Daisy and her mother indicated that Daisy's mother believed Daisy to have a firmer understanding surrounding her father's absence than was possibly the case:

Georgina - *What does Daddy do, what's his job?*

Daisy - *I don't know*

Daisy's Mother - *Why does Daddy have to go away?*

Daisy - *He keeps rumbling away.*

Daisy's Mother - *Why did Daddy have to go away, do you remember?*

Daisy - *I don't know*

(Daisy and Daisy's mother, combined interview)

This finding indicates that, as a function of age and developmental stage, pre-school children are not able to apply the same understanding of time or distance as an adult to the scenario of a parent's deployment. Where a child can name the location or state the length of a deployment, this may lead a parent or other adult to assume that a child has a more developed understanding of the parent's absence than is actually the case. As noted by DeLoache (1995), this may be as adults who are already skilled and experienced with symbolic reasoning may wrongly assume that children share the same symbolic relationships as themselves. For Jessica, Owen and Toby this uncertainty or a lack of firm understanding of time, distance, why their father was away were indicated as being significant factors in their increased clinginess and anxiety at being separated from their mothers (see section 7.2). This finding supports those of Alfano *et al.* (2016) who note that children in the three to five-year age group may be more aware of parental absences than younger children but still have limited resources for understanding and coping with such a significant stressor. It also supports that of Louie and Cromer (2014, p.500) who note 'out of sight is not out of mind for these young children and failing to adequately prepare them for parental separation may leave them sad, confused and incorrectly blaming themselves for the separation'. Viewing young children as incapable or too young to understand can hinder the potential benefits of such preparations (Louie and Cromer, 2014).

Conversations with the pre-school children in this research highlighted that they were capable of using age-appropriate information to develop a workable construct about their fathers' absences. Time and distance are abstract and often intangible concepts but the idea that the father was *far away* for a *long time* helped develop an understanding that they could be expected to be away from the family home for the foreseeable future. This

finding therefore agrees with that of Louie and Cromer (2014), who argue that young children should be involved in the preparations prior to the actual deployment in order to create a more accurate understanding of their parent's absence. I argue, however, that this should not be limited only to the period prior to the parent's deployment. Rather, facilitating pre-school children's awareness of a parent's deployment is an ongoing process that should be revisited with age-appropriate terminology and strategies throughout the duration of the deployment. The purpose of symbolic tools used to facilitate pre-school children's understanding of time and place in relation to a parental deployment should be made explicit to the children. In line with the views of the new sociology of childhood (James, Jenks & Prout, 1998) and cultural historical theory (Vygotsky, 1998), such an approach helps move us away from the deficit view of pre-school children and starts to frame them as capable of not only perceiving the situation of a parental deployment, but also being capable of influencing their own psychological wellbeing during this time. The effectiveness of strategies used to support young children's awareness of a parental deployment is an area that would benefit from additional research in the UK context.

7.4 Daily routines within the home environment

All ten mothers reported that the daily routines of the household had changed as a result of the fathers' deployments as the mothers attempted to adjust to lone parenting and the families as a whole attempted to adjust to the departure of the fathers. All ten mothers reported that their children's leisure time and/or sporting activities had altered as a result of the fathers' deployments. In all cases, this was strongly related to the mother adjusting to life as a lone parent following the deployment of her partner; a factor which has been linked to increased levels of deployment-related maternal stress in American research (Strong & Lee, 2017; Waliski *et al.*, 2012). Owen's mother, for example, reported having stopped Owen's swimming lessons as a direct result of the challenges of lone parenting during the deployment, '*...we used go swimming but I've stopped swimming now Rob is away because it's too much trying to take him to swimming lessons*' (Owen's mother, individual interview). Lucy's mother similarly

reported that she stopped her children's usual sporting activities whilst she adjusted to life as a lone parent after her husband deployed to Afghanistan, *'we went through a stage of sort of not doing any lessons after school and stuff, because I just felt like our world is kind of like too busy, we're kind of you know, so swimming and gymnastics and it felt like it was oh my God, there was too much going on'* (Lucy's mother, individual interview).

Whilst the pressures of lone parenting had led to changes in the sporting and leisure activities in all ten of the focus children, this did not necessarily mean that the children engaged in fewer activities during this time. Nine of the ten mothers described an increase in the amount of leisure activities that they engaged in during their husbands' absences. In all instances, this was associated with the emphasis the mothers placed on keeping busy and maintaining family routines during this time. From the cultural historical perspective, learning and development is seen to be occurring through the process of changing participation in dynamic cultural communities and each generation makes use of and transforms intellectual traditions and tools passed down from the previous generation (Hedegaard, 2009; Robbins, 2005; Rogoff & Chavajay, 1995). *Keep busy and carry on* can be seen to be an example of a cultural tool created within this community over successive generations for the purposes of developing resilience in the face of such challenges; an aspect that can be linked to what Clifton (2007, p.194) refers to as a 'stoical outlook' being an engrained aspect of British Army life. Highlighting the interlinked nature of the different domains of wellbeing, a strong link emerged between increasing or maintaining leisure activities (especially where these involved other social relationships and physical activity) and positive psychological wellbeing within the family. Charlotte's mother, for example, described her emphasis on keeping busy, *'...I've been trying to keep myself busy so I've been working at the nursery and then after nursery she's been having or friend round or we've been to see friends, we've been doing stuff'* (Charlotte's mother, combined interview). Lucy's mother similarly reported that she had reintroduced her children's sporting activities after she had adjusted to lone parenting. She described how she found the evening routines associated with such activities to be beneficial to the whole family, *'...it felt like the evenings are quite long, so you finish at kind of after school, the evenings are quite long, so we put swimming back in and we've*

done gymnastics...So actually every day is punctuated with something.' (Lucy's mother, individual interview).

Four of the mothers identified that they chose to engage in more local leisure activities during the period of deployment due to the pressures of lone parenting young children, *'...on a weekend we've stayed more local knowing that I've got to drive there myself be on my own and try and keep eyes on two children and then come home to then sort everything out on my own, and then bedtime on my own'* (Daisy's mother, combined interview with Daisy). Two of these four mothers also cited low levels of driving confidence as influencing the decision to engage in more local leisure activities. Tom's mother remarked that her husband normally did the majority of the driving and she felt that this changed the children's leisure activities in his absence, *'they are a bit limited because of me, of where I'm going to drive them to and stuff'* (Tom's mother, individual interview). This finding highlights that, whilst the pressures of lone parenting could lead to stress within the mothers that in turn impacted on the children's sporting and leisure activities, the majority of the mothers were resilient and adapted to their situations in order to keep busy and maintain routines during the period of deployment. This, in turn, helped to bolster psychological, physical and social wellbeing across the entire family unit. This may be more difficult for Army families who are located in more remote areas with less access to local leisure facilities or for those with less driving confidence.

A second factor to emerge surrounding routines and leisure activities was that of changes to the more physical aspects of play during a parental deployment. Four of the mothers identified that their children were missing the more energetic or rough and tumble aspects of play that they would have normally had with their fathers, *'...it's just playing with the boys that they've missed and that's what the behaviour is, the wrestling'* (Toby's mother, combined interview with Toby). Joshua's mother similarly felt that Joshua had missed elements of rough and tumble play in the absence of his father, *'I think that's what he misses, the play fighting...'* (Joshua's mother, individual interview). Joshua's mother remarked that she felt it was difficult to take on the role of engaging in more energetic play in the absence of her husband, *'like trampolining as well! (laughs) I can't really do that dude! Not with two kids!'* (Joshua's mother, individual interview). Talking

alongside me the morning after his father had returned home from a nine-month deployment to Estonia, Joshua's first choice of subject to talk about was the energetic activities that he now wanted to play with his father, perhaps emphasising the importance of this to him:

Georgina - *Joshua, since I saw you last time has someone come home?*

Joshua - *Yeah, Daddy!*

Georgina - *Daddy!*

Joshua - *And I want to play tag with him*

Georgina - *You want to play tag with him? Is that the first thing you wanted to do?*

Joshua - *Yeah.*

Georgina - *What else do you like to do now Daddy's home?*

Joshua - *Erm, dancing.*

(Joshua, combined interview with keyworker)

Toby's mother similarly highlighted the difficulties of finding time to play with Toby and his younger brother whilst taking on the demands of lone parenting, *'Toby turned around to me the other day and said 'You don't play with me Mummy' because I'm not on the floor saying 'lets play trains', and I'm like 'I keep you alive and feed you don't I, seriously, give me a break! (laughs)'* (Toby's mother, combined interview with Toby). This comment is interesting in light of the perspective of Roberts (2010), whose model of wellbeing asserts that young children must first have good physical health and development (incorporating elements such as eating, sleeping and the management of illness) before any other aspects of wellbeing can develop. Many of the other mothers emphasised the importance of adapting their routines to ensure that the children and the wider family still maintained healthy diets, regular bathing and bedtime routines, *'...with no routine everything just turns to chaos and you end up living off toast'* (Alfie's mother, individual interview). Adopting the viewpoint of Roberts' (2010) model, maintaining the overall physical wellbeing of the pre-school children was therefore important. Whilst it initially

appears to be somewhat understated within the data, it does suggest that the mothers in many ways may be seen to be prioritising the physical domain of their children's wellbeing during the fathers' deployment by actively maintaining healthy eating, sleeping and sporting/leisure habits of their families. Providing the conditions for good physical wellbeing could then be seen to be giving firm foundations for the other domains of wellbeing to develop.

7.5 Summary of findings

This chapter set out to investigate how different domains of wellbeing were impacted by the pre-school children's social relationships during a parental deployment. The data revealed that the most influential relationship on the pre-school children's psychological, physical and social domains of wellbeing during their fathers' deployment is that between the child and the at-home mother.

Psychological wellbeing was significantly the largest domain of wellbeing seen within the data relating to the child's relationship with the mother in the context of a father's deployment. A principle finding of the data analysed in this chapter is that different domains of children's wellbeing were both impacted *by* and had an impact *on* the mother's wellbeing during the father's deployment. In this sense, relationships between a child and a mother are dyadic in nature, the wellbeing of each individual impacting on the other. Importantly, and avoiding the potential for a crisis narrative, the relationship between the mother and the pre-school child is found to offer both aspects of resilience and risk to the overall wellbeing of the child during the father's deployment. The psychological wellbeing of the mother in particular is found to be influential in determining this. Where the mother appeared to have good levels of psychological wellbeing, this was associated with positive aspects of psychological, physical and social wellbeing in the child during the father's deployment. Conversely, where mothers experienced difficulties in their psychological wellbeing, this was associated with more negative aspects of the child's psychological, physical and social domains of wellbeing. In turn, pre-school children who appeared to have good psychological wellbeing were found

to place less of a strain on the psychological resources of the mothers during the deployment than those who did not.

On the other side of the mother-child dyad, individual factors of the children were also found to be associated with resilience and risk to their psychological wellbeing during a father's deployment. A child's individual personality was highlighted as an important feature, with a more confident personality-type appearing to be linked to resilience and a more anxious personality-type being linked to risk. Due to the age and developmental stage of the pre-school children, their understanding of time, distance and the roles of their fathers was found to be different to that of the adults around them and this was found to be contributing to emotions of confusion and uncertainty in some of the children. Such uncertainty and confusion is arguably a form of ambiguous loss and supporting children in developing an age-appropriate understanding of time, distance and their father's roles could be beneficial in reducing their uncertainty around their deployment situations.

Across the data, several factors emerged that appeared to be associated with resilience/ positive psychological wellbeing in the at-home mothers during a time of spousal deployment:

- Good networks of social support (frequently other Army spouses)
- Good mental health
- Support of extended family members
- Employment
- Support of Unit Welfare Officers or other Army resources (such as coffee mornings at a welfare centre)
- Ability and/or confidence to drive
- Maintaining family routines
- Maintaining boundaries within the family

The data also revealed factors that appeared to be associated with risk and poor psychological wellbeing in an at-home mother during a time of spousal deployment:

- Demands/challenges of lone parenting young children
- Challenging behaviour of children
- Lack of support networks in the community
- Poor mental health
- Being far away from extended family
- An inability to drive or low driving confidence (particularly in isolated areas)
- Challenges in maintaining or adapting family routines
- Challenges in maintaining boundaries within the family

These areas of resilience and risk should not be considered to be gender specific and could arguably be applied to an at-home father or other caregiver during a period of deployment.

For the ten focus children, the influence of the mother - child relationship on the domain of physical wellbeing during the fathers' deployment emerged at a less overt level in comparison to that of psychological wellbeing. Participants spoke much less frequently about aspects relating to the physical health of the children during a period of deployment. Where the physical domain was most conspicuously raised was in reference to changes in the children's sporting and leisure activities, rough and tumble play and eating and sleeping habits. In every case these factors were only raised after aspects of psychological wellbeing had firstly been addressed, strongly suggesting the participants felt this domain to have been impacted less by the fathers' absence. Interestingly, however, in many ways the mothers could be seen to be actively but unconsciously prioritising the physical domain of wellbeing by ensuring their pre-school children continued to maintain good physical health in the form of good nutrition, hygiene/cleanliness, sleeping patterns and sporting/leisure activities. Children outside of the ten focus children whose at-home parents were less able to adapt to the changes in family structure during a parental deployment appeared to be at greater risk of poor

physical, psychological and social wellbeing. Two pre-schools referred to instances where the risk to a child's overall wellbeing was apparent in terms of potential child maltreatment or neglect.

In the context of the mother-child relationship, a third domain, social wellbeing, was found to be more of an indicator of the child's psychological and physical wellbeing during the fathers' deployment. Where the child had good social wellbeing in the form of pro-social behaviours with adults and peers outside of the immediate family, this was often indicative of good psychological and/or physical wellbeing operating in the background, particularly within the home environment. Conversely, where the child had poor social wellbeing, this was often indicative of poor psychological and/or physical wellbeing operating in the background.

Within the data, the interlinked nature of the psychological, physical and social domains of wellbeing led to an emerging picture of them being essential to the pre-school children's overall wellbeing. In line with Vygotsky's (1987) principles of *units*, these emerging domains are not separate entities and are interlinked in nature, their interplay contributing to the pre-school children's overall wellbeing during the fathers' deployments. Thus, the pre-school children's wellbeing in the context of the mother-child relationship is found to be a holistic and entangled concept that is difficult to reduce. A child does, however, also have important relationships with individuals other than the mother. Chapter 8 will now explore the impact of wider relationships on the domains of pre-school children's wellbeing during a father's deployment.

Chapter 8

The impact of other key relationships

8.1 Introduction

Chapter 7 discussed how the pre-school children's relationships with the at-home mothers had a significant impact on their psychological, physical and social wellbeing during the period of a father's deployment. This relationship was found to offer both elements of resilience and risk to these domains of the children's wellbeing. Chapter 7 also found that different domains of children's wellbeing were both impacted by and had an impact upon the pre-school child's relationship with the mother during the father's deployment. Further analysis of the data highlights that pre-school children's wellbeing is also influenced by social relationships outside of their relationships with their mothers. In similarity to Chapter 7, this chapter therefore continues to address the following research question:

- How do social relationships impact upon different domains of pre-school children's wellbeing during a parental deployment?

Social relationships with the deployed father, friends and siblings were all found to be influential to domains of the pre-school children's wellbeing during the fathers' deployments. These relationships form the focus of this chapter.

8.2 Relationships with the deployed fathers

Within the data, children's relationships with the deployed fathers emerged as a significant influence, particularly on the children's psychological domain of wellbeing.

Importantly, and avoiding the potential for a crisis narrative surrounding relationships with deployed fathers, this relationship offered factors of both resilience and risk to the children's domains of wellbeing during a deployment. This was seen in how the pre-school children reacted to being separated from their fathers and how they maintained relationships with their fathers during this time.

8.2.1 Children's reactions and expressions surrounding the fathers' deployments

From the perspective of all of the mothers, practitioners and pre-school children involved in this research, the father leaving the family home directly caused emotions of sadness and distress to varying levels within the children. This is not an entirely unanticipated reaction to being separated from a parent or primary caregiver. Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969), for example, highlights how being separated from a primary attachment figure (such as a father) can lead to distress as the child loses an external source of stability and support within their daily lives. The philosophical discourse of wellbeing further emphasises how happiness is a state that can not realistically be maintained at all times and feeling sad in response to a loss within one's life is an entirely appropriate emotion (Clack, 2012).

The data revealed that the pre-school children reacted to and expressed their emotions about their fathers' deployments in a variety of ways over the course of the deployment periods, further reflecting the influence of individual factors as discussed in section 7.3.3. Initial separation from the fathers at the point of deployment emerged as a particular time of distress for many of the children. In all ten of the children, this was expressed through changes to their emotions. Lucy's mother reported Lucy having become very emotionally distressed in the weeks following her father's deployment, '*...there was a morning probably about two or three weeks after Will left and she was just beside herself*' (Lucy's mother, individual interview). In a further example, Alfie's pre-school manager observed that his father's initial deployment had a noticeable impact on his psychological wellbeing, '*...we saw a few meltdowns, emotional meltdowns, where he would just put himself to the floor. There was no kicking out or temper, he was just sobbing, he was just*

really kind of really distressed, I would say he was emotionally low' (Manager C, individual interview). She also noted how Alfie had become more quiet and withdrawn immediately following his father's deployment, retreating for comfort from the adults in the setting during this time, *'but then when Daddy's away, he can go, he can sort of go back on himself and actually become really quiet, he likes to then be with an adult ...'* (Manager C, individual interview).

