

Recommendations to Support Young Children from Australian Military Families: A Report for Policy Makers, Family and Social Workers and Educators

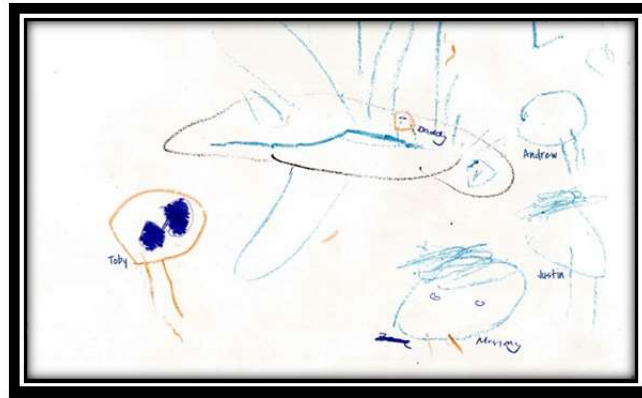
Marg Rogers
University of New England

Deployment is considered a challenging time for military families that lasts three to nine months for Australian Defence Force (ADF) personnel. There is insufficient research about children who experience parental deployment (Siebler, 2015). This recommendations report highlights valuable insights into young children's understandings and experiences of their parents' military deployment in Australia. The research utilised an adapted framework, based on the policies from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 2015) and Clark and Moss (2011), to listen to and privilege the often-marginalised child's voice. The research found that young children's experiences of parental deployment included stressors, responses, adaptations and protective factors. Children's understandings of parental deployment were often underestimated by parents and strongly influenced by time, place, acculturation, narrative, digital technology, cognitive development, adult reinforcement and the use of age and culturally appropriate resources. This knowledge is presented to inform effective support strategies for parents, educators and professionals who work with these children in the ADF and broader community.

Keywords: military families, early childhood, military deployment, early childhood education, family support, protective factors, mosaic approach, narrative, acculturation, family narrative

INTRODUCTION

FIGURE 1
ANDREW'S (4) DRAWING OF HIS DAD GOING ON DEPLOYMENT WITH HIS FAMILY WAVING GOODBYE



PREFACE

The purpose of this report is to put forward recommendations to those who make decisions in the Australian Defence Force (ADF) and those who act in supporting and educating roles for children and parents in defence families. There are summaries of the research normally found in a thesis literature review, methodology and results chapters to give readers enough background information to justify the findings and subsequent recommendations.

FIGURE 2
BETHANY'S (4) DRAWING ABOUT WHAT WANTS TO DO WITH HER DAD WHEN HE RETURNS FROM DEPLOYMENT



In this report, recommendations are made for Australian military policy makers, social workers, family liaison officers, education liaison officers and educators based on the results of this research study. The study has increased knowledge about young children's understanding and experiences of parental deployment in military families within Australia.

JUSTIFICATION FOR A RECOMMENDATIONS REPORT

Power in research needs to be acknowledged and utilised for the greater good. It is my duty as a researcher to share the study participants' views, challenges and visions for improvements in the way families experience parental deployment within the ADF. Their participation in the research was in the hope of a better outcome for their own families and for future ADF children and families. It is also my responsibility to privilege the previously marginalised voices of children in this area of research. A summary of the literature review, methodology, ethics, data and my recommendations can be found in this Prezi (https://prezi.com/27rp_oymr5ce/?token=130336e184a8eb69f2393e426efdced59c0c7be7ef7f5d4233f317faaf8fdbaf&utm_campaign=share&utm_medium=copy). Additionally, throughout the paper I have also included examples of raw data to demonstrate the various data collection tools and as a reminder of the voices of children, parents and educators within the study as displayed in the coloured textboxes and Figures 1 to 4.

Natalie (3): I went on an aeroplane.

Emily (2.5): I went to the airport today. (She had gone two days previously)

Emily: My Dad went on the plane.

Emily: My Dad is home now

(Two days after he had left on deployment to the Middle East).

Emily: My Dad is waiting for me.