In contrast to the more inward emotional responses of the children discussed above, Charlotte's mother described more outward behavioural changes in Charlotte immediately following her father's deployment, *'...the first night he was gone, bedtime was the worst, because like when Dan is here we've got our routine you know, she's normally quite good with going to sleep. But the first night Dan wasn't there, she kicked off, so she kicked the radiator, was kicking the bed, saying she doesn't want to go to sleep and that she wants her Dad...'* (Charlotte's mother, combined interview with Charlotte). Jessica's mother similarly reported more outward behaviours following the deployment of her father, *'...(she was) smacking or kicking for literally no reason'* (Jessica's Mum, individual interview). This finding, that the children in this sample displayed both inward and outward behaviours in response to the deployment of their fathers, is in line with that seen in the study of Chartrand *et al.* (2008). Chartrand *et al.* (2008) found that children aged three to five years with a deployed parent displayed increased internalised behaviours, such as emotional reactivity and withdrawal, and increased externalised behaviours, such as attention difficulties and aggression, even after controlling for the remaining caregiver's stress and/or depressive symptoms. They further found differences between age groups, with children below the age of three not displaying increased behavioural symptoms in response to the deployment of a parent. They hypothesised this was due to children aged three to five being more aware of the absence of their other parent.

Building on the work of Chartrand *et al.* (2008), the data in my study finds that the children were not only aware of the absence of their fathers but that their responses were not just limited to changes in their behaviour. Conversations with the mothers, the pre-school practitioners and the pre-school children themselves revealed that all ten of

the children were also capable of expressing their emotions verbally. The mothers and pre-school practitioners revealed that children's verbal reflections and interactions occurred regularly throughout the deployments, such as was the case for Tom, *'...he just started crying and I said 'what's up?' and he said 'I miss Daddy''* (Tom's mother, individual interview). Verbal expressions of the fathers' absences were also seen within the pre-school environments and arose during everyday activities, such as in Jessica's play, *'...it could be something as simple as when they're playing in the mud kitchen and they go 'oh look, my Dad makes pancakes' and she'll go (upset tone) 'my Daddy's not here''* (Jessica's keyworker, individual interview). Tom's mother noted how Tom's verbal reflections could occur spontaneously and, from an adult perspective, be seemingly unconnected to what was happening in the here and now:

He went to the toilet, he just went to the toilet and I said, I heard him crying, I was like 'why are you crying?' and he said he misses his Daddy, but he wasn't even, nothing happened, he'd not been told off or asked to do anything, he just went for a wee! And he just got upset, so he must have had time to think about it maybe. (Tom's mother, individual interview)

Jessica's mother reflected on the impact on Jessica of seeing large numbers of uniformed soldiers as a result of living in a Garrison town, *'obviously round here you see a lot of people in uniform. She'll either hide or she'll start shouting 'Daddy!' at them which is quite awkward walking around Tesco. And it's when they turn around and she'll go (upset tone) 'that's not my Daddy''* (Jessica's mother, individual interview). Interestingly, the data also revealed that children's verbal expressions of their fathers' absences were not always limited to expressions of sadness and loss. An example from Lucy's keyworker highlighted how Lucy used a verbal exchange to express her understanding of her father's deployment immediately following his return to Afghanistan after a two-week period of rest and recuperation (R&R):

I said 'oh has Daddy gone back now?' And she said 'yes, he's gone back, he's in Afghanistan for 10 weeks, and then he'll be home' ...And then I said, 'how do you feel about Daddy being in Afghanistan?' And she just stopped and she

went 'happy' (keyworker makes a Makaton sign for happy) I said, 'and how do you think you'll feel when he comes back home?' and she said 'happy, I'll feel happy'. (Lucy's keyworker, individual interview).

During the research activities of talking, drawing and photography alongside myself, many of the children similarly explained their understanding of their fathers' current deployments. Charlotte, for example, chose to explain to me that her father going away involved an aeroplane journey, *'yeah, he's going on an aeroplane to get to there'* (Charlotte, combined interview with Charlotte's mother). Alfie talked about a distinction between his father's work in the Garrison and his deployment, *'yeah and we've got far away work and his near work. He always does work there'* (Alfie, combined interview with keyworker). Tom could state where his father was, *'he's in Canada'*, and that this was far away *'It's far, far away. It's far, far away from England. It's really, really, really far away'* (Tom, combined interview with keyworker). In all of these cases, the children were both competently and confidently explaining to me their own subjective understanding of their fathers' current deployments. As discussed in section 7.3.3, having an age-appropriate understanding of a father's deployment could then help to support the psychological wellbeing of the child in terms of reducing the potential for uncertainty and ambiguous loss within the change in their home situations.

Of the six pre-school children who took part in the data collection, three verbally identified that they felt sad in the absence of their father. Toby gave more detail about missing his father during discussions alongside his mother, *'...I like it when my Daddy and my Mummy's just here and not when my Daddy's not here and my Mummy's not here'* (Toby, combined interview with Toby's mother). The other three children selected a sad face when presented with a choice of three faces drawn on a piece of paper (one happy, one sad, one neutral). None of the six participating pre-school children identified feeling happy as a result of their father's deployment. For the majority of the children who took part in the research activities, reflections on their feelings at being separated from their father did not go beyond the word *sad*. My own observations and reflections from the data collection with the children reveal why it may have been difficult to explore their emotions in more detail. As discussed in section 5.4.1.4, primarily there are ethical

considerations when asking children to reflect on emotions that may be negative in nature. I was aware that such conversations and research activities needed to be handled in a sensitive manner. This would allow the children's voices to be heard whilst simultaneously protecting their psychological wellbeing during the research activities but also respecting their right to not respond. In the situations of the three children who identified sadness at the absence of their father, I deemed within the research activities that this information was sufficient and was something that should not be pursued unless initiated by the child. It was also apparent at several points in the conversation with Tom, for example, that he was potentially unwilling to talk about his emotions at his father's absence and that this was something that ethically I should not pursue further:

Tom - *He's comes back at work*

Georgina - *So sometimes he's here /*

Tom - *And sometimes he's not*

Georgina - *Can you tell me what it's like when he's not here?*

Tom - *Yeah, but I can balance this on my head! (places a beanbag on head)*

(Tom, combined interview with keyworker)

Such examples highlight that whilst it is important to attempt to represent pre-school children's subjective views of their own wellbeing, representing these views in an ethical and authentic way can be challenging (Colliver, 2017). As well as having the right to have their voices heard, children must be allowed not to speak, not to inform and not to express themselves (Eide & Winger, 2005). I find this especially to be the case where the children are being asked to respond to the situation of being separated from a parent.

This section has highlighted that pre-school children may express their emotions at being separated from their fathers in a variety of verbal and non-verbal ways. Whether it be a verbal or non-verbal expression, the pre-school children are competently expressing their emotions and understanding at being separated from a primary caregiver. This further strengthens the argument that children of this age should be viewed as human beings and not as human becomings (James, Jenks & Prout, 1998; Quennerstedt &

Quennerstedt, 2014; Roberts, 2010) and that their own perspectives, both verbally and non-verbally, should be represented in research which looks to explore their wellbeing (Ben-Arieh *et al.*, 2001; Eide & Winger, 2005; Mashford-Scott *et al.*, 2012). These findings also align with the cultural historical perspective, whereby the child is seen as an active agent in the circumstances that promote their own wellbeing (Fleer, 2003; Rose, Gilbert & Richards, 2016).

8.2.2 Maintaining relationships with the deployed father

Mirroring the findings of American literature (Lieberman & Horn, 2008; Louie & Cromer, 2014; Osofsky & Chartrand, 2013; Paris *et al.*, 2010), the data analysis revealed the importance of maintaining connectivity between a young child and an absent parent during a time of deployment. Building on these findings, maintaining relationships with the deployed fathers emerged as being important, particularly to the psychological domain of the pre-school children's wellbeing. Within the data, many participants referred to different methods of maintaining father-child relationships and the challenges that were associated with this. The two principle methods referred to were those involving the *real time* presence of the father, such as telephone calls and face-to-face video communications via Skype/Facetime/WhatsApp, and methods that created a *symbolic* presence of the father, such as dolls, teddy bears and other keepsakes. Both methods had implications for the wellbeing of the pre-school children.

8.2.2.1 Real time methods

All ten mothers referred to the importance of video communications for children in maintaining relationships with the deployed father. Owen's mother, for example, interestingly chose the phrase '*virtual Daddy*' (Owen's mother, individual interview) and noted how Owen's sense that his father could be contacted appeared to bring him comfort during the period of separation. She also remarked that this was facilitated by Owen's understanding of the availability of such technology, '*...my husband would say to*

Owen on the phone 'Oh I miss you' and Owen was like 'Oh don't worry, we can Facetime you or we can call you!' So pre-Facetime it would have been a lot harder' (Owen's mother, individual interview). She further reflected that she felt the video communications had been supportive in helping Owen adjust to the absence of his father, *'...because for him adapting to Dad being away for months, Facetime has been incredible'* (Owen's mother, individual interview). This finding is in line with American research which has highlighted the importance of maintaining contact with the deployed parent on young children's ability to successfully manage the absence of that parent (Osofsky & Chartrand, 2013). Drawing on her 18 years of experience in working with service children, Manager D also believed that the advent of video communication technology had helped to maintain relationships between young children and their absent parent:

Years ago I have seen it where parents, where children are kind of like not wanting to go to that parent because they've been away for so long and they can't recognise them. Doesn't tend to happen now, I think that is the benefits of the Skype thing because they can see people regularly, but years ago, when that didn't happen, it's just that almost shyness, yes, 'I do know you, but you're a bit of a stranger to me'. (Manager D, individual interview).

Three of the children also reflected on the positivity of the experience of talking to their fathers via video technology. Charlotte, for example, appeared to value the physical real-time presence of her father:

Georgina - *How do you get to talk to Daddy?*

Charlotte - *On the phone.*

Georgina - *Do you see him (puts hand out in front) or do you hold the phone like this? (puts hand to ear)*

(Charlotte holds hand out in front of her)

Georgina - *Oh like this, so you get to see him as well!*

Charlotte – *Yeah. And share things with him like ‘Here you go Daddy!’
(pretends to pass something through the phone)*

(Charlotte, combined interview with Charlotte’s mother)

The importance of maintaining an attachment relationship with the father and the impact that this could have on the psychological wellbeing of a pre-school child during a deployment was strongly evident within Toby’s case. Toby’s extreme anxiety at being separated from his mother during his father’s deployment which lasted for a period of five and a half months (see section 7.2) lessened after a telephone call with his father in Estonia in which his father had sent some *special powers* to Toby:

Toby’s Mother – *(Turns to Toby) And you’ve been doing really well haven’t you, I was telling Georgina (researcher) about how you said you were brave the other day remember when we were outside your brother’s nursery and before you said you didn’t want to get out and you said ‘No, I’m being brave today’ - Why did you decide to be brave that day Toby?*

Toby - *Daddy sent me some special powers*

(Toby’s mother & Toby, combined interview)

Toby drew a picture of his new *special powers* whilst the conversation between himself, his mother and I continued:



Fig. 5 – Toby drawing his *special powers*

Whilst engaged in his drawing, Toby's comments gave insight into the mode by which these *special powers* may have had an impact on his feelings at being separated from his mother. He used analogies of strength such as thunder and lightning to describe the new powers he felt he had received from his father:

Toby - No, loads of powers, lightning, thunder and water power!

Georgina - Oh wow, I love your special powers! Do you feel better now Daddy has sent you your special powers?

Toby - Yeah! Red power! Red thunder power. It gets mixed up together.

(Toby, combined interview with Toby's mother)

The sudden change in Toby's confidence at being separated from his mother indicates that his relationship and recent communication with his father had had a direct positive impact in enhancing his psychological wellbeing and resilience to the strains of his father's deployment. Mild to moderate, developmentally acceptable stress can enable a child to develop and practise strategies to tolerate such displeasure, anger, pain or fear in order to recover from emotional dysregulation, and to repair interpersonal conflict and manage frustration in the course of exploration and learning (Lieberman & Horn, 2013; Vygotsky, 1998). Stress that cannot be transformed into a positive development, on the other hand, can lead to detrimental developmental effects (Fleer, 2010; Hedegaard, 2009). This communication with his father potentially enabled Toby to transform some of the developmental stress of his father's absence into resilience. The symbolic nature of his new *special powers* to his relationship with his father was also evident here (see section 8.2.2.2 below for further discussion of symbolic methods). Toby was able to draw upon his memories of his supportive relationship with his father and internalise the *special powers* sent within this real time communication to foster a new sense of resilience in his absence. This exemplifies the cultural historical perspective that individuals, even when acting alone, are always acting in collaborative ways through their socially constructed memories (Goncu, 1999; Stetsenko, 2017).

Telephone and video communications with the deployed fathers were not straightforward in all cases, however, and difficulties for both the child and parents emerged within the data. Alfie referred to speaking to his father on 'I-Skype' (Alfie, combined interview with keyworker) and appeared to understand the instant and real time nature of these communications. His mother, however, referred to both positive and negative influences that this had on Alfie's psychological wellbeing. Whilst she remarked on the importance of Alfie being able to maintain visual contact with his father, '*...thank God for Skype so he gets to see him*', she also noted that this contact could have a negative impact with the video communication often seeming to reinforce his distress over his father's absence, '*once he's had the contact then he kind of breaks a little bit... he just sort of hides away, playing in the corner of the room, up in his bedroom away and then he'll just come down the stairs crying, 'I want my Daddy*' (Alfie's mother, individual interview). Alfie's response to video communications suggests that caution must be taken to not view this technology as something that is unquestionably positive in the lives of pre-school children with a deployed parent. Further remarks from Manager D support the view that such technology can have both positive and negative outcomes on children's psychological wellbeing:

...I think, as wonderful as technology is, and I do think it is a wonderful thing and it's a wonderful means of communication, I think sometimes for little children seeing somebody on a screen, it's not the same as having that person there and that person is then gone at the end of that video chat. Whilst it's lovely, for some children, actually that complete separation, as hard as it is, it's out of sight out of mind, can be, I won't say it's better because you know they need both parents to be there for them, but it's that constant reminder that Mummy or Daddy aren't there, it can be quite hard. It really can. (Manager D, individual interview)

Whilst the mothers highlighted the importance of video communication between the pre-school children and their deployed fathers, they also reported differences in the availability of the technology between deployment locations and difficulties in the reliability of this technology. Daisy's mother referred to the differences in availability

between a shorter training deployment to Canada and her husband's recent six-month deployment to Estonia, *'...that was maybe worse in Canada because when he was out doing the exercises they couldn't use their phones, their phones were taken off them, so he couldn't phone, whereas in Estonia we could call him whenever we wanted kind of thing'* (Daisy's mother, individual interview). Tom's mother similarly highlighted the frustrations that the reliability of video technology could sometimes bring in facilitating contact between her children and their father in Canada, *'...I don't want them to be sat there holding a phone, for half an hour, waiting for Dad to ring and it just keeps cutting off'* (Tom's mother, individual interview). Such findings highlight that it should not be assumed that video or telephone communications are readily available across all Army deployments.

The disparity between the times that the young children wanted to speak to their fathers and when they were actually able to speak to them also emerged as a contributing factor to difficulties in video communications. Daisy's mother remarked that a common scenario with her two young children was of them wanting to speak to their father immediately, not necessarily understanding that they would have to wait until a mutually convenient time, *'...I want to speak to Daddy now not later!'* (Daisy's mother, individual interview). She further noted that the children may be less willing to engage in conversation when the opportunity then arose to speak to their father at a later point, *'...he'd (Daisy's father) be like 'I rang to speak to the kids and the kids don't want to speak to me' so he'd be feeling bad that the kids don't want to talk to him and I'm like it's nothing against you, it's just that Paw Patrol's on the tele and Paw Patrol's more important right now!'* (Daisy's mother, individual interview). Four of the ten mothers reported that their children did not necessarily want to talk with their fathers for more than a short period of time. They felt this was a result of age-related factors such as short attention spans and being more concerned with events in the here and now. According to these mothers, low engagement in video calls often seemed to be more of a point of concern for the absent father than it was for the children. Joshua's mother noted that Joshua behaved similarly when he spoke to his Grandparents on Skype. She felt that her husband, deployed in Estonia, did not have this point of reference to help him understand Joshua's minimal engagement with him, *'he always says 'Oh I wish he would talk to me a bit more' but I*

said look, he's like that when Nana and Grandad are on Skype he might say 'hello, I'm alright' and then go off and play' (Joshua's mother, individual interview). Such examples highlight the relational nature of wellbeing between the pre-school child and their deployed fathers with both members of this attachment relationship influencing the psychological wellbeing of each other. This is an area that would benefit from additional research in the British Armed Forces context.

These findings support those seen in American literature which have highlighted how young children may not easily shift their attention to an unplanned video conversation or may have short attention spans which could, in turn, be perceived as a rejection of the deployed parent (Louie & Cromer, 2014; Paris *et al.*, 2010). Interestingly, Manager D believed that a pre-school using an online *learning journey* (an online record of a child's progress and pre-school activities shared with the child's parents) could be beneficial in maintaining connectivity between a deployed parent and their young child. From her perspective, this held the potential to facilitate conversations between the child and the deployed parent, *'to actually say, 'I saw your observation today, I saw what you did at nursery'. That conversation, 'how do you know that I made this wonderful creation at nursery today?!' but it's an opening block of a conversation'* (Manager D, individual interview).

Existing research also suggests that maintaining the physical presence of the absent parent in this way may also have positive implications for the successful reintegration of the service member at the end of their deployment. The period of family reintegration following deployment is often cited as one the most stressful of the whole deployment cycle process (Lester & Flake, 2013; Pincus *et al.*, 2001). For deployed personnel, the physical transitions to and from home require moving from physically absent to present partnering and parenting, as well as between structured military contexts and informal family contexts with different rules for communication and emotional expression (Huebner *et al.*, 2007). The rapid pace of development in the pre-school years may mean that, even in relatively short deployments, a service member can return to find their child developmentally much changed from the one that they left behind. This issue is bidirectional, with young children's inability to recognise their parents being a common

reunion challenge (Barker & Berry, 2009; Julian *et al.*, 2018). Long deployments can exacerbate the challenges faced at reunion due to the physical, emotional and developmental changes seen in service members, spouses and the children alike (Riggs & Riggs, 2011). These visual methods of communication may then serve to lessen the impact that deployment can have on the attachment relationships between the pre-school child and their deployed parent, particularly in terms of reintegrating the serving member back into the family unit.

8.2.2.2 Symbolic methods

Vygotsky (1978) distinguished between experiences produced by the here and now contact of the individual with their environment and those that are shaped by interactions which are mediated by symbolic tools. These tools include signs and symbols that help the individual master psychological functions such as attention, memory and perception (Kozulin, 2003). The data revealed that methods of maintaining relationships between the child and the deployed father also extended to those that did not rely on the *real-time* presence of the father, but rather created a *symbolic* presence. This was seen through the use of dolls, teddy bears and other keepsakes/mementos specifically related to the fathers. Five of the children had keepsakes/mementos and in four of the five cases, these were something that could be cuddled, such as teddy bears and dolls that were specifically marketed to service children with a deployed parent. In this way, such artefacts become simultaneously material and ideal, representing more than their material form (Cole, 1996). This was exemplified by Vygotsky (1978), who discussed tying knots in a handkerchief as a form of mnemonic device to aid the retrieval of information from the memory. Stetsenko (2017) further notes that such artefacts are created socially and culturally and facilitate children's memory not just in the sense of the past, but also in the in the child's activities aimed at changing their present and future. These keepsakes/mementos are examples of cultural tools created within Army (and wider tri-service) communities for the purposes of bringing psychological comfort to the children by symbolising their relationships with their absent parent. The photograph below was taken by Lucy's mother on the day that her father had been sent on a six-month

deployment to Afghanistan. It shows Lucy having gone to sleep with her *Huggable Hero* – a doll with a picture of her father printed on it:



Fig. 6 - Lucy with a huggable soldier doll on the night of her father's deployment to Afghanistan

Similarly, Jessica had a doll that her father had recorded messages onto, such as *'goodnight, I hope you're being a good girl'* (Jessica's mother, individual interview). Joshua had been given an Army teddy bear by his mother during his father's absence which she noted appeared to bring him comfort, *'...he was like 'Oh that looks like Daddy, I like this''* (Joshua's mother, individual interview). Adopting a cultural historical perspective, DeLoache (1995) asserts that the more a symbol resembles its original referent, the easier it is for young children to perceive the similarity between the two. High levels of such iconicity, she argues, is less important for older children who can more easily achieve the symbolic relation between the concrete object and its abstract form. This would suggest that, as a function of their young age, the psychological wellbeing of these three pre-school children was benefitting from symbolic tools that had a high level of iconicity to their absent fathers.

In contrast to the huggable keepsakes/mementos described above, Toby's keepsakes/mementos were badges (rank slides), which again could be argued to have a high level of iconicity as they were related to his father's role in the Army. Toby took a photograph of one of his badges and explained that these had made him feel happy:



Fig. 7 – Toby's photograph of his *special badges*

Toby - Good, he gave me a special badge and said I'm the man of the house.

Georgina - Did he! Have you got that badge?

Toby - Two!

Georgina - You've got two! Do you want to show them to me? I would love to see your special badges – ask Mummy if it would be ok.

Toby - I feel sad and happy.

Georgina - What makes you feel happy?

Toby - The badges.

(Toby, combined interview with Toby's mother)

Sending a keepsake/memento of the child away with a deploying parent was also highlighted as a method of maintaining connectivity between a pre-school child and a father. Charlotte explained how she had chosen to send a teddy bear to Estonia with her father, illustrating how this may also help to maintain relationships with a deployed parent:

Charlotte – *He has my teddy*

Georgina - *He's got your teddy has he?*

Charlotte – *I've got an Army teddy and I gave it to Daddy and now he took it to Estonia my Daddy*

Georgina - *Oh lovely, why did you give it to Daddy?*

Charlotte – *Just so he's remembering us*

(Charlotte, combined interview with Charlotte's mother)

This example highlights how the psychological wellbeing of pre-school children could potentially be bolstered by the children sending items in order to maintain or reinforce the sense of connectivity with the deployed parent, further emphasising the role that the individual child can have in the development of their own psychological wellbeing. It also reinforces the position that individuals, even when acting alone, are always acting in collaborative ways through their socially constructed memories (Goncu, 1999; Stetsenko, 2017). Maintaining the symbolic or psychological presence of the deployed service member has also been shown to be beneficial across the different phases of deployment. In a somewhat dated but insightful study, McCubbin *et al.* (1975) found that such psychological presence of the service member was important to promote flexibility and adaptability when managing difficulties occurring during the reintegration of a family member; a phase of the deployment cycle that has more recently been associated with stress across the family system (Barker & Berry, 2009; Huebner *et al.*, 2007; Lester & Flake, 2013; Pincus *et al.*, 2001; Riggs & Riggs, 2011). This phase of the deployment cycle was outside the scope of my research and is an area that would benefit from additional research in the UK context.

8.3 Children's relationships with friends

For many of the pre-school children, friendships with other children emerged as being important to multiple domains of their wellbeing during the fathers' deployments. This finding is in line with a plethora of research highlighting the importance of children's friendships to their wellbeing (Brogaard-Clausen & Robson, 2019; Corsaro, 2003; Dunn, 2004; Fattore, Mason & Watson, 2016; Layard & Dunn, 2009; Robson, Brogaard-Clausen & Hargreaves, 2017). Parents, practitioners and the children alike highlighted the benefits of the children's friendships. The data revealed that friendships were important to their psychological, social and physical domains of wellbeing during this time.

The domains of social and psychological wellbeing were found to be interrelated in the context of the pre-school children's friendships during the periods of deployment. NICE (2012, p.1) defines social wellbeing in the early years to be when a child 'has good relationships with others and does not have behavioural problems, that is, they are not disruptive, violent or a bully'. Non-military focused literature on wellbeing has identified networks of community support - such as a pro-social peer group - as being characteristics relating to individual, social and environmental factors that are important in creating resilience in children (Pugh, 2005). In the context of my study, having good social wellbeing in the form of pro-social relationships with other children was found to serve as a protective factor to a child's psychological wellbeing during a father's deployment. Several parents felt that the opportunities to play with other children had a positive impact on the children's psychological wellbeing. Toby's mother, for example, remarked *'if he didn't get that play (with other children) I don't know what he would do, he needs that play'* (Toby's mother, combined interview with Toby). Isla's mother similarly commented *'I can't play like a three-year-old does'* (Isla's mother, individual interview). Play within friendships and peer relationships has also been highlighted to be a crucial element of meaning-making in children's lives (Corsaro, 2003). As such, pre-school children with a deployed parent may use play as an important way of making sense of the changes that they are experiencing in their home environments. This is an area that would benefit from additional research in the context of British Armed Forces

deployments. The opportunity to play socially with other children could also be seen to be enhancing their physical wellbeing during a deployment. This is especially important in light of a finding discussed in section 7.4, that the mothers found it difficult to maintain the more physical aspects of play during a period of lone parenting.

The pre-school settings were highlighted as being important environments to the pre-school children's social wellbeing (see section 6.3 for a more detailed discussion). For example, the consistency and stability of friendships in the pre-school were highlighted as being an important source of resilience to Lucy during a time of change within her life at home:

The things that probably help her, she's got fairly solid friendships, she's at the point of her development where she's formed quite strong partnerships, that's obviously something on a day-to-day she can walk in and know that partnership is there because that partnership is around all the time and that's probably very powerful. (Deputy Manager E, individual interview)

Fattore, Mason and Watson (2016) highlight the emphasis that children themselves put on their attachment relationships with friends and the importance of the sense of having someone who is there for them. This is different to family relationships and one in which children themselves may have more control (Brogaard-Clausen & Robson, 2019), this sense of control being important to children's wellbeing (Layard & Dunn, 2009; Statham & Chase, 2010). Isla's mother expressed concern regarding the upcoming summer holidays and the impact that the resulting decrease in time spent with friends would have on Isla, *'it's something else that's gone out of her life, because she loves (pre) school, it's a real positive thing for her, so not only has Dad gone now school's gone and with school is her friends'* (Isla's mother, individual interview). Having the opportunity to play with other children at events organised by the Unit Welfare Officers was highlighted by Joshua's mother as being beneficial to Joshua's social and psychological wellbeing, *'like Joanne goes with her two and Joshua then plays with, you know, he's got someone to play with'* (Joshua's mother, individual interview). Six of the mothers also reported valuing the weekly coffee mornings at the offices of Unit Welfare in providing a safe environment in

which their children could play with others. Having friendships and opportunities to play with other children, such as within pre-schools or at events organised by the Unit Welfare Officers, is therefore found to act as a factor of resilience to the social, psychological and physical wellbeing of a pre-school child during a time of parental deployment.

From the perspectives of two of the mothers, an important aspect of social and psychological wellbeing came from being around other children with a shared experience of parental deployment. Charlotte's mother, for example, described a situation whereby Charlotte and her four-year-old friend had self-initiated sending cards to each other on the subject of their father's absences:

Maiya (Charlotte's friend) said 'Oh I wanna do a card'... because she said to Charlotte 'I know what it's like, my Daddy's away too and I miss my Daddy'...I read the card and Charlotte just gave Maiya the biggest cuddle straight away and they just cuddled each other.

(Charlotte's mother, combined interview with Charlotte).

This value of shared experience between pre-school children may be similar to that seen within the mothers as described in section 7.3.2. Discussions with Charlotte, however, did not reveal the extent to which she herself felt this shared experience to be important. Charlotte was aware that both her and her friend's fathers had been sent to Estonia but, from her perspective, the purpose of the cards they had sent each other were concerned with bringing each other's fathers home:

(Charlotte passes Georgina the card from Maiya)

Georgina - So why did she send this card to you Charlotte?

Charlotte – She wanted to make my Daddy come back

Georgina - Do you know when Daddy's coming back?

Charlotte – I sent this for Maiya's Daddy to come back

Georgina - I see, where is Maiya's Daddy?

Charlotte – *Estonia too*

Georgina - *Estonia too!*

(Charlotte, combined interview with Charlotte's mother)

Whilst good social wellbeing emerged as an indicator of good psychological wellbeing, poor social wellbeing amongst peers also emerged as a potential indicator of poor psychological wellbeing. Within the ten focus children, Tom was highlighted as displaying poor social wellbeing amongst his peers, such as in the form of throwing sand or being verbally unkind to other children. As discussed in section 7.3.1, he had also been highlighted as displaying aggressive behaviour towards staff members. Both the practitioners at his pre-school and his mother linked these behaviours to periods of poor psychological wellbeing which they felt were influenced by the impact of his father's regular and repeated deployments across the entire family unit. From the perspective of Tom, however, his friendships were still important to him. Whilst engaged in a drawing activity alongside myself, Tom referred to his friendship with a specific child at several points. This friendship was also the first thing he chose to speak about with me, suggesting that he valued this friendship within his life:

Tom - *Great, good, happy*

Georgina - *Great and good and happy, what makes you happy?*

Tom - *Erm, playing with Ethan*

(Tom, combined interview with Tom's keyworker)

Taking part in the research process alongside Tom, his keyworker also appeared to notice the positive emphasis he was giving to this friendship, '*Do you play with Ethan outside of nursery Tom? Maybe we could get a playdate going?*' (Tom's keyworker, combined interview with Tom). His keyworker's remarks of organising a playdate outside of the nursery setting indicate that she felt enhancing his social wellbeing could also be of benefit to his psychological wellbeing during this time.

Poor social wellbeing was also highlighted as an indicator of poor psychological and physical wellbeing in pre-school Army children outside of the ten focus children. Discussing a child who had recently left her pre-school, Manager A described how this child experienced very poor physical and psychological wellbeing during his father's deployment (see section 7.3.2). She believed he became socially isolated from his peers as a result of this situation on his social behaviours during this time. She felt this isolation and the difficulties within his social wellbeing were strongly linked to the stress he was experiencing within his family home and the impact that the deployment had had on his mother, *'...he had no understanding, like the amount of times we've had to intervene and distract him away from something because he's been incredibly cruel to somebody...'* (Manager A, individual interview). In turn, this child did not then have friendships to support and bolster his psychological wellbeing during this time. Murray and Harrison (2005) note that a lack of friendships can be a significant stressor and a factor which contributes to poor wellbeing. Those children who become rejected or isolated by their peers can become aggressive or depressed and may then tend to then associate with children who are also aggressive, thus reinforcing such behaviours and having a negative impact on their wellbeing (Layard & Dunn, 2009). As discussed in section 7.3.2, the situation for this particular child was incredibly complex with many contributing factors leading to this outcome within the context of his father's deployment. Whilst complex, the scenarios of both this child and Tom highlight that poor social wellbeing in various forms, such as sudden increased aggression towards others or isolation from peers, may be a risk indicator of poor psychological and/or physical wellbeing for that child in the context of a parental deployment.

Within this study, the pre-school children's friendships with other children emerged as being influential to their psychological, social and physical wellbeing during their fathers' deployment, suggesting the importance of these relationships during this time. Recent research highlights a potential issue, however, where parents/carers and early years practitioners assign low priority to the importance of friendships to children's wellbeing (Brogaard-Clausen & Robson, 2019). The findings from this study can help parents and pre-school practitioners in understanding the importance of encouraging and supporting friendships and play with other children during a deployment. Relationships with other

children in the form of siblings were also found to be influential and will be now be explored further.

8.4 Children's relationships with siblings

Relationships with siblings emerged to a lesser level than other relationships within the data but were still found to influence domains of the pre-school children's wellbeing in the context of a father's deployment. Two of the mothers reported that their children (in terms of sibling pairs) had responded differently to each other, even though they had been experiencing the same deployment. Their individual responses could, in turn, then have an impact on each other's wellbeing, particularly in terms of the psychological domain. This supports the viewpoint of Paley, Lester and Mogil (2013), that a pre-school child may have siblings and the reactions of each child are likely to impact on the responses of the other members of the family. The differences seen in my data across siblings may be a function of personality, age or developmental differences, as wider research has highlighted differences across ages groups (Chartrand *et al.*, 2008). From the perspective of the psychological discourse, however, wellbeing is subjectively defined and two individuals in the same circumstance may indeed experience different states of wellbeing (Fegter, Machold & Richter, 2010). Both the bioecological model of development (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994) and cultural historical theory (Hedegaard, 2008; Vygotsky, 1998) highlight how the child is an active agent who interacts both in social situations and with his/her environment in everyday life. Wong (2015) describes six properties of the individual child that influence development; his/her needs, desires, perception, personal sense, motives and competences in relation to his/her social situations. These properties are not fixed or static but are rather dynamic, shaped by individual factors such as the character, age, genetics, health and environmental situations of the child (Wong, 2015). In this sense, it is plausible that siblings could have entirely different responses to the same parental deployment. Individual differences in personality and temperament mean that some children may be more vulnerable to stress in undesirable conditions than others (Chen & Schmidt, 2015) and this may account for some of the differences seen between siblings experiencing the same deployment. This is

an area that would benefit from additional research in the context of British service children.

Daisy's mother noted a difference between Daisy and her five-year-old brother Jack in the context of their father's deployment. As discussed in section 7.3.3 she believed this was a function of individual differences in her children's personalities, commenting *'I think she's pretty chilled out, she's so laid back, I'm lucky with her!'* (Daisy's mother, combined interview with Daisy). This was in contrast to her brother, *'Jack was crying he was shouting and keeping the house awake pretty much'* (Daisy's mother, combined interview with Daisy). Daisy's mother felt that the biggest impact the deployment had had on Daisy came via the impact it had had on her older brother, *'I think the more it's affected her is because our older one, it's affected him. She's seen him, his behaviour, and then she's been copying like 'Oh I miss Daddy as well' because he's saying 'I miss Daddy' but it doesn't sort of connect in her head that she's actually missing him'* (Daisy's mother, combined interview with Daisy). Tom's mother similarly noted that his change in behaviour was having an impact on his eight-year-old sister's psychological and physical domains of wellbeing. She noted an increase in Tom's aggressive behaviour towards herself and his sister, *'sometimes he'll do everything exactly as you want him to and then other times he'll be quite aggressive, like he'll hit me, or he'll hit his sister'* (Tom's mother, individual interview). Demonstrating the interconnected nature of wellbeing, Tom's mother described this as having an impact across the at-home family unit:

...she's (Tom's sister) so sensitive and like she's obviously missing her Dad and it's just, you just find yourself getting so stressed that you're trying to deal with one and you've got one crying, she's been hit, and one crying because he doesn't want her to do something and he's hit her and it's just a big mix of emotions at the minute. (Tom's mother, individual interview)

Each service child is part of a wider family/caregiving unit and the reactions of each during a parental deployment impacts on the others. These findings demonstrate how the relationship with siblings can be impacted *by* and have an impact *upon* the siblings' psychological and physical domains of wellbeing during a parental deployment.