The reasons why children's voices have been marginalised include historical and cultural factors. Western culture generally looks to adults to find out about the experiences of young children, rather than seeking to find out directly from the children. Traditional approaches have been to ask parents what is the best practice for their child, without finding out the wishes and understandings of the child involved. It can also be difficult to research with children, especially young children. Traditionally young children have not been considered able to clearly express themselves or to have sufficient knowledge or understandings of their lives to be valid research participants (Clark & Moss, 2011). As revealed in the coloured text boxes and Figures 1-14 there are many ways children express their experiences, understandings and emotions around parental deployment and life within a military family at 2.5 to 5 years old. Within this study, young children are considered experts in their own lives, able to competently express themselves in varied ways if we as adults are able to listen with perception and intelligence. It may create feelings of unease amongst some adults to listen to and take account of what children say even about matters that directly affect them. Arundhati Roy (2004) takes a stronger stance by stating, 'We know of course there's really no such thing as the "voiceless". There are only the deliberately silenced, or the preferably unheard' (para. 4). Whatever the reason, the Australian government ratified the United Nations (1989) Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1990, meaning children's opinions must be heard when making decisions that will affect them.

Cassie (3): My Daddy is away.
Blake (5): I like sleeping with my Mummy.
Cassie: Sometimes I sleep in my Mummy's bed.
Cassie: I talk to my dad on the phone.
Blake: I talk to my Dad on the phone and on the computer.
Natalie (3.5): I talk on the computer too.
Bella: My Dad is away.
Cassie: My Daddy is on a course.
Cassie: My Dad's gone away on training.
Natalie: My Daddy's wearing army pants.
Cassie: And my Daddy's wearing army pants and army boots.

IDENTIFIED GAP

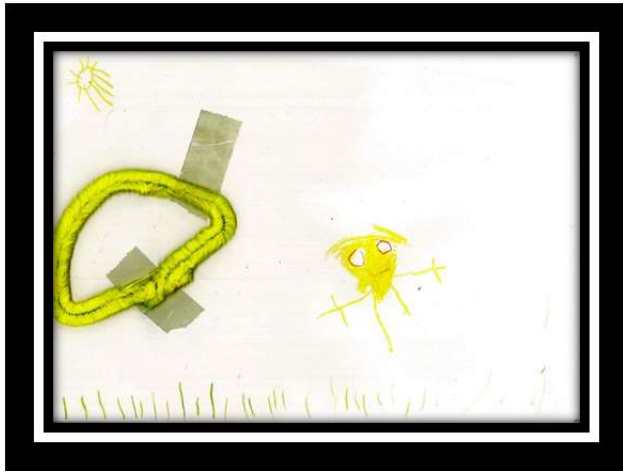
The literature about Australian military families is scarce (McFarlane, 2009; Siebler, 2009). There are examples of funded research, such as McGuire et al. (2012); however, independent studies are almost non-existent. Globally there is a dearth of data collected with young children from military families (Chandra & London, 2013). The literature review revealed that all identified Australian studies utilised only secondary data collected from the parents, rather than through any direct contact with the children or their educators. These included large-scale studies authored by Siebler (2009) and McGuire et al. (2012). Additionally, many interviews with parents were conducted after the deployment, relying on memory. This meant that the experiences that occurred during deployment were more likely to lose intensity when relayed by the parent upon reflection. Within this study, many families were currently experiencing deployment, lengthy training episodes or very recent parental absences.

FIGURE 3
BETHANY'S DRAWING AFTER READING A STORYBOOK ABOUT DEPLOYMENT



‘Mum is waiting for Dad to come home. Ule, Nancy, and I are at home. Nancy is looking after us.’

FIGURE 4
BETHANY'S DRAWING DEPICTING WHAT HAPPENS IN HER FAMILY WHEN
HER DAD IS ON DEPLOYMENT



'Mummy is waiting for Daddy
who is on deployment.'

METHODOLOGY

To address this gap in knowledge and understandings of young children within defence families, the Mosaic research approach was utilised. Employing a framework developed by Clark and Moss (2011), this approach assumes children are adept at communication and meaning-making and are knowledgeable about their own lives. The central goal of the Mosaic approach 'is not to make children's knowledge unquestionable, but to raise it to such a level that children's knowledge about their lives is central to adult discussions' (Clark & Moss, 2005, p. 65). This approach invited children to participate as their strengths, interests and preferences dictated. I gathered various insights into the ways children experienced phenomena from different perspectives, as described by Darbyshire, McDougall, and Scheller (2005) and displayed in the coloured textboxes and Figures 5-7. It also offered multiple entry points and exit points for the children, families and educators, depending upon their availability, focus and experiences throughout the study. This afforded cross-validation of themes from various data sources as recommended by Clark and Statham (2005). Narrative approach was also employed for a secondary set of data, discussed in the following section. Drawing on these two approaches, I constructed a shared knowledge of the children's understandings and experiences.