8.5 Summary of findings

Chapter 7 concluded that the pre-school children's psychological, physical and social wellbeing were strongly influenced by their relationships with their at-home mothers during their father's deployments. The data considered in Chapter 8 revealed that these domains of wellbeing were also influenced by their relationships with others. A key relationship considered in this chapter is that between the children and their deployed fathers. The children in my sample were found to have an important attachment relationship with their fathers and were capable of perceiving and responding to their sudden absence. This finding supports that of Chartrand *et al.* (2008) who reported a direct impact of a father's deployment in children aged three to five years even after controlling for a remaining caregiver's stress and/or depressive symptoms. Chartrand *et al.* (2008) found that children aged three to five with a deployed parent displayed increased behavioural issues such as anxiety, withdrawal and aggression. My research builds upon this, finding that children aged three to four years may indeed display these behaviours but that these are the normal expressions of young children who are experiencing distress at the sudden absence of one of their primary caregivers. The data also revealed that children of this age can verbally represent their emotions and understanding of their father's deployments. This finding strengthens the argument that pre-school children should be seen as capable human beings and not as incapable human becomings (James, Jenks & Prout, 1998; Quennerstedt & Quennerstedt, 2014; Roberts, 2010) and that future research should continue to attempt to represent their subjective views on their own wellbeing.

Maintaining attachment relationships with the deployed fathers is found to be particularly influential to fostering positive psychological wellbeing within the pre-school children. Within my sample, this was done in one of two ways: those involving the *real time* presence of the father, such as telephone calls and face-to-face video communications via Skype/Facetime/WhatsApp, and methods that created a *symbolic* presence of the father, such as dolls, teddy bears and other keepsakes. Differences seen between the individual children and across the availability of technology during different

deployments suggest that one or both of these methods may be more appropriate in different situations. It should not, for example, be unquestioningly assumed that video communications between a deployed parent and young child will always promote good psychological wellbeing in that child.

For the ten focus children, strong friendships and good social wellbeing emerged as a protective factor to the psychological wellbeing of the children during a father's deployment. In this sense, having good social wellbeing in the form of solid and established friendships was a protective factor to the children's psychological and social wellbeing. Having the opportunity to play with other children was also found to be an important aspect of the children's physical wellbeing. This was particularly the case during a period of lone parenting where the mothers highlighted difficulties in maintaining the more physical aspects of play (see Chapter 7). Where a child was seen to have poor social wellbeing, this was often indicative of poor psychological and/or physical wellbeing during (and frequently prior to) a parental deployment.

Relationships with siblings emerged to a lesser extent within the data but were still found to influence the pre-school children's wellbeing in the context of a father's deployment, particularly the psychological domain. The data revealed that, within families, siblings could have a different response to the same deployment and could influence each other's experience of that deployment. Differences were found to be influenced particularly by personality but also by the developmental stages of the children. This finding supports the view that subjective measures of wellbeing can offer important insight and future research should continue to represent children's voices of their own wellbeing.

Relationships with pre-school practitioners also emerged as being important in supporting the children during a time of uncertainty and loss within a parental deployment. This was particularly illustrated by the case of Alfie who retreated to his pre-school practitioners for comfort after his father's initial deployment. Knowing that there were consistent and supportive adults within his pre-school environment appeared to bolster the psychological wellbeing of Alfie during this time of distress.

Chapter 6 highlighted that the wellbeing of pre-school children experiencing a parental deployment should be considered within the environmental and cultural contexts that they inhabit. Chapters 7 and 8 have highlighted that the wellbeing of pre-school children should not be considered outside of the families that they are part of. The next chapter, the conclusion, will now draw together the overall findings of my study and discuss the implications of my research.

Chapter 9 - Conclusion

9.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to draw together the overall findings, contributions and recommendations emerging from my research. The central aim of this thesis was to explore the impact of parental deployment on the wellbeing of British Army children aged three to four years and in the pre-school year. Until this point, the deployment-related wellbeing of British pre-school Army children has been overlooked in research. This situation existed despite increasing international recognition that parental deployment can have a profound impact on young service children (Barker & Berry, 2009; Hess & Skomorovsky, 2019; Nolan & Misca, 2018; Osofsky & Chartrand, 2013; Riggs & Riggs, 2011; Trautmann *et al.*, 2016) alongside a worldwide recognition of the importance of early childhood experiences to later development (Belfield *et al.*, 2006; Papatheodorou & Wilson, 2016; Sylva *et al.*, 2003). This absence of such research has been problematic, particularly in terms of accurately informing educational, social and Armed Forces policy and practice for these children. My thesis makes an important contribution to this literature.

In addition to this central aim, my thesis also looked to address a collection of gaps and limitations seen across wider service children's research. Firstly, wellbeing as a concept is increasingly being used to refer to the deployment-related experiences of service children in both UK and international policy and literature (Hess & Skomorovsky, 2019; MOD, 2018; Mustillo, Wadsworth & Lester, 2016; Nolan & Misca, 2018; Public Health England, 2015; Williamson *et al.*, 2018). Whilst this is a positive move in the field of service children's research, wellbeing is often referred to with little or no accompanying exploration of the nuances of this conceptually vague term. This is problematic, particularly as perspectives and foci arising from different disciplines influence the way in which wellbeing is conceptualised and operationalised by individuals and organisations (Axford, 2009; Ereaut & Whiting, 2008; LaPlaca, McNaught & Knight, 2013; Silberfield,

2016). Within this thesis, I have therefore undertaken an exploration of wellbeing in order to use this term more accurately within my research.

A further issue that my research looked to address is the deficit approach often taken towards service children experiencing a deployment, particularly when focusing on behavioural issues that may occur during this time. I have borrowed Riddell's (2003) term *crisis narrative* throughout my thesis to refer to this issue. Researchers both within the UK and international context have challenged the notion of viewing service children of all ages and their families through a deficit lens, particularly as this overlooks their strengths in pursuit of their weaknesses (Cozza *et al.*, 2013; Cozza, 2014; Hess & Skomorovsky, 2019; Nolan & Misca, 2018; Park, 2011; Russo & Fallon, 2015; Wadsworth *et al.*, 2016). A crucial task within the study of wellbeing is to identify the key risk factors that are likely to have an adverse effect on children alongside the corresponding protective factors that can help to develop resilience and allow children to flourish and thrive (Pollard & Lee, 2003; Roberts, 2010). My research has taken a balanced approach; acknowledging the factors that foster positive wellbeing in pre-school children during a parental deployment alongside those that can lead to poor wellbeing.

An additional gap that my research looked to address is the underrepresentation of pre-school children's voices in both British and international research focusing on young children's wellbeing during a parental deployment. Such underrepresentation of children's own perspectives and an over-reliance on parental report potentially tells us more about parental experiences of deployment than those of the young child (Trautmann *et al.*, 2015). Wellbeing is also a subjective experience therefore it is vital that young children's perspectives are represented (Ben-Arieh *et al.*, 2001; Mashford-Scott *et al.*, 2012; Roberts, 2010). My research included the perspectives of six of the ten pre-school children alongside those of their at-home mothers and their early years practitioners in order to gain a more accurate understanding of their deployment-related wellbeing. My research aligns with a children's rights perspective, recognising that children of all ages have a right to be freely heard in matters that affect them (United Nations, 1989). It also adheres to the principles of the new sociology of childhood; that children are active and creative social agents who are both shaped by and shape their

circumstances and the society that they are part of (James, Jenks & Prout, 1998). In this sense, they are seen to be competent human beings with rights in the here and now and not as incompetent human becomings or as adults in the making (James, Jenks & Prout, 1998; Quennerstedt & Quennerstedt, 2014; Roberts, 2010). The pre-school children's own perspectives have made an important contribution to the findings presented within this study.

The final issue that my research looked to address is the individualistic approach often taken within service children's research. Service children of all ages are embedded in multiple interacting systems, such as their families, schools and the military itself (Benbenishty & Astor, 2014; Clifton, 2007; Kudler & Porter, 2013; Lester & Flake, 2013). Research often fails, however, to acknowledge the significance of this within such children's lives. Within the field of wellbeing, it has been acknowledged that discourses that focus solely on the individual and their emotions leads that individual to be defined in a way that detaches him or her from the environment that they inhabit; family, friends and the surrounding community (Ben-Arieh & Frones, 2011; Clack, 2009). My study has therefore drawn upon cultural historical theory (Hedegaard, 2008; Vygotsky, 1998) and the bioecological model of development (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994) which has afforded an exploration of the individual, familial, social and wider contextual factors that help shape the wellbeing of pre-school children during a parental deployment.

This case study of ten focus children aged three to four years was employed to explore the following two research questions:

- How do social relationships impact upon different domains of pre-school children's wellbeing during a parental deployment?
- How do environmental and contextual factors impact upon different domains of pre-school children's wellbeing during a parental deployment?

This chapter will now revisit the two research questions to summarise the key findings. Contributions of the thesis and recommendations to support the wellbeing of pre-school

children during a parental deployment will be discussed. The limitations of the study will then be considered followed by implications for future research.

9.2 How do social relationships impact upon different domains of pre-school children's wellbeing during a parental deployment?

My research finds that relationships within the pre-school children's lives have a profound influence on their domains of wellbeing during a parental deployment. Five important relationships/relationship groups emerged from my data, those between the pre-school child and:

- The at-home mother
- The deployed father
- Friends
- Siblings
- Pre-school practitioners

Importantly, this study finds that the child is an active agent in these relationships; they are not only impacted by them but also impact upon them. These five relationships/relationship groups were found to have a varying influence on four different domains of the pre-school children's wellbeing:

- Psychological
- Physical
- Social
- Cognitive

Chapter 5 detailed how existing research had been drawn upon to define these domains in the context of my study. Psychological wellbeing refers to indicators of emotion and/or mental health. Physical wellbeing refers to indicators related to the bodily health. Social

wellbeing refers to indicators of a child's relationships with others, particularly those outside of their immediate family. Finally, cognitive wellbeing refers to intellectual, educational or school-related indicators.

These four domains of wellbeing were found to be interlinked, the pre-school children's wellbeing being a holistic and entangled concept that can not easily be reduced to its component parts. I find, however, that the exploration of these individual domains has led to a clearer understanding of how different aspects of a pre-school child's wellbeing can be impacted by a parental deployment. This is important, given the nebulous nature of wellbeing acknowledged within existing literature (Ben-Arieh & Frones, 2011; Clack, 2012; Deci & Ryan, 2008; Ereaut & Whiting, 2008; Fattore, Mason & Watson, 2007; Fauth & Thompson, 2009; Lewis, 2016; Mashford-Scott *et al.*, 2012; Morrow & Mayall, 2009; McLellen & Steward, 2015; OECD, 2013; Pollard & Lee, 2003; Roberts, 2010; Statham & Chase, 2010; Thomas, 2009). It is also important given the tendency to limit the term wellbeing to refer only to emotional or psychological aspects of an individual (Clack, 2012; Roberts, 2010) and the tendency to use this term within service children's research without accompanying exploration of this conceptually vague term.

Within my sample, the most significant relationship found to have an impact on the pre-school children's domains of wellbeing during a father's deployment was that between the child and the at-home mother. This was especially the case for the children's psychological and physical domains of wellbeing and, to a lesser but still important extent, their social and cognitive wellbeing. I conclude that this relationship was so influential on account of the fact that it was the primary caregiving relationship within the context of the fathers' deployments for all ten of the focus children within my study.

9.2.1 Children's relationships with their mothers

The main way that the impact of the father's deployment on the children's psychological wellbeing presented within the ten focus children was through enhanced clinginess to the mother and/or increased anxiety at being separated from her. Further analysis revealed

two main findings associated with this: 1) close attachment relationships are an important source of comfort and support during a time of stress and disruption in the children's lives and 2) increased clinginess and/or anxiety at being separated from the mother is associated with a sense of vulnerability or fear that the mother might also leave.

Existing research has frequently framed such behaviours in young service children as being problematic (Barker & Berry, 2009; Chartrand *et al.*, 2008; Mustillo, Wadsworth & Lester, 2016; Nguyen *et al.*, 2014). I challenge this and argue that many of these behaviours can be seen to be the age-appropriate expressions of young children's distress and uncertainty in response to being separated from a primary caregiver. This is supported by the philosophical discourse of wellbeing, which asserts that feeling sad or distressed in response to the sudden absence of a parent can be seen to be an entirely appropriate emotion (Clack, 2012). From an attachment perspective, a child retreating to a trusted adult for comfort in these times can be indicative of a healthy attachment relationship (Bowlby, 1969). In my sample of ten pre-school Army children, a secure attachment relationship between the child and the mother was found to be a protective factor in helping the pre-school children adapt to such a significant change in their home environments. Taking the psychological perspective of Dodge *et al.* (2012), having a supportive and close attachment bond with a mother can be seen as an important psychological resource in helping the child to return to a state of equilibrium during a time of distress. An increase in pre-school children's desire to be near their at-home parent/caregiver during such a significant change in their lives should not, therefore, always be framed as problematic. For the majority of the ten focus children, the increased desire for support from the at-home mothers was particularly associated with (but not limited to) certain trigger points of increased stress, such as the initial period of deployment or when a father returned to the deployment following a period of rest and recuperation at home (R&R). I therefore recommend that the relationship between the pre-school child and the at-home parent is one that educational, social and Armed Forces policy should look to support during times of deployment. Whilst this support should occur throughout the duration of a deployment, particular emphasis should be on certain points of potential enhanced stress. An example of this would be prior to and following

the initial deployment, where families attempt to reorganise their structure and routines to reflect the change in the home-front situation.

Three of the ten focus children displayed behaviours that were associated with longer-term anxiety that the mother might also leave them. The analysis revealed that this was linked to a combination of factors including the personality of the child, the reactions of the mother and the children's perspectives and understanding of their deployment situations. The voice of four-year-old Toby was particularly powerful in highlighting the relational nature of wellbeing in terms of how this influenced his increased anxiety at being separated from his mother, such as where he remarked that he was worried that she had '*runned away*'. By listening to Toby's voice alongside the perspectives of his mother, a depth of understanding emerged that would not have been gained had his subjective views on his own wellbeing not been sought. In this sense, without his perspectives, Toby's sudden increased anxiety at being separated from his mother might have been framed in terms of a problematic behaviour rather than as an attachment-related behaviour influenced by the departure of his father on a deployment. This example further highlights the importance of recognising pre-school children as capable human beings and not as incapable human becomings. I therefore recommend that the subjective views of service children of all ages should always be sought in order to give an accurate and balanced picture of their experiences.

All three of the focus children who displayed increased anxiety that their mother might leave appeared to feel an increased sense of vulnerability to the stability of their home situations. The three mothers did not identify as having weak or insecure attachment relationships with their children, a perspective which was further supported by the perspectives of the pre-school practitioners who took part in the study. Whilst my findings support existing literature which has hypothesised that families with secure attachment bonds may be more resilient to the strains of deployment (Riggs & Riggs, 2011), it also highlights that pre-school children with secure attachment bonds can still have a variety of different reactions to their father's deployment, depending on a multitude of individual, social and contextual factors. Such reactions can act to increase the strains placed on an at-home parent during a time of lone parenting which can, in

turn, impact upon the different domains of the children's wellbeing in a cyclical, repeating process. It is not a foregone conclusion that only pre-school children with insecure attachments to their primary caregiver/s will experience an impact on their domains of wellbeing in the context of a deployment. Drawing on the wider perspectives of the pre-school practitioners outside of the ten focus children, less secure attachment relationships between children and their mothers did appear to influence a greater risk of poor psychological, physical, social and cognitive wellbeing during a father's deployment. In these examples, a link emerged between poor psychological wellbeing in the mothers and the resulting difficulties such families faced in terms of effectively reorganising family roles and routines to adjust to the absence of the other parent. Importantly, these families appeared to be more vulnerable to the challenges of deployment in the first instance, the deployment then acting as a catalyst to poor wellbeing across the at-home mothers and children. This is an area that would benefit from future research in the context of the British Armed Forces.

The attachment relationship between the pre-school child and the mother is found to be dyadic in nature; the wellbeing of each individual impacting on the wellbeing of the other. Importantly, this relationship is found to offer both aspects of resilience and risk which is particularly but not entirely mediated via the psychological wellbeing of the at-home mothers during the deployment. Good levels of maternal psychological wellbeing were found to be associated with good levels of psychological, physical, social and cognitive wellbeing in the child during the father's deployment. This was especially associated with the mother having successfully reorganised the family structure to cope with the demands of lone parenting, running a household and adapting routines in order to provide a sense of stability across the family unit. Conversely, where the mothers experienced difficulties in their psychological wellbeing, this was found to be associated with more negative aspects of the child's psychological, physical, social and cognitive domains of wellbeing during a deployment. In these families, family structure and routine were less likely to have adapted to the changes resulting from the deployment of the fathers. In turn, pre-school children who maintain good psychological wellbeing are found to place less of a strain on the psychological resources of the mothers during a period of lone parenting than those who did not. These findings should not be seen to be feeding

into a new crisis narrative; one surrounding the at-home mother. Both the mother (or other primary caregiver) and the child have an influence in this key relationship in the family home during a period of parental deployment. This dyadic nature of this attachment relationship should also be recognised alongside the wider influence of other social relationships and environmental factors, such as the support that is provided to families during such times.

Being an individual in their own right, the pre-school child is an active agent in this relationship, as well as in his/her relationships with others. Factors relating to children's personalities - particularly in relation to their tendency towards confidence or anxiety - were found to be important in how they responded to their fathers' deployments. This finding emphasises that children's individual personalities, resulting from both biological dispositions and social experiences, may lead some to be more susceptible to the stresses of a parental deployment than others. Variations were seen across the ten focus children in terms of how they responded to the absences of their fathers. Some of the pre-school children displayed behavioural changes that were more difficult for their mothers and pre-school practitioners to manage in comparison to others, such as increased aggression or increased separation anxiety. This finding supports that of Paley, Lester and Mogil (2013), who note that more behaviourally challenging children, whether by virtue of temperament or function of developmental difficulties, are likely to create more stress in any family. The importance of individual factors is further illustrated by the differences mothers reported between siblings who were experiencing the same parental deployment. This was not necessarily just a factor of age, with some pre-school children reportedly experiencing less of an impact to their wellbeing in comparison to older siblings, whilst others experienced more of an impact. This finding concurs with that of Lieberman and Horn (2013), who posit that the reactions of different children to separations and reunions will be mediated by their proclivity of their temperament to distress versus resilience. It also highlights how wellbeing can also be seen as a subjective experience (Fegter, Machold & Richter, 2010) and further emphasises the importance of pre-school children's subjective views of their own wellbeing being sought.

Individual developmental factors were also found to be important in influencing how the children experienced their fathers' deployments. The pre-school children were found to have difficulties in fully conceptualising the length (in terms of time), distance and the purpose of their fathers' deployments. For some children, this uncertainty led to a sense of ambiguous loss and lack of control over their situations which in turn impacted negatively upon their psychological wellbeing. My research also finds, however, that the pre-school children were capable of demonstrating an age-appropriate awareness of the deployment and for many of them this was a source of resilience. Time and distance are abstract and often intangible concepts but the idea that a father was *far away* for a *long time* often helped the children develop an awareness that their fathers could be expected to be away from the family home for the foreseeable future. Furthermore, the children's resilience and psychological wellbeing was often enhanced if this understanding was supported by key adults such as the at-home mothers and pre-school practitioners. Age-appropriate terminology and strategies, such as *sleeps* to refer to a tangible sense of time, could support the children in developing a workable awareness of their father's deployments, thus reducing ambiguity around their situations. Effective communication between at-home parents/caregivers and pre-schools can further ensure that the same terminology and strategies are used consistently between these two key environments of the child. Each child is, however, an individual in their own right and strategies that work for some might not work for others. I therefore recommend that early years practitioners and parents would benefit from having an array of strategies - informed by research such as this - and should work together to support children's awareness of time, distance and parental roles.

On the other side of the mother-child dyad, existing research acknowledges that the fluctuations in the parenting capacity of the home-front parent (frequently the mother) impacts upon young children during a parental deployment (Lieberman & Horn, 2013; Paris *et al.*, 2010; Posada *et al.*, 2015). The influences behind this are often not explored in depth, nor are the factors that can actually promote resilience in this key caregiver, thus potentially leading to a crisis narrative surrounding the at-home parent. Across the data, several factors emerged that were associated with resilience and positive psychological wellbeing in an at-home mother during a time of spousal deployment:

- Good networks of social support (frequently other Army spouses)
- A sense of belonging within the Army community
- Good mental health
- A confident/independent personality
- Support of extended family members
- Employment
- Support of Unit Welfare Officers or other Army resources (such as coffee mornings at a welfare centre)
- Ability and/or confidence to drive
- Maintaining or adapting family routines
- Knowing the finite length of their spouse's deployment
- Good communication with the deployed spouse
- Prior experience of deployment
- Having a place at a pre-school for their children

These factors are important as they, in turn, helped to provide resources for the at-home mother to support the wellbeing of the pre-school child (and any other children) during a father's deployment. The data also revealed factors that were associated with risk and poor psychological wellbeing in an at-home mother during a time of spousal deployment:

- The demands/challenges of lone parenting young children
- Challenging behaviour of children
- Lack of support networks in the community
- Poor mental health
- Being far away from extended family or a lack of support from extended family
- An inability to drive or low driving confidence (particularly in isolated areas)
- A reduced ability to maintain or adapt family routines
- Indeterminate lengths of deployment
- No prior experience of deployment

Each at-home mother experienced different levels of risk and resilience, demonstrating the unique situation of every Army family. These areas of resilience and risk should also not be seen to be gender specific and could arguably be applied to an at-home father or other caregiver during a period of deployment. These lists may not yet be exhaustive and future research may identify further aspects associated with resilience and risk in the primary caregiver during a parental deployment.

Within the data, the influence of the mother-child relationship on the domain of physical wellbeing during the fathers' deployment emerged at a less overt level in comparison to that of psychological wellbeing. Participants spoke much less frequently about aspects relating to the physical health of the children during a period of deployment. The exception to this was in two examples outside of the ten focus children where potential neglect/maltreatment in the context of a deployment was raised. Where the physical domain was most conspicuously raised was in reference to changes in the children's sporting and leisure activities, rough and tumble play and eating and sleeping habits in the absence of the father. In every case these factors were only raised after aspects of psychological wellbeing had firstly been addressed, strongly suggesting the participants felt this domain to have been impacted less by the fathers' absences. Further analysis, however, led to the conclusion that the mothers in many ways could be seen to be actively but unconsciously prioritising the physical domain of wellbeing by ensuring their pre-school children continued to maintain good physical health in the form of good nutrition, hygiene/cleanliness, sleeping patterns and sporting/leisure activities. Concurring with the viewpoint of Roberts (2010), I find that the mothers' actions of maintaining good physical wellbeing in their pre-school children then provided the foundations upon which the other domains of wellbeing could develop.

In the context of the mother-child relationship, social wellbeing and cognitive wellbeing were found to be more indicators of the child's psychological and physical wellbeing during the fathers' deployments. Where the child had good social wellbeing in the form of pro-social behaviours with peers and adults outside of the immediate family, this was generally indicative of good psychological and/or physical wellbeing in the mother-child

relationship operating in the background. Conversely, where the child had poor social wellbeing during a deployment this was frequently associated with poor psychological and/or physical wellbeing in the context of the mother-child relationship. Throughout the data, cognitive wellbeing as a domain was not overtly raised by any of the mothers or pre-school practitioners. In similarity to conclusions drawn surrounding physical wellbeing, however, the fact that it was not overtly raised does not necessarily mean that it was not an important domain of the pre-school children's overall wellbeing. In my sample, the children's cognitive wellbeing did not appear to be negatively impacted by the absence of the fathers and this may be largely due to it being supported by the maintenance of routines and stability within their families and pre-schools during this time. Reflecting on pre-school children outside of the ten focus children, the pre-school practitioners did, however, identify situations where a parental deployment had impacted upon children's cognitive wellbeing. From their perspectives, this was particularly where a child did not have a firm basis of physical, psychological and social wellbeing in order to facilitate good cognitive wellbeing. It was also seen where an at-home parent had not adapted routines in order to maintain the children's regular attendance at pre-school. This is an area that would benefit from additional research in the context of the British Armed Forces.

The significance of these findings surrounding children's relationships with their at-home mothers is that educational, social and Armed Forces policy and practice should both acknowledge and support this key caregiving relationship during a period of deployment. This should be the case regardless of the type or length of deployment, as each family and the members within it enters a deployment with collection of factors relating to areas of both risk and resilience.

9.2.2 Children's relationships with the deployed fathers

The ten pre-school children in my sample were found to have an important attachment relationship with their fathers and were capable of both perceiving and responding to their sudden absence. This finding is important in highlighting that children's responses to

their fathers' deployments are not entirely mediated by their relationship with their at-home mothers, therefore reducing the potential for a crisis narrative surrounding the mothers' influence during this time.

The absence of the fathers was found to have a direct impact upon the wellbeing of all ten of the focus children. This was particularly the case for their psychological domain of wellbeing, where distress was seen in the form of inward behaviours such as quietness and withdrawal and outward behaviours such as tantrums and behavioural outbursts. In turn, the children's social and cognitive wellbeing could be negatively impacted as a result of their psychological distress at the absences of their fathers. This finding supports that of Chartrand *et al.* (2008) who found that children aged three to five with a deployed parent displayed increased behavioural issues such as anxiety, withdrawal and aggression even after controlling for the remaining caregiver's stress and/or depressive symptoms. My finding now builds upon this: I argue that children aged three to four years may indeed display these behaviours but that these are the normal expressions of young children who are experiencing distress at the sudden absence of one of their primary caregivers. I also find that children aged three to four years are capable of verbally representing their emotions and awareness of their fathers' deployments and this can lead to valuable insight on how their wellbeing is impacted by this.

Maintaining attachment relationships with the deployed fathers was found to be particularly influential to supporting positive psychological wellbeing within the pre-school children. Within my sample, this was done in one of two ways: those involving the real time presence of the father, such as telephone calls and face-to-face video communications via Skype/Facetime/WhatsApp, and methods that created a symbolic presence of the father, such as dolls, teddy bears and other keepsakes. Differences reported in the responses of the individual children and across the availability of technology within different deployments suggest that one or both of these methods may be more appropriate in different situations. As such, parents and pre-schools may benefit from having a greater awareness of the importance of maintaining the pre-school child's attachment relationship with a deployed parent and of the variety of methods that can be used to facilitate this. Maintaining attachments relationships between young children

and a deployed parent may also facilitate the re-establishing of that relationship when that parent returns home - a stage of the deployment cycle that has been associated with stress across the family system (Barker & Berry, 2009; Huebner *et al.*, 2007; Lester & Flake, 2013; Pincus *et al.*, 2001; Riggs & Riggs, 2011). This is an area that would benefit from future research in the UK context.

9.2.3 Children's relationships with friends

In line with wider findings on the importance of children's friendships to their wellbeing (Brogaard-Clausen & Robson, 2019; Dunn, 2004; Layard & Dunn, 2009), strong friendships and good social wellbeing emerged as a protective factor to the overall wellbeing of the pre-school children during the stresses of a father's deployment. Having established friendships and opportunities to play alongside other children emerged as a protective factor, particularly to the children's psychological and social domains of wellbeing. Having the opportunity to play with other children was also found to be important to the children's physical wellbeing, particularly where this afforded the opportunities for active and energetic play that were highlighted by the mothers as being harder to maintain during a period of lone parenting.

Friendships and play were also a valued aspect for the at-home mothers who felt that their children playing socially with other children brought wider benefits to the overall wellbeing of the family unit. From the perspectives of all of the participants, the pre-schools that the children attended were found to be valuable environments for facilitating such friendships. It is therefore important that early years provision is available to Army families during a period of deployment. The opportunity to play with other children during a parental deployment likely also benefits children's cognitive wellbeing in the form of their social learning, language development and ability to resolve conflicts (Dunn, 2004) and this area would benefit from additional research in the context of British Armed Forces deployments.

Where a child was seen to have sudden poor social wellbeing amongst their peers, this was often indicative of their poor psychological and/or physical wellbeing during a parental deployment. This could occur for shorter or extended periods of time, depending on individual factors of the child and the influences of the relationships and environments that they were part of. This finding can help parents and pre-school practitioners in understanding the importance of encouraging and supporting friendships and play with other children during a deployment.

9.2.4 Children's relationships with siblings

Relationships with siblings emerged to a lesser level within the data but were still found to influence the pre-school children's wellbeing in the context of a father's deployment. This was particularly the case for the psychological domain of wellbeing. Where one sibling had poor psychological wellbeing in response to the father's deployment, this could then impact on the psychological wellbeing of the other. Likewise, where a sibling had good psychological wellbeing this could promote good psychological wellbeing in the other. The data revealed that siblings could have a different response to the same deployment and these differences were found to be influenced particularly by personality but also by the developmental stages of the child. This finding supports the view that children are individuals and active agents in their development (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994; Hedegaard, 2008; Rogoff, 2003; Wong, 2015). It further reaffirms the argument that the subjective views of pre-school children should be represented within research that looks to explore their wellbeing and that service children, even within the same family, are not a homogenous group.

9.2.5 Children's relationships with pre-school practitioners

The pre-school children had important relationships with their pre-school practitioners which often helped to support their psychological, physical, social and cognitive wellbeing during a parental deployment. A significant element of this was found to be the stability,

predictability and supportive nature of these relationships and the boundaries within them. This was particularly important to supporting the pre-school children's domains of wellbeing at a time when they were undergoing a significant change within their home situations. Daily routines including eating, sleeping and play were found to stay constant within the pre-school settings. The nature of these supportive relationships to the psychological and physical wellbeing of the children then provided the foundations for good social and cognitive wellbeing to develop. In my sample, the pre-school practitioners had remained consistent for the children during their fathers' deployments. This might not, however, be the case across the entire length of the deployment. One child in my sample, Charlotte, would go on to transition to primary school within the period of her father's deployment following her participation in my study. Other children outside of my sample may have also experienced a change in keyworkers or pre-school settings. This is an area that would benefit from further research in the context of the British Armed Forces.

It was apparent throughout the data that all of the pre-school practitioners who took part in my study knew their pre-school children very well and had a close working relationship with them. This was the case regardless of being in a setting with high numbers of Army children or not. The practitioners who worked in pre-schools with large numbers of Army children and/or had experiences of being service children or spouses themselves were, however, found to have a wider understanding the unique challenges facing this group of children and the nuances of the Army community and culture that they came from. This was evident in comparison to those who worked in settings with fewer numbers of Army children or who had less experience of service life to draw upon. Such an understanding appeared to facilitate the practitioners' confidence in appropriately supporting the specific challenges facing these children during a deployment. This is significant given the further finding that all practitioners felt that there was a lack of information provided to them in terms of how best to support the wellbeing of their service children during a deployment or move. This situation had led to some settings having a broader base of knowledge generated from within their community of practice with service children than others which helped them to better target their support, particularly in terms of understanding the importance of the wellbeing of the at-home parent during this time.

This finding strongly suggests that all pre-schools – and especially those with fewer service children – would benefit from research-based evidence to inform their practice during a parental deployment.

9.3 How do environmental and contextual factors impact upon different domains of pre-school children's wellbeing during a parental deployment?

9.3.1 The impact of the local Army community

Environmental and contextual factors were found to both directly and indirectly impact upon the pre-school children's psychological, physical, social and cognitive wellbeing during a father's deployment. From the perspectives of the participants who took part in my study, the local Army environment and context had created a unique community that was bound by the common thread of military service and the shared experiences of Army life. All of the mothers who took part in my research felt that their experiences of deployment were both understood and supported by fellow members of their Army community and that this supported their own wellbeing during a deployment. This is significant given the finding presented in section 9.2.1, that the psychological, physical, social and cognitive wellbeing of pre-school children was inextricably linked to the psychological wellbeing of the at-home mothers during a deployment. In my study, the Army community to varying extents indirectly supported the psychological, physical, social and cognitive wellbeing of the ten focus pre-school children during their father's deployments by providing support and resilience for the at-home mothers. Practitioner perspectives on children outside of the ten focus families, however, revealed that being within the Army community could also be an isolating or negative experience for other families. At-home parents/caregivers in these families appeared to be more likely to display elements of risk as described in section 9.2.1 above, such as lower levels of support within the community and poor mental health. This, in turn, was a factor leading to a negative impact on the pre-school children's psychological, physical, social and cognitive wellbeing. It can not, therefore, be concluded that being part of an Army community leads to positive outcomes across pre-school children's domains of wellbeing

during a deployment. Rather, it must be concluded that being part of an Army community during a deployment can, to varying degrees, impact either positively or negatively on the wellbeing of pre-school children during a parental deployment. Individual factors and those relating to social relationships between family, friends, colleagues and pre-school practitioners were found to mediate the extent to which being part of the Army community influenced pre-school children's wellbeing.