FIGURE 5
ANDREW'S (4) D IS FOR DEPLOYMENT PICTURE



Andrew (4): 'I have practised my D's and coloured them in. There are many suns so all the boys can work outside on deployment. The lady is digging on deployment.'

Participants

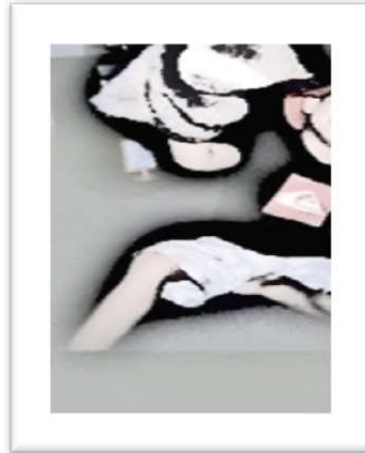
This study consisted of two sets of data. Firstly, data was collected from eight families who amongst them had fourteen children attending an early childhood centre on a military base. I conducted research with ten of these children over a period of four weeks. Through the parents, I was also able to gather secondary data on the other four children who were siblings of these ten children. Parents and educators of the children were also rich sources of data. Although all of the data was utilised, six of the children were chosen for case study analysis. Secondly, three additional families with five children from different geographic states and defence bases were also included in the study to promote diversity. While I observed and talked to all of their children from these additional families, the data was secondary, gathered from interviews with the parents rather than the children.

FIGURE 5
NATALIE (3) ROLE-PLAYING



The children were acting out the character's interactions from the researcher's storybook 'Anthony's Story'. The story explores the experiences of a child during parental deployment.

FIGURE 6
ANDREW (4) ENGAGED IN PUPPET ROLE-PLAY



Research Tools

A variety of data collection tools were employed, because a 'hundred ways of listening' are needed by adults if we are to hear the 'hundred languages of children' (Clark & Statham, 2005, p. 54). Mosaic approach employs the tools of observation, interview and participation to create a picture or 'mosaic' of children's experiences and understandings (Clark, 2010). The Mosaic approach hands a number of the research tools over to the child and supports the demonstration of children's strengths and preferences in expression (Mazzoni & Harcourt, 2013). As a researcher, I kept a detailed journal of my observations, conversations, assumptions, thoughts, wonderings, challenges, surprises and overall journey. With the children, I utilised semi-structured interviews, chats, observations, drawings, craft and other artwork, and photographs taken by the child or the parent (see Figures 8 and 9). Group work with children involved storybook elicitation, puppet play, role-play, action rhymes, movement, discussions and thematic verification. Semi-structured face-to-face interviews and thematic verification were conducted with parents and educators, as revealed in the coloured textboxes next to the figures below and in Tables 1 to 3. Some parents also engaged in email communication, phone conversations and in one instance, a home visit.

FIGURE 7
BELLA'S (2.5) PHOTO OF HER DOG



Fern's (mother of Blake and Bella) explanation: 'The dog is allowed inside when Dad goes away so he can protect us.'

FIGURE 8
BLAKE'S (5) PICTURE OF HIS FATHER'S COUCH



Fern's explanation: 'The children are only allowed to sit on it when Dad is away, so it takes on special meaning when he is away.'

Analysis and Emerging Themes

Thematic, case study and narrative analysis were employed to reveal a number of themes within children's experiences and understandings. Themes were verified through cross analysis of data, child and group verification (Harcourt & Mazzoni, 2012) as well as parental and educator verification. Most themes aligned with previous literature; namely, responses to deployment, managing transitions, risk factors, protective factors, ADF support and communication. Conversely, one major theme – ritual, acculturation and narrative in relation to children – had not previously been discussed.

FIGURE 9
BLAKE (5): 'DAD IS HOPPING IN HIS CAR GOING TO AYERS ROCK FOR WORK.'



RECOMMENDATIONS

This section explores the recommendations that have been formulated from the research findings, including the voices of children, parents and educators.

Why Are Recommendations Needed?

Findings revealed that despite considerable efforts by the ADF, the structures and supports that were set up for deployment of family members are lagging behind the experiences and reality of contemporary Australian families. Attrition is a major concern for the ADF due to the loss of skilled personnel and the amount of time and expense it takes to replace them (Department of Defence, 2012). Summarising this, Andres, Bowen, Manigart, and Moelker (2015) note that the military has shifted away from the institutional model, where the military's needs had to override all other relationships and commitments, towards an occupational model, considering the needs of family. While the balance has improved, during deployment, training and relocations, the institutional model still holds (Andres et al., 2015).

FIGURE 10
EMILY (2.5) AND BELLA (2.5) ENGAGING IN PRETEND PLAY



Emily and Bella acting out the 'Daddy' going away by kissing the other pencil family members before he boards the plane at the airport to leave on deployment.

FIGURE 11
EMILY AND BELLA ACTING OUT DEFENCE FAMILIES



Finding a Framework for the Recommendations

In choosing a framework for the recommendations, I sought one that would invite examination of the organisations of family, the ADF and early childhood education services and how they intersect with defence families. Organisational critical theory promotes discerning exploration of the organisational structure, culture, ideology, communication and management (van Manen, 1990) of these organisations in relation to the impacts on the children's and family's experience of deployment. It is not to say that any of these organisations or cultural groups were inherently poorly organised, however this framework encourages critical thinking and the creation of ideas that may result in better outcomes for the defence families. In 1605, Frances Bacon described critical thinking as 'a desire to seek, patience to doubt, readiness to consider, carefulness to dispose and hatred for any kind of imposture' (Bacon, 1605 in Silver, 2015, p. 1). As Cooksey and McDonald (2011) explain, critical theory necessitates moving on from a

neutral, sympathetic position. While there is much to be said in favour of adopting critical thinking, promoters of critical thinking believe the alternative to thinking critically is in the long term financially expensive and detrimental to the richness of life (Scriven & Paul, 2016). Thus, by using organisational critical theory, I have endeavoured to utilise the findings from this thesis to provide a foundation when discussing potential changes. It is hoped that these organisation changes may be a starting place for discussion and implementation of changes that may impact positively on defence children and their families' lives. In using a theoretical framework for the conclusions, I am moving forward from the theoretical framework that informed the data collection and analysis. Therefore, I am seeking to not only use the lens I have used throughout the thesis but to add to that lens another dimension as depicted in Figure 13.