A further finding emerging from this research question is that *deployment* should not be used as a generic term in research on service children of any age. I strongly argue that it is vital to recognise that the commitments of the British Army (and indeed any branch of the Armed Forces, British or international) are specific to a particular historical time and that this will have an influence on the wellbeing of all family members, including pre-school children. Importantly, in 2018 no British Army deployment locations or commitments were considered as wartime or combat deployments. The ongoing presence of terrorist organisations such as the Taliban and ISIS/ISIL/DAESH in certain locations (such as Iraq and Afghanistan) means that there are, however, significantly heightened security issues associated with these deployments. This context is different to that seen within American-focused literature that continues to dominate service children's research. This is likely as America both maintained combat operational deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan beyond the UK's withdrawal in 2011 and 2014 respectively and also saw significantly higher combat-related casualties during these conflicts. The unique challenges that service families face therefore differs from their earlier cohorts which leads previous research to having a limited relevance to the current population (Hess & Skomorovsky, 2019). The context of my research is different to British-focused research conducted within combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan between 2001 – 2014 (e.g. White *et al.*, 2011). Many currently serving personnel and their families may, however, have experienced combat-related deployments during that era which will then influence their subsequent experiences of deployment, either in a positive or negative sense. I find that it is essential that the context of British deployment is accurately explored and defined so that the impact of the features of such deployments on the wellbeing of children of any age can be more firmly understood.

My research also finds that non-combat related deployments can still have a significant impact on the psychological, physical, social and cognitive wellbeing of a pre-school child and on other members of the at-home family. The data revealed that the impact of deployment on children's wellbeing is influenced by being separated from a primary caregiver, both directly and indirectly through the impact that this has on the at-home mothers. The lengths and types of these deployments further influence the impact of such separation. This, in turn, is influenced by the operational and training commitments of the British Army at any particular time. Data collection took place in and around Middlesford Army Garrison in England between April 2018 and July 2018. The at-home mothers identified three different deployment locations that the serving members of the family (the fathers) had been deployed to; Estonia, Afghanistan and Canada. Whilst varied, this should not be seen as a fully representative list of all of the current deployments of the British Army nor as a comprehensive list of current deployments within Middlesford Garrison at that time. Some were considered by the participants to be of short duration whereas some were considered to be unusually long in length.

Defining what constitutes a lengthy period of deployment presents a challenge as it is subject to variation in perception across individual families and organisations. The UK's Ministry of Defence notes that 'deployments can be anything from a month to up to 12 months and can place a strain on family life and have an impact on the education and wellbeing of children' (MOD, 2018, p.3). This defines the parameters of deployment between one month and twelve months, although UK deployments can and do operate outside of these time frames. Talking with the families involved in my research, an important social construct emerged that appeared to be influenced by the cultural and historical context of deployments in the British Army. Deployments of around three months were considered by many participants to be relatively short in duration, six-month deployments were seen to represent a standard operational deployment that were experienced relatively infrequently (such as during the Iraq and Afghanistan era), and nine-month deployments were considered to be unusually long. The constructs of this community surrounding the separation from a family member would likely differ to many members of a non-service community and it is important for educational practitioners to be aware that this may influence the experiences of a service family. For

example, from the viewpoints of the mothers, the length and types of deployments influenced the Army-focused support that they felt they received or were entitled to receive during this time, perceiving there to be a greater focus on operational deployments or those of longer duration.

My research finds that the separation from a father in the context of what may be considered to be a relatively short three-month peacetime training deployment can still have a significant impact on the wellbeing of a pre-school child and their families. This is supported by the findings of Mustillo, Wadsworth and Lester (2016) who found that experiencing a recent long deployment (over 30 days in the past three months) was associated with higher levels of generalised anxiety in children aged three to five years. These combined findings highlight that what may be considered a relatively short deployment within the culture of the British Army can in fact still have a significant impact on the psychological, physical, social and cognitive wellbeing of pre-school children. I therefore conclude that educational, social and Armed Forces policies and practices should provide appropriate family-focused support to facilitate good overall wellbeing across a family unit during a deployment, regardless of its length or type. Importantly, service families and pre-schools should be informed by research such as this in terms of what impact a deployment of any length may have on their children's wellbeing and on the wellbeing of the wider family unit so that they may be better prepared for the challenges that it may bring.

9.3.2 The impact of the pre-school settings

A further environment found to be important in terms of influencing the children's psychological, physical, social and cognitive wellbeing during a father's deployment were the pre-school settings that they attended. The pre-schools were found to provide environments where the predictability of routines, relationships, structures and boundaries supported these four domains of the children's wellbeing during a time of change at home. This was the case across the eight pre-schools that the ten focus children attended and strongly implies that attending a good quality pre-school can

support the overall wellbeing of children during a parental deployment. Across the pre-school settings, however, different levels of understanding of Army life and culture emerged. Three factors were found to influence the pre-schools understanding of Army culture 1) the proximity of the early years setting to the Army Garrison, 2) practitioner expertise and experience of Army culture and 3) links between the pre-school settings and the Army. Those settings in closer proximity to the Army Garrison were more likely to have higher proportions of Army children attending and practitioners who had experience of working with these children. They were also more likely to have practitioners working for them who were Army spouses themselves. These combined factors led to a sense of greater knowledge developed through a community of practice in these settings in terms of the specific nuances and challenges of Army life. This appeared to be beneficial in terms of how confidently these settings felt in supporting the wellbeing of their children experiencing a deployment. The mothers of the children in these settings also valued this shared sense of understanding and identity in terms of supporting themselves and their children during a deployment. This finding is important, particularly in light of all of the pre-school practitioners in my research reporting a lack of third-party information in terms of supporting the wellbeing of their service children. Settings with fewer numbers of service children in areas away from Armed Forces bases may have less opportunity to develop such knowledge in terms of supporting the wellbeing of their children during a parental deployment. It is therefore important that the findings from research such as this are disseminated to early years settings across the UK in order to support them in better understanding the implications of a parental deployment to the wellbeing of the children in their care. Through this, they can then support both the children in their care and the families that they are part of. It is also important that findings such as this are used to inform organisations who are involved in the training of early years practitioners and in the inspection of pre-schools, such as Local Education Authorities and Ofsted.

One of the most knowledgeable organisations on the nuances of Army culture is the Army itself, yet my research revealed variable levels of communication between the Army and the pre-school settings, even where the two were in very close proximity to each other. The pre-schools who had a good working relationship with the Army (in the form of Army Welfare Services) believed this working relationship to be important in facilitating their

ability to support the needs of the Army children in their care. They also believed that a close working relationship was beneficial to the Army in terms of understanding how to better support their personnel and their families through the challenges of Army life, such as during deployments and regular moves. This finding strongly implies that educational, social and Armed Forces policies that encourage a close working relationship between the Army and pre-school settings could have benefits in supporting both Army personnel and their families. This may be more difficult for pre-school settings with fewer numbers of Army children or are further away from the Army base where the parent/s works. In situations where a child is perceived to be at serious risk of harm during a deployment, I argue that it is important that Army Welfare Services form part of a multi-agency approach in terms of supporting that family. This should be the case regardless of the proximity of that pre-school setting to the Army base.

9.4 Contributions and recommendations of this thesis

Following the discussion of the main findings above, this section now discusses two contributions of my thesis to the field of pre-school service children's deployment-related wellbeing and the recommendations that arise from these.

9.4.1 The wellbeing of British pre-school children aged three to four years can be significantly impacted by an Army-related parental deployment.

My research finds that British pre-school children's wellbeing can be profoundly impacted by an Army-related parental deployment. This is particularly significant in light of the current lack of UK focused research on pre-school service children and the absence of UK educational, social or Armed Forces policy relating specifically to this age group of children.

I recommend that parents, pre-schools, the Armed Forces and wider educational organisations should be made aware of the impact that deployment can have on the different domains of pre-school children's wellbeing so that they can be better equipped

to support these children during such times. Parents and pre-schools should not be expected to know how best to support the wellbeing of their service children during a deployment. I recommend that they need policies and practices – informed by research such as this – to influence the support that they then provide. Changes in practices do not always necessarily need to incur additional cost. For example, for pre-schools, having an understanding that the wellbeing of the at-home parent can in turn influence the wellbeing of their children could lead to changes as simple as asking the parent how they feel they are coping during a deployment and signposting them to the appropriate support. In a further example, an awareness that young children's sense of ambiguous loss may be reduced by facilitating an understanding of time and distance can lead to age-appropriate strategies being applied in both home and pre-school environments. I recommend that the DfE/MOD's Service Children in State Schools handbook be extended to include information on the factors that can impact upon the different domains of pre-school children's wellbeing during a parental deployment.

Within England, the UK Government currently provides schools with £300 per service pupil per year – the Service Pupil Premium - as part of their wider Pupil Premium funding. Children from Reception (aged 4 to 5 years in school) to Year 11 (aged 15 – 16 years) are eligible for this funding, as are all school-aged service children who have had a serving parent leave the Armed Forces within the last six years. This consequently means that school-aged service children (and those who were previously service children) who are not currently experiencing parental deployments and mobility are eligible for the Service Pupil Premium funding whilst children who are currently experiencing these factors in the pre-school years are not. I therefore strongly argue that the Service Pupil Premium should be extended into the pre-school year. Further to this, I recommend that this funding should specifically target the psychological, physical, social and cognitive domains of wellbeing, with a particular focus on psychological wellbeing within the child and the at-home parent during a deployment.

9.4.2 The consideration of four interlinked factors allows the term *wellbeing* to be used more effectively when exploring the deployment-related experiences of pre-school children.

The concept of wellbeing is increasingly being referred to within service children's research yet is often done so without an accompanying exploration of this conceptually vague term. Arising from this research is a model of four interlinked factors that can be considered in order to give a greater depth of understanding when exploring the deployment-related wellbeing of pre-school service children:



Fig.8 - A model of four factors for the exploration of pre-school service children's deployment-related wellbeing

Figure 9 illustrates how this model applied to my research:

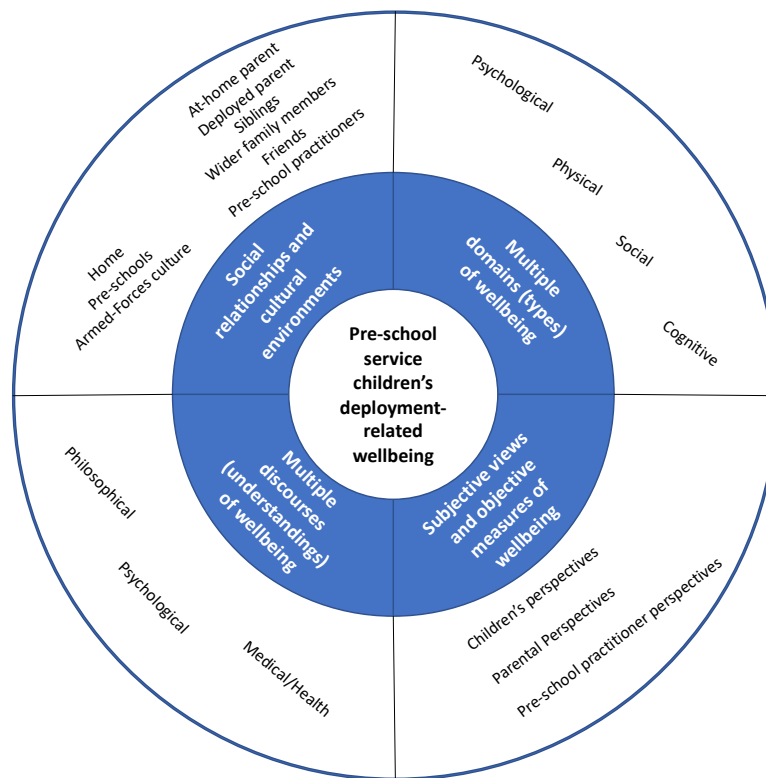


Fig. 9 – The model as applied in my research

The four factors and recommendations arising from this model will now be discussed in more detail.

9.4.2.1 Research on the deployment-related wellbeing of service children should be explored in relation to the social relationships, environments and contexts that they inhabit.

This study has explored the variety of individual, social and environmental factors that can influence pre-school children's wellbeing during a parental deployment. This is in contrast to the over-reliance on parental report focusing on behaviour problems occurring within the family home that is often seen within existing pre-school service children's literature.

Pre-school service children do not exist in a vacuum; they are individuals who are part of families, homes, social relationships, educational settings and arguably the Armed Forces

itself. All these are set within a specific cultural and historical time. Drawing upon the bioecological model of development (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994) and cultural historical theory (Hedegaard, 2008; Vygotsky, 1998), these factors are found within this study to profoundly shape the wellbeing of pre-school children experiencing a parental deployment and should continue to form a focus within future research on the wellbeing of service children of all ages. Importantly, these factors afford resilience as well as risk to the wellbeing of pre-school children.

One of the main findings of this study is that the wellbeing of pre-school children is inextricably linked to the wellbeing of their non-deployed parent (in each case in my research, this was the mother). I therefore recommend that the relationship between the pre-school child and the at-home parent/carer is one that educational, social and Armed Forces policy and practice should especially look to support during times of a deployment. Pre-school children also have important attachment relationships with their deployed parent, wider family members, friends, siblings and pre-school practitioners. These relationships all play an important role to the deployment-related wellbeing of pre-school children and their importance should be considered in future research, policy and practice.

I also recommend that future research on British service children should consider the importance of the wider environments that they are part of. The pre-school environments were found to support the children's psychological, physical, social and cognitive domains of wellbeing by facilitating other key social relationships (such as with friends and keyworkers) and by providing stability and routine during a time of change at home. Having a place at a pre-school was also found to support the wellbeing of the at-home mothers during a period of lone parenting, which in turn, helped them to support the wellbeing of their young children. I therefore recommend that educational, social and Armed Forces policy should ensure that early years provision which is sensitive to the needs of this group of children is readily available to families during a period of parental deployment. I also recommend that the Department for Education and the Armed Forces work together to actively increase levels of communication between pre-schools and military bases in order to better support such children and families.

This study has also highlighted that the specific cultural and historical context of the British Armed Forces are influential in shaping the experiences and wellbeing of service children. British educational, social and Armed Forces policy should therefore consider but not be overly reliant on international research due to limited cultural generalisability. It should also not be overly reliant on British-focused research from a previous era as this might not accurately reflect the operational demands currently being placed on British service families.

9.4.2.2 Research on deployment-related wellbeing of pre-school service children should draw upon multiple discourses of wellbeing.

My research has provided a deeper and more accurate understanding of the concept of pre-school children's wellbeing in relation to a parental deployment by drawing upon multiple discourses of wellbeing. This is important, as wellbeing is increasingly being used to refer to the deployment-related experiences of service children in both the British and international context, yet it is often done so in the absence of an exploration of this conceptually vague term.

Drawing upon multiple discourses of wellbeing affords the opportunity to view this concept through a variety of lenses, leading to a deeper understanding of this term. My research drew on the philosophical, psychological and medical discourses of wellbeing and future research may wish to expand from this base. An example of this would be drawing more upon the economic discourse to explore the influence of a serving parent's rank. Drawing upon multiple discourses helped to avoid the potential for siloed thinking, rejecting the stance seen in existing literature where pre-school children's wellbeing is defined only in terms of the presence or absence of observable problematised behaviours, thus feeding into a crisis narrative surrounding such children. I recommend that there should be a move away from measures that look solely at problematic behaviours or attainment/academic performance in young children that characterises existing research on pre-school service children. Whilst such data can be insightful, it does not provide a

depth of understanding for the reasons behind such measures. For example, adopting a philosophical perspective, increased anxiety when being separated from the at-home parent can be seen as a normal attachment response linked to being separated from their deployed parent. It is also important that where measures of academic attainment are used as measures of wellbeing within the context of a deployment the reasons behind these outcomes are sufficiently explored, particularly in relation to their social relationships and environments.

9.4.2.3 Research on deployment-related wellbeing of pre-school service children should explore how different domains of wellbeing are impacted.

Whilst wellbeing is an entangled and holistic concept, breaking it down to explore its domains provides a more accurate picture of how specific aspects may be impacted by a parental deployment. My research has highlighted that wellbeing in relation to pre-school service children can be conceptualised in terms of psychological, physical, social and cognitive domains. This list may not yet be exhaustive and future research may add to these domains. By breaking wellbeing down into domains, it also becomes apparent that some domains may be impacted more by a parental deployment than others. In the case of my study, psychological wellbeing was the overwhelmingly dominant domain to emerge as being impacted by a father's deployment. The physical, social and cognitive domains of wellbeing emerged less overtly but were still all found to be impacted by a parental deployment, mediated by individual, social and environmental factors. As such, wellbeing is found to be a holistic concept and, whilst some domains may see a greater or more obvious impact resulting from a parental deployment than others, all are important to a child's overall wellbeing. I recommend that pre-schools, parents and other organisations (including the British Armed Forces and the Department for Education) could draw upon the findings from this study to target these four specific domains with appropriate support in order to lead to better deployment-related wellbeing for such children. Importantly, this should not just be focused on the child but also on the families that they are part of.

This approach of drawing upon multiple discourses of wellbeing and exploring its domains allows for a more detailed understanding of deployment-related wellbeing of pre-school service children which in turn can inform more targeted educational, social and Armed Forces policies and practices for such children and their families. This approach could be further adopted to research the wellbeing of service children of all ages from across the different branches of the Armed Forces, both within the British and international context.

9.4.2.4 Research on deployment-related wellbeing of pre-school service children should represent the child's subjective views of their own wellbeing alongside other objective perspectives and measures.