FIGURE 12
INFLUENCES ON THE CHOSEN FRAMEWORK FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

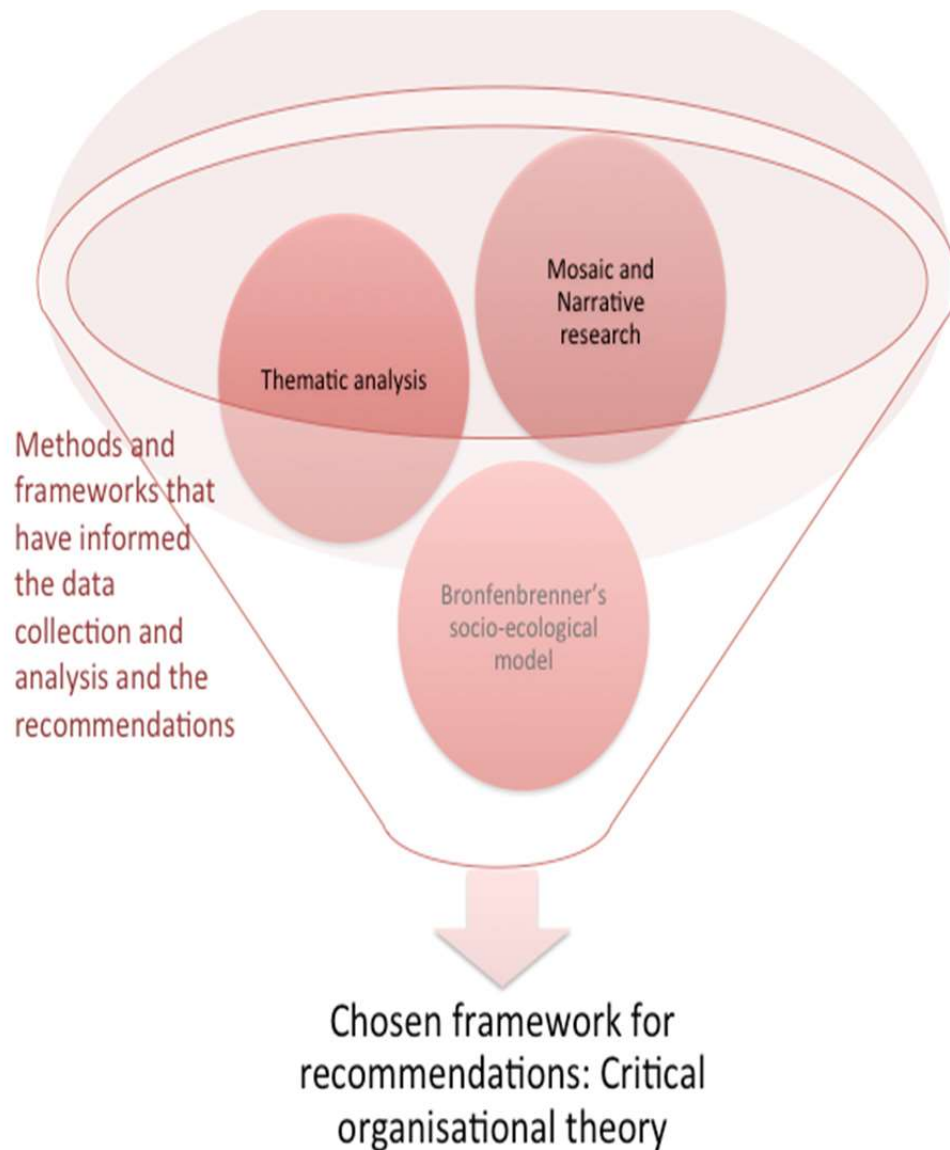


FIGURE 13
BETHANY'S (4) CLAY FAMILY PICTURE (TWO MEMBERS ARE HOLDING HANDS)



FIGURE 14
IVAN'S (3) CLAY MODEL OF HIS FAMILY



Scope of the Recommendations

It is not within the scope of this study to evaluate the cost-effectiveness, feasibility or affordability of the recommendations. The recommendations could, however, potentially reduce attrition of personnel with young children. Being apart from their families is generally cited as the major contributing factor for attrition amongst personnel (Siebler, 2009; Thomas & Bell, 2007). Additionally, the recommended changes may improve the job and lifestyle satisfaction for personnel and their families. In turn, this may benefit ADF personnel's ability to focus on work with less distraction and less worrying about the wellbeing of their families. Children who are in resilient, thriving defence families are more likely to look favourably on a military career, creating a generational flow-on effect. Three types of recommendations are outlined in the subsequent sections and these are grouped into organisational changes, family and educational support.

Proposed Organisational Changes

Due to the serious challenges raised in the study, I propose a trial of a new model of deployment and relocation for personnel with children and potentially other ADF members. Table 1 outlines the six proposed changes and the rationale behind the recommendations, including examples of data in coloured textboxes and Figures 16 to 18, findings and literature. Building on the work of Pincombe and Pincombe (2010), Figure 19 models the proposed changes to the deployment cycle.

**TABLE 1
PROPOSED ORGANISATIONAL CHANGES AND JUSTIFICATIONS**

Change	Details and rationale
1) Pre-deployment: adequate notice for family members of one month, barring emergency situations.	A month's notice grants time for household and family arrangements and for parents to prepare a narrative for the children to understand the changes the family will undergo. Families need transparency around deployment dates to reduce uncertainty (Siebler, 2009).

Parent: We didn't have time to prepare anything to help the kids before he left. He (spouse) was only given ten days' notice to go to a six-month peacekeeping deployment.

**FIGURE 15
EMILY'S FATHER PREPARING THE FAMILY NARRATIVE USING A GLOBE AND MARKER PEN**



2) Deployment: a reduction in deployment lengths to a maximum of six months. Due to the reduced time, leave during deployment will not be given, unless it is for emergency family or personal situations.	The six-month deployment could include a rotation of units to increase force effectiveness and minimise accumulated stress as explained by Pincombe and Pincombe (2010). It would also help to reduce family fatigue and stress and minimise time away from young children who change and grow quickly. Leave during deployment can be very difficult time for families to navigate. Additional reunions and departures are stressful for all concerned, adding to the disruptive nature of deployment that brings difficulty to families (Medway et al., 1995). A transparent end date for deployment is needed for families (Siebler, 2009)
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FIGURE 16
BLAKE'S CLAY MODEL 'MY FACE WHEN MY DAD GOES AWAY.
THE TEARS ARE BLUE'



Parent: I made him (spouse) come away on a family holiday soon after he came back. He didn't want to, but it made a big difference to reconnect. It is hard as the kids were up to different stages so he was often babying them and they didn't want to be babied. Nine months is a long time in a young child's life and they changed a lot. He was also really upset by some of the parenting decisions I had made in his absence. It was hard having those very honest conversations where he was saying he thought those decisions were wrong. I made them to cope during that tough time. Issues like the kids coming and sleeping in our bed. We were all having trouble sleeping and Brianna was having nightmares. It just saved the fights at the time and was much easier on everyone. I think I just had to get through it at the time by doing things my way.