My research included the perspectives of six of the ten focus pre-school children on their own subjective wellbeing. This is important as young children's perspectives of their own wellbeing are underrepresented within both British and international service children's literature as well as in wider literature on young children's wellbeing. Including the subjective views of the pre-school children was found to add to a richness of understanding that could arguably not have been gained via objective measures such as test scores or via parental and/or educational practitioner voice alone. This finding supports the argument that children of this age should be viewed as human beings and not as human beings (James, Jenks & Prout, 1998; Quennerstedt & Quennerstedt, 2014; Roberts, 2010) and that their own perspectives, both verbally and non-verbally, should be represented in research which looks to explore their wellbeing (Ben-Arieh *et al.*, 2001; Eide & Winger, 2005; Mashford-Scott *et al.*, 2012).

Across wider research, the wellbeing of young children is often represented by objective measures (such as test scores) and parental report in the absence of their own subjective views. Such approaches potentially tell us more about parental experiences of deployment than those of the child (Trautmann *et al.*, 2015). The findings of my research highlight that three to four-year-old children are capable of representing their own subjective views of their experiences via both participatory research methods and interviews. The process of including pre-school children's voices in research is, however,

not without its challenges and researchers need to be mindful of this. For example, young children may still choose to not take part in research or feel unwilling to share their experiences with a relative stranger. The significance of this finding is that parents and educational practitioners are well placed to hear the authentic and self-initiated voice of the child during a deployment and I recommend that their perspectives (and other relevant objective data) should continue to be represented alongside those of the children.

9.5 Limitations of the study

The limitations of my study will now be considered. This will be followed by the recommendations for future research.

This thesis reports on a case study of ten focus children within a specific Army Garrison town in England. Whilst the purpose of a case study is not statistical generalisability, I recognise that it may be limited in terms of generalisability to Army families who live dispersed within the general population or to those who experience very short-notice deployments. It may also be limited in terms of generalisability to deployments within the other branches of the British Armed Forces. This is because deployments across the Army, Royal Navy and Royal Air Force can differ from one another and are also subject to change over time, reflecting the global political landscape.

The British Army still maintains deployments to locations such as Afghanistan and Iraq where the ongoing presence of terrorist organisations such as the Taliban and ISIS/ISIL/DAESH present a heightened risk to the lives of the personnel deployed there. With only one of the ten focus children in my sample having a father deployed to Afghanistan, this study did not specifically explore the impact that deployment to such high-threat locations may have on the wellbeing of pre-school children.

In the case of all ten of the focus children, it was the father who had deployed away from the family home. I recognise that the father being the serving member of a family whilst

the mother is a non-serving member is not the only model of family in the British Army, with female-serving, dual-serving and single parent families experiencing deployments each year. In the case of all ten focus children in this study, however, the mother remained at home whilst the father deployed. As discussed in section 5.3, whilst this homogenous sample was not intentional, it reflects the fact that the British Armed Forces are male dominated, with only 10.6% of overall numbers currently being female (MOD, 2019e).

Section 5.3 also detailed how the self-selecting sampling technique used in this research led to one family who had been highlighted by a pre-school as experiencing poor deployment-related wellbeing choosing not to take part. As a result, my sample did not comprise many children and their families who were experiencing poorer wellbeing during a parental deployment and was more reliant on pre-school practitioner report for this information. The self-selecting nature of my sampling also meant that no foreign commonwealth families came forward to take part in my research. This was despite there being high numbers of such families in the area and the research being open to all families within the six pre-schools that participated within my research.

A further limitation seen is the lack of the fathers' perspectives on their children's deployment-related wellbeing. This was due the fathers being deployed at the time of data generation. My research specifically looked to explore the wellbeing of pre-school children during an Army-related deployment. It did not, therefore, explore the wellbeing of these children during the post-deployment phase where the serving member reintegrated back into the family unit, a phase of the deployment cycle that can bring positive wellbeing but has also been associated with stress across the family system (Barker & Berry, 2009; Huebner *et al.*, 2007; Lester & Flake, 2013; Pincus *et al.*, 2001; Riggs & Riggs, 2011).

Finally, this study took place within the academic year and therefore did not explore the impact of transitioning into primary school during a parental deployment on the different domains of pre-school children's wellbeing.

9.6 Areas for future research

Future research would benefit from an exploration of the model presented in section 9.4.2 as applied to other age groups of service children. It could also be applied to research on service children's wellbeing in the context of the different branches of the UK Armed Forces. This model could further be applied to research with service children in the international context.

The following areas would also benefit from future research:

- The perspectives of the deployed parent on the wellbeing of their child.
- The experiences of pre-school children and their families when a deployed service member returns and reintegrates back into the family unit.
- The impact of young children's friendships on their wellbeing during a parental deployment.
- The experiences of children from foreign commonwealth families during a period of parental deployment.
- The impact of transitioning from pre-school to school during a parental deployment.

This thesis has argued that a multi-disciplinary approach - drawing upon multiple discourses of wellbeing – can lead to a more accurate and useful understanding of pre-school children's wellbeing in relation to Army-related parental deployment. It has also argued that an exploration of the different domains of wellbeing leads to a greater depth of understanding of how a parental deployment can impact upon a pre-school child. Future research could adopt this approach to explore the deployment-related wellbeing of service children of all ages from across the three branches of the British Armed Forces (Army, Royal Air Force, Royal Navy). This approach could also be applied to service

children internationally, particularly as the deployment-related wellbeing in the under-fives remains underrepresented in research worldwide.

9.7 Concluding comments

This thesis has aimed to explore the wellbeing of Army children experiencing a deployment in the pre-school year. It has drawn upon multiple discourses of wellbeing to highlight that at least four different domains of pre-school children's wellbeing can be impacted by a parental deployment. Pre-school Army children and their families can experience situations unimaginable to many in the non-service population. The majority of the pre-school children and their families in my study demonstrated remarkable resilience in the face of a difficult situation. Each service child and their family facing a deployment has factors of both resilience and risk that will shape their experiences. For young children, experiencing the sudden and often lengthy absence of a parent presents a risk to that child's wellbeing. Many children and their families do, however, display remarkable resilience in the face of such challenge. It is not a foregone conclusion that only poor wellbeing will emerge from such situations.

Research that looks to identify the areas of risk or of poor deployment-related outcomes misses the opportunity to understand the factors that promote resilience in the service community and potentially leads to a crisis narrative surrounding these children. This is the case both in the British and international context. A better understanding of the factors that can influence resilience during a period of deployment means that these can then be replicated and bolstered within educational, social and Armed Forces policy and practice, alongside those that look to target areas of risk.

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Appendix A

Information and Consent Forms- Educational Professionals

Dear participant,

Before you decide if you would like to participate in my research, it is important that you are aware what the purpose of it is and how any information you give will be used. Please read carefully through the following information sheets. If you feel happy to be involved in the research, please complete and sign the consent form on page 5.

Who is the researcher?

My name is Georgina Normile and I am a PhD student within the Institute for Education at Bath Spa University. I am a qualified teacher and am passionate about representing this group of often overlooked service children in academic research.

What is the research about?

During the last decade it has been acknowledged that service children experience additional circumstances which may have an impact upon their wellbeing. Until now, however, the focus has been almost entirely on older school-aged service children and not those within the Early Years Foundation Stage. My research aims to fill this gap in our understanding and discuss how this could lead to better policies and practices for Army children aged three – four in the pre-school year.

The title of my research is: 'Exploring the wellbeing of Army children experiencing parental deployment in the pre-school year'. My research aims to focus on pre-school children who are currently, recently or about to experience Army-related parental separation.

Why are you being asked to take part?

You have been invited to take part as you are an educational professional who is working with children from an Army background who are in the pre-school year. Your insights and experiences of working with these children are very valuable to the research.

What will you get out of participating?

This research is an opportunity to raise the profile of service children in the pre-school year. As this is a small-scale piece of research, I am unable to offer any financial compensation for

taking part. At the end of the wider data collection phase, your setting will be provided with a short report detailing the findings of the study.

What will you be asked to do in the research?

You will be asked to participate in either an individual face to face interview or focus group with other educational professionals to give your perspectives on how a child's wellbeing may be influenced by Army-related parental separation. You may be able to choose whether to participate in a focus group or an individual interview, depending on the numbers of other available participants. In both cases, the process should take approximately one hour. An audio recording will be taken so that I don't miss any information given during the interview. These recordings will be transcribed so that I have an accurate record of everything discussed.

If you are the keyworker of a child in focus, you may also be asked to take part in some 'observed play' in order for that child to explore their thoughts and feelings with an adult whom they are familiar with and trust. In this scenario, you would use your knowledge and understanding of the child to help explore his/her current situation through play whilst I observe this interaction. My focus here is entirely on the child's responses and not your practice. You do not have to do this if you do not feel comfortable. I may also ask you to reflect on previous observations that you have made of the child related to their experiences of parental deployment. This is because a child's self-initiated behaviours and discussions may offer us very valuable insight into their world.

The aim of my research is not to scrutinise your practice with Army children, rather I would like to tap into your expertise in order to build up an accurate picture of what the wellbeing needs of pre-school Army children are. If you feel 'put on the spot' by some of the questions that I ask, I want to assure you that it is completely fine to say you are not sure about something, that you don't know or would rather not answer.

Who else is being asked to participate in my research?

I aim to build up a picture of the impact of parental separation on the child's wellbeing through a multitude of perspectives. In addition to your viewpoints I will be asking a number of others to share their views and experiences. These will include:

- The pre-school child
- Their parents
- Other military or educational-facing professionals outside of your setting.

What are the service children in your care being asked to do in my research?

Children are experts in their own lives and representing their viewpoints can be a very powerful aspect of research. It is their opportunity to tell us how they experience their world and the things that are important to them. I want to explore their viewpoints on parental separation due to active service or training.

As the children in your care are young, it would not be appropriate to explore their views using interviews like you yourself will be asked to take part in within this study. Research has shown that techniques that replicate some of children's everyday activities are a good way of finding out the information that matters to them. In my research, I may be asking the children to take part in:

- 1) Observed play with their keyworker or other trusted adult in your setting
- 2) Taking photographs in their early years setting and home
- 3) Drawing pictures
- 4) Listening to stories and discussing the themes

I would like to take an audio or video recording of these processes so that I don't miss any valuable information. These recordings will be transcribed so that I have an accurate record of what was said. All audio and video recordings will be stored securely and deleted three months following completion of my research.

In the case of photographs taken by the children within your early years setting, you will have the final say on the choice of photographs taken by the child in your setting that I can use within my research.

How will I protect your identity in my research?

Any information that you give me will be anonymised within the final report. Names and locations will be changed to protect identities. Faces in photographs will be blurred.

How will your data be stored?

All data will be used and stored in accordance with the Data Protection Act (2018). Electronic data will be stored securely on a password protected computer and deleted three months following the end of the research. Hard copies of data will be stored in a locked cabinet and will be shredded three months following the end of the research.

What happens if you change your mind after you have completed the research?

You retain the right to withdraw from the research at any point up to the publication of my PhD report. If you decide to do so, you can contact me via

[REDACTED] or my Director of Studies, Dr Melanie Macer via [REDACTED].

What happens if you have any additional questions?

You can ask me any questions that you may have now or if you have questions at a later date you can contact me via [REDACTED]

Certificate of Voluntary Informed Consent (please tick as appropriate)

I confirm that I have read the accompanying information sheet and am aware of the purpose of the research:

☐

I am happy for the interview/focus group to be audio recorded:

☐

I understand that I have the final say over the use of any photographs taken by a child in our early years setting, for the purpose of this research:

☐

I give my consent to participate in this study:

☐

Signed _____

Print Name _____

Job title _____

Date _____

Information and Consent Forms – Parents/Carers

Dear Parent(s)/Carer(s),

Before you decide if you and your child would like to participate in my research, it is important that you are aware what the purpose of it is and how any information you give will be used. Please read carefully through the following information sheets. If you feel happy to be involved in the research, please complete and sign the consent form on page 4.

Who is the researcher?

My name is Georgina Normile and I am a PhD student within the Institute for Education at Bath Spa University. I am a qualified primary school teacher, a service spouse and mum to two young service children. I am passionate about representing this group of children in academic research.

What is the research about?

During the last decade it has been acknowledged that service children experience circumstances which may have an impact on their wellbeing. Until now, however, the focus has been almost entirely on school-aged service children and not those in the pre-school year. There is also very little research which considers this from the viewpoint of the service children themselves. My research aims to fill this gap in our understanding and discuss how this could lead to better policies and practices for service children in the pre-school year.

The title of my research is: 'Exploring the wellbeing of Army children experiencing parental deployment in the pre-school year'. My research aims to focus on pre-school children who are currently, recently or about to experience Army-related parental separation due to deployment.

Why are you being asked to take part?

You have been invited to take part as you and/or your spouse are serving members of the Army with a child aged three – four and in the pre-school year.

What will you be asked to do in the research?

You will be asked to discuss your perspectives on the wellbeing of your child in relation to the deployment you are currently or have recently experienced as a result of your status as an Army family. You will be interviewed face to face either individually or as part of a larger focus group with other parents of service children, all within your local area. You may be able to choose whether to participate in a focus group or an individual interview,

depending on the numbers of other available participants. In both cases, the process should take approximately one hour.

An audio recording will be taken so that I don't miss any information given during the interview. These recordings will be transcribed so that I have an accurate record of everything discussed.

You will also be asked to share some information about yourself and your family such as your age, your highest educational qualification, the rank and role the serving member of your family is in and how long they have been serving. You will not be asked to give any sensitive information about the service member's role within the Army. I would also like to collect additional information such as how many moves you have had, how many early years settings your child has been in, how many siblings they have (and the age of those siblings), whether your child has been diagnosed with any special educational needs or disabilities and how many deployments on active service or training your family has experienced. This information will be used to help me build up an accurate picture of how these factors may be impacting on pre-school Army children during times of deployment. All of the information you give will be confidential and you retain the right to not share any of this information if you do not wish to do so.

How will your child be involved in the research?

You are also being asked to give consent for your child to be involved (information for this is included in a separate sheet). This is because representing the child's voice can be a very powerful aspect of research. It is their opportunity to tell us how they experience their world and the things that are important to them. I want to explore their viewpoints on parental deployment.

As your child is young, it would not be appropriate to explore their views using interviews like you yourself will be asked to take part in within this study. Research has shown that techniques that replicate some of children's everyday activities are a good way of finding out the information that matters to them. In my research, I will be asking your children to take part in:

- 1) Play alongside their keyworker or another trusted adult in their early years setting
- 2) Taking photographs in their early years setting and home
- 3) Drawing pictures
- 4) Listening to stories and discussing the themes

I would like to take an audio or video recording of these processes so that I don't miss any valuable information. These recordings will be transcribed so that I have an accurate record of what was said. All audio and video recordings will be stored securely and deleted three months following the publication of my research.

Once you have consented for your child to be involved in the research, your child's assent will be sought verbally, so that they can indicate whether or not they would like to take part. Your child will be able to withdraw their participation at any time and this will be

made clear to them. If I feel it is in the best interests of your child to withdraw from the research, i.e. if they seem unhappy or disengaged, then I will make that decision on behalf of your child.

What will you get out of participating?

This research is an opportunity to raise the profile of service children in the early years. As this is a small-scale piece of research, I am unable to offer any financial compensation for taking part.

How will I protect your identity in my research?

Any information that you give me will be anonymised within the final report. I will change your name to protect your identity and I will not be sharing any of your personal details with third party organisations.

How will your data be stored?

All data will be used and stored in accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998). Electronic data will be stored securely on a password protected computer and deleted three months following publication of the research. Hard copies of data will be stored in a locked cabinet and will be shredded three months following publication of the research.

What happens if you change your mind after you have completed the research?

You retain the right to withdraw from the research at any point up to the publication of my PhD report. If you decide to do so, you can contact me via

[REDACTED] or my Director of Studies, Dr Melanie Macer via [REDACTED].

What happens if you have any additional questions?

You can ask me any questions that you may have now or if you have questions at a later date you can contact me via [REDACTED]

Certificate of Voluntary Informed Consent (please tick as appropriate)

I confirm that I have read the accompanying information sheet and am aware of the purpose of the research:

☐

I am happy for the interview/focus group to be audio recorded:

☐

I understand that I have the final say over the use of any photographs taken by a child in our home, for the purpose of this research:

☐

I give my consent to participate in this study:

☐

Signed _____

Print name _____

Date _____

Information and Consent Forms – Children (to be completed by parents/carers)

Dear Parent(s)/Carer(s),

The purpose of this form is to give you more information on how your child will be involved in the study so that you can decide if you are happy for them to take part. Please read carefully through the following information sheets. If you feel happy for your child to be involved in the research, please complete and sign the consent form on page 4.

Children are experts in their own lives and representing their viewpoints can be a very powerful aspect of research. It is their opportunity to tell us how they experience their world and the things that are important to them. I want to explore their viewpoints on parental separation due to deployment on active service or training.

As your children are young, it would not be appropriate to explore their views using interviews like you yourself will be asked to take part in within this study. Research has shown that techniques that replicate some of children's everyday activities are a good way of finding out the information that matters to them. In my research, I may be asking your children to take part in:

- 1) Representing their experiences by playing with toys alongside their keyworker or other trusted adult from their early years setting
- 2) Taking photographs in their early years setting and home
- 3) Drawing pictures
- 4) Listening to stories and discussing the themes

How will play be used?

Discussions with the early years settings involved in this research have highlighted that observing play between your child and a trusted adult, such as their keyworker, may help your child to explore their views and experiences with someone they feel familiar with. Your child might be asked to use toys such as 'Small World People' to create scenarios similar to their own. As the researcher I will observe but not necessarily be directly involved in this play.

Why photographs?

Photography gives your child an easy and accessible opportunity to document aspects of their lives from home and their early years setting. Your child will be given a camera for a

certain period of time to keep with them in their early years setting and at home. They will be asked to take pictures of 'things that are different when Mummy/Daddy is away'. I will liaise with you to see how long you feel you may need to keep the camera for.

Following this, I will print out the pictures and discuss them with your child. I may also ask to discuss them with you or your child's keyworker alongside your child to learn more about their significance.

How will I protect the identity of your children and family in the photographs?

Taking pictures within the home means that another family member is likely to be captured within the images. Where the images are used within my final report, faces will be blurred to protect the identity of all individuals in a photograph.

You will have the final say on the choice of photographs taken by your child in your home that I can use within my research.

At the end of the research, you will be given a copy of the images taken by your child. My copies of the images will be destroyed three months following publication of the research.

Where will the drawing and stories take place and what will they involve?

Gathering information through drawing and stories will take place in your child's early years setting.

Drawing – Your child may be asked to draw a picture of an aspect of their lives relating to their parent's deployment. I will sit and discuss this with your child throughout the whole process so that I can: a) learn more about the meaning of their pictures and b) be vigilant for signs that your child remains happy to engage in this process.

Storytelling and discussion – your child may be asked to take part in a small group activity with other service children listening to a children's story on a theme of being separated from a loved one. I will then ask the children to discuss the themes from the book, allowing them to reflect on their own experiences if they choose to do so.

Audio/video recordings

I would like to take an audio or video recording of these processes so that I don't miss any valuable information. These recordings will be transcribed so that I have an accurate record

of what was said. All audio and video recordings will be stored securely and deleted three months following completion of my research.

How will I protect the wellbeing of your child during the research?

The wellbeing of your child is my primary concern during the research process. Your children have the right to say that they do not want to take part in the activities even if you have given your consent for them to do so. If they choose to take part, I will be drawing on my skills as a qualified primary school teacher to ensure that their best interests are considered throughout the entire process. The activities have been chosen specifically to allow them to participate as much or as little as they wish to. If they indicate in any way, shape or form that they no longer wish to take part then the research will be stopped. If your child were to become distressed during the research process then the research will be stopped immediately and this would be fed back to his/her keyworker and yourself via the telephone number that you have been asked to provide below.

What happens if you change your mind after you have completed the research?

You retain the right to withdraw your child from the research at any point up to the publication of my PhD report. If you decide to do so, you can contact me via [REDACTED] or my Director of Studies, Dr Melanie Macer via [REDACTED].

What happens if you have any additional questions?

You can ask me any questions that you may have now or if you have questions at a later date you can contact me via [REDACTED]

Certificate of Voluntary Informed Consent (please tick as appropriate)

I confirm that I have read the accompanying information sheet and am aware of the purpose of the research:

☐

I give my consent for my child to be invited to participate in this study:

☐

I am happy for the research to be video recorded:

☐

I am happy for the research to be audio recorded:

☐

I understand that I have the final say over the use of any photographs taken by my child in our home, for the purpose of this research:

☐

Signed (Parent) _____

Print name (of parent) _____

Print name (of child) _____

Telephone number (parent) _____

Print name and location of child's Early Years setting

Date _____

Appendix B – Interview Schedules

Interview Schedule – Parents/Carers

- 1) Introduction and consent form. Any questions?
- 2) Discuss the three areas of wellbeing that I will be exploring.
- 3) Turn on audio recorder. State date, time and participant number.

About the child

- Can you tell me about your child? / How would you describe your child?
 - What is their personality/temperament?
 - What sorts of things do they like/like to do?
 - How well do they interact with other children?
 - Are they settled in their early years setting?
 - How many times has your child moved? How did they respond to this?
 - Between you and your partner, who is the main caregiver for your children?
 - How would you describe the sort of bond (name) has with you both (e.g. Mummy/Daddy's boy/girl, both equal).
 - How many days a week do they attend nursery/pre-school?

Your child's experiences during this deployment

- How long has your partner been away?
 - What is the total length of the tour?
 - Where have they been deployed to?
- Has he/she experienced any periods of parental separation before?
 - How did he/she respond to this?
- Can you describe the run up to your partner's current deployment?
 - At what point did you tell him/her about it?
 - How did he/she respond to that?
 - How much do you feel they understood about what was about to happen?
 - Did he/she express his/her understanding in any way?
 - Was his/her early years setting aware of the deployment or involved in any form of preparation in this stage?
- How did he/she respond when they left?

- How well do you feel he/she is coping with your partner's absence now they are away?
- What is helping him/her to cope?
- What are the things he/she is struggling to cope with?
- Have you found any of their behaviours harder to cope with during your partner's absence?
- Since the deployment, have you noticed any changes in their behaviours (either positive or negative) in terms of:
 - Clinginess
 - Fears or anxieties
 - Temper/acting out
 - Crying
 - Withdrawing into themselves
 - Hyperactivity
 - Any others?
 - Sleeping patterns or routines
 - Eating habits
 - Toileting routines
 - Any others?
 - Their friendships – getting on and falling out with other children (inc. siblings)
 - How they respond to you as a parent or other adults in their lives
 - Any others?

Other aspects of learning and development?

- Has he/she communicated her understanding or feelings on their absence in any way?
 - Such as through play
 - Are you aware of any changes or instances where he/she has expressed his/her feelings in their pre-school setting?
- Have there been any times or occasions where he/she has asked for his/her Mum/Dad?
- Have they experienced any periods of illness whilst Mum/Dad has been away?
 - How did they respond to this?
- Has he/she responded any differently to your other children?

- Does your child show interest in communicating with Mum/Dad when the opportunity arises (e.g. Skype, Facetime)?
- **If applicable** – How did they respond to your partners period of R&R, before, during and after?
- Has your partner accessed your child's online learning journal whilst they have been away?

Your family's experiences during this deployment

- As a family, how are you finding this current deployment?
 - Have there been any particularly difficult moments?
 - Has there been any impact on your other children?
- How well do you feel your family has adapted to the deployment?
 - What have been the sources of stress?
 - What have been your sources of strength?
 - Are you having to take on more responsibilities for your children? What impact has this had on you?
 - What sorts of things have helped your family to adapt?
- Have you experienced any specific situations that you feel have been harder to cope with in your partners absence?
 - E.g. illness
 - Other sources of stress
- Were you offered support from the Army or any other agencies when your partner deployed?
- What support (if any) have you accessed?
 - Is there any that you wouldn't access?
 - What are the reasons for this?
- Is there any additional support that you feel would be beneficial to you as a family?
 - What would you find supportive?
- Have you or your child received any support concerning your partners deployment from the early years setting?
 - Before or during the deployment?

- Are there any ways that they could be supporting you and your child more during the deployment?
- Do you have any previous experiences of your partner deploying?
 - What was the impact of this on you and your family?
 - Has this previous experience impacted on your experiences of this current deployment?

Family Routines

- Have your family routines changed as a result of your partner's absence?
 - Has your child's routine changed as a result of their absence, during the week or weekends? - Are there any changes to their early years setting routine or leisure time?
 - Are there any activities they take part in less whilst your partner is away?
 - How has your child adapted to these changes?
 - Have the roles of any of your other children changed?
 - Are there any differences in how your pre-school child has coped compared to your other children?
- Have you experienced any changes in your ability to access resources for your child/children, such as health or leisure, whilst you have been on your own?
 - What about your own leisure time?

Questions/Comments

- Is there anything you would like to raise or add?

If have been a service child or spouse, any of their own experiences that they would like to discuss?

Interview Schedule – Pre-school Managers

- 1) Introduction and consent form. Questions.
- 2) Turn on audio recorder. State date, time and participant number.

About the child

- Can you tell me about *name (the child) / How would you describe him/her?
 - What is their personality/temperament?
 - What sorts of things do they like/like to do?
 - How well do they interact with other children?
 - How well do they interact with the adults around them?
 - Are they settled here in the early years environment?
 - How long have you been working with him/her?
 - Are you aware of how many times he/she has moved or experienced parental separation due to a deployment?
 - Do you feel he/she will be ready to start school this year based on both his/her progression in the EYFS and any other observations?
 - How many days a week do they attend nursery/pre-school?

About the deployment

- At what point were you aware that his/her Mum/Dad was going to be deployed?
 - Did you notice any change in (*name) before the deployment?
 - Did you change your practice in response to this?
 - Did you or your staff have communication with the parents about the upcoming deployment?
- How well do you feel (*name) is coping with Mum/Dad's absence?
 - What has led you to think this?
 - What do you feel are the factors that are leading him/her to cope/not cope?
- Since the deployment, have you noticed any changes in their behaviours (either positive or negative) in terms of:
 - Clinginess
 - Fears or anxieties
 - Temper/acting out
 - Crying

- Withdrawing into themselves
- Hyperactivity
- Any others?

- Sleeping patterns or routines
- Eating habits
- Toileting routines
- Any others?

- Their friendships – getting on and falling out with other children (inc. siblings)
- How they respond to you as a parent or other adults in their lives
- Any others?

- Can you give examples from observations?

- Do you have any examples or observations where (*name) has talked about or represented his/her experiences of the deployment in some other way (such as play, drawing)?

- From your discussions and observations either individually or as a team, how well do you feel the family are coping with the deployment (particularly the at-home-parent?)

- What do you feel are the main factors helping them to cope/leading to them not cope?

Experiences with other Army children

- Have you observed mobility or deployment impacting on the wellbeing of other Army children that you have worked with, either in a good or bad way?
- Can you give examples?

- Have you had examples of a child and their family experiencing multiple moves and deployments?
- What did you observe in these situations?

- Do you observe some children coping better with the circumstances of Army life than others? If so, what do you notice about this?
 - Child characteristics?
 - Family circumstances?

- Have you witnessed any impact on family functioning as a result of deployment or mobility?

- Can you give examples?
- Have you observed deployment impacting on a child's school readiness?
- In what ways?
- Do you notice any differences in terms of wellbeing between your Army children and non-service children?
- In what ways?
- Are there any differences in terms of attainment on the EYFS between your Army and civilian children?
- Have you had dealings with outside agencies such as health visitors for concerns specifically related to parental deployment?

Policy

- Are you expected to identify who your service children are? (i.e. by the Local Authority or Ofsted?)
- Are there any national policies on service children that you are expected to abide by?
- Do any external agencies (Local Authority, DfE, Ofsted) support your work or provide you with information on supporting your work with early years Army children?
- What information/support have you used to develop your working practices with Army children?
- What additional information would be useful?
- Do you have links with any other early years settings or schools in attending to the wellbeing of your service children?
- Do you have any links with the local military community, such as welfare services?
- What input do they/have they had?

Within the setting

- How many service children do you currently have?
- What are your levels of turnover as a result of the local Army population?

- What are the implications of this in terms of funding/costs/staffing levels?
- Does this impact on your ability to recruit staff?
- Do you have any specific policies in place for your service children? How do you inform these?
- Do you track comparisons of achievement between your service and non-service children on measures of the EYFS?
- Do you give your parents any form of information (or signpost them to information) during a deployment or move?
- Have you or any of your staff received any specific information or training on the needs of service children?
- What additional information would be useful?

Questions/Comments

- Is there anything you would like to raise or add?

If have been a service child or spouse, any of their own experiences that they would like to discuss?

Interview Schedule - Keyworker

- 1) Introduction and consent form. Questions.
- 2) Turn on audio recorder. State date, time and participant number.

About the child

- Can you tell me about *name (the child) / How would you describe him/her?
 - What is their personality/temperament?
 - What sorts of things do they like/like to do?
 - How well do they interact with other children?
 - How well do they interact with the adults around them?
 - Are they settled here in the early years environment?
 - How long have you been working with him/her?
 - Are you aware of how many times he/she has moved or experienced parental separation due to a deployment?
 - Do you feel he/she will be ready to start school this year based on both his/her progression in the EYFS and any other observations?

About the deployment

- At what point were you aware that his/her Mum/Dad was going to be deployed?
 - Did you notice any change in (*name) before the deployment?
 - Did you change your practice in response to this?
 - Did you or your staff have communication with the parents about the upcoming deployment?
- How well do you feel (*name) is coping with Mum/Dad's absence?
 - What has led you to think this?
 - What do you feel are the factors that are leading him/her to cope/not cope?
- Since the deployment, have you noticed any changes in their behaviours (either positive or negative) in terms of:
 - Clinginess
 - Fears or anxieties
 - Temper/acting out
 - Crying

- Withdrawing into themselves
- Hyperactivity
- Any others?

- Sleeping patterns or routines
- Eating habits
- Toileting routines
- Any others?

- Their friendships – getting on and falling out with other children (inc. siblings)
- How they respond to you as a parent or other adults in their lives
- Any others?

- Can you give examples from observations?

- Do you have any examples of observations where (*name) has talked about or represented his/her experiences of the deployment in some other way (such as play, drawing)?

- From your discussions and observations either individually or as a team, how well do you feel the family are coping with the deployment (particularly the at-home-parent?)

- What do you feel are the main factors helping them to cope/leading to them not cope?

Experiences with other Army children

- Have you observed mobility or deployment impacting on the wellbeing of other Army children that you have worked with, either in a good or bad way?
- Can you give examples?

- Have you had examples of a child and their family experiencing multiple moves and deployments?
- What did you observe in these situations?

- Do you observe some children coping better with the circumstances of Army life than others? If so, what do you notice about this?
 - Child characteristics?
 - Family circumstances?

- Have you witnessed any impact on family functioning as a result of deployment or mobility?

- Can you give examples?
- Have you observed mobility or deployment impacting on a child's school readiness?
- In what ways?
- Do you notice any differences in terms of wellbeing between your Army children and non-service children?
- In what ways?
- Are there any differences in terms of attainment on the EYFS between your Army and civilian children?

Questions/Comments

- Is there anything you would like to raise or add?

If have been a service child or spouse, any of their own experiences that they would like to discuss?

Interview Schedule – Prompts for researching/interviewing with children

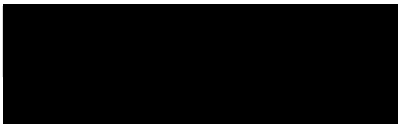
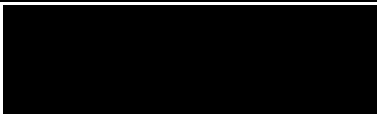
- 1) Discuss the purpose of the research activities or interview in child-friendly language
- 2) Turn on audio recorder

Possible prompts -

- Can you remember what I am interested in learning about by talking with you today?
- Who is at home at the moment?
- Has somebody from your house gone away somewhere?
- Do you know where they have gone to?
- Can you tell me how you feel about them being away? Or...
- Can you point to the face (on pieces of paper) that shows how you are feeling about them being away?

Questions to then respond to answers of children.

Appendix C – Confirmation of Ethical Approval

Comments on the ethical issues raised by the proposed research and how well they have been addressed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is a very well prepared application. Everything is very clear and well thought out. • If any changes are made to the design it will be important to renew ethical approval. • I wonder how the decision about 'saturation' point of the data collection will be reached. This should be discussed with the supervisor and contingencies discussed if it does not seem to be imminent! • I wish you well with this important and interesting research. • You say that you'll destroy/delete the data at 'the end of the research' or 'the completion of the research'. Here don't you mean following successful completion of the doctorate? A minor tweak to the wording would help to clarify this. 	
PASS	I am satisfied that the ethical issues raised by the proposed research project have been addressed and give approval for the project to go ahead	Yes
CONDITIONAL PASS		
REFERRAL		
Signature and Date: (Chair of School level committee)		
Signature and Date: (Dean of School)		19/09/2017

Appendix D

Participant Information Forms – Educational Professionals

To be completed by the participant:

Age: _____

Gender: M / F

Ethnicity (please state): _____

Job Title: _____

Highest Educational Qualification: _____

Length of time in current
setting: _____

Length of experience working with
early years children: _____

Length of experience working with
service children: _____

Were you a service child? Y / N

Are you/have you been a service spouse? Y / N

Participant Information Forms – Parents/Carers

To be completed by the participant:

Age: _____

Gender: M / F

Ethnicity (please state): _____

Are you: Non-Serving Spouse / Serving member of Armed Forces
(please circle): Dual Serving Family / Ex-Forces, Spouse Still Serving

Are you currently employed? Y / N
(please circle)

Job Title: _____

Highest Educational Qualification: _____

Number of children: _____

Ages of other children: _____

Age of your pre-school child: _____

What language does your child speak
at home? _____

How many early years settings has
your pre-school child been in? _____

How many moves have you had as a family? _____

How many houses has your pre-school child lived in? _____

Has your child previously experienced periods of separation from the serving member of the family (including training)? Y / N

What is the shortest and longest separation times that your child has experienced from the serving member of your family? _____

During your child's lifetime, where has the serving member been away to for a period of two weeks or more? (please list)

Rank of serving member: _____

How long has the serving member been in the Army? _____

Role or Regiment:
(e.g. Infantry, Artillery, etc) _____