3) Deployment: training for deployment needs to be conducted on the way to deployment, without returning home. Further training may be conducted during deployment through the rotation of units.

Training could occur during deployment via a rotation of units to ensure personnel have a break from stressful combat and environmental experiences (Pincombe & Pincombe, 2010). This reduces the likelihood of rapid re-entry problems upon return to civilian life (Peebles-Kleiger & Kleiger, 1994), maximising the capacity of the personnel to return to work, family and community life effectively. This training mode should also minimise chances of secondary transference of depression and PTSD to spouses and children by reducing time in combat zones. These factors are a drain on the family, the ADF and the wider community with the additional finance and support needed. These changes also minimise the pre-deployment training that requires the personnel to leave the family home frequently for short periods of time, increasing stress for the whole family. Epigenetics also reveal that stressful events in childhood can also have generational effects (Grace, Hayes, & Wise, 2016; Sims, 2014).

Father: We had never planned as a family that I would be there (with the ADF) forever. In the end it came down to more time away for promotion and I was away all of 2012, came home in February for six weeks, then home for two weeks then away for three to four months again.... The main reason I left was just lifestyle.... It was the right decision for our family to leave.

Mother: All the time away was the big issue for us. Caleb had missed the first soccer games and other big events in the children's lives. ... We still see another family whose husband was in Afghanistan with Caleb. He has just discharged too for family reasons. Since leaving things are much easier for us all. We can plan events and know we will all be there, including the holidays. The uncertainty is gone. The children are more settled. It's great knowing the time you have will be yours as a family.

4) Deployment: further training could also be conducted on the way home from deployment.	This may alleviate the stress of sudden entry into civilian life (Pincombe and Pincombe, 2010). The levels of stress involved with each particular deployment or situation should be employed to calculate the frequency of the unit rotation.
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Parent: He (spouse) was really tired and tried sleeping during the day to catch up. The kids just made really loud noises suddenly and he would be angry at being woken up. I kept saying: 'They are just young kids, Seb'. He said it is hard because when you are on base you are with adults for nine months; adults who are good at following orders. When he came home, he was dealing with a toddler and a pre-schooler. He also said it was really hard to fit back in as a civilian. When he was deployed, people just got out of their way because they were heavily armed and often riding in armoured vehicles. Back here he found it really difficult to be just someone ordinary again. When people cut in front of him in traffic he would be so angry. He needed help with anger management at first.

5) Redeployment: should only occur after one year at home for personnel with young children.	Families need time together to nurture intimate relationships and grow together. Children need time with parents for bonding, building secure attachments and strengthening relationships. Time is needed for families to move out of stressful periods to ensure the health and wellbeing of all members is restored. This timeframe could be shortened in cases of national emergencies. Redeployment brings higher risks for personnel and their families on return from deployment (MacManus et al., 2012) and poorer outcomes for families (Siebler, 2009).
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FIGURE 17
CASSIE: I LIKE SWIMMING WITH DADDY WHEN HE IS HOME



Parent: (After she was informed another parent's spouse was back from deployment) So now you two have to catch up with each other on all that has happened.

Other parent: (thoughtfully): Yes... and that's nice, but there are things they just miss. I mean how do you ever really catch up eight months' worth of things that happen, events in Jack's life, the extended family, what is happening with my life, our emotions? And on top of that is all the time away for training. I don't know he keeps things from me and I overhear him talking about something that happened on deployment with his mates over a beer. Things he doesn't share with me, probably 'cause he doesn't want to scare me. There are things you just don't share I suppose.

<p>6) Pre and post deployment: training outside of deployment needs to be limited , streamlined , coordinated and aligned with adequate notice of three weeks given to families.</p>	<p>Training needs to be either conducted at the personnel's base or a limited once-per-year stint of up to eight weeks within Australia (one session away , not several short sessions that require returning to the family home in between). Data revealed families were unable to plan family events and the extra support needed during a parent's absence. This contributed to family stress and a desire to leave the ADF.</p>
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Parent: The kids would be all over Caleb at first when he got home from training or deployment. Sam developed this extreme reaction where he would be really angry and awful to Caleb after three to five days and not want anything to do with him. This would last for quite a while. He was not speaking well and I think it was just his way of showing his anger. He was also frightened Dad was going away again. He was always in and out for training. It was particularly hard on Caleb. After Afghanistan Caleb decided to take a step back for the reintegration period. This meant I took care of them and all discipline was handled by me for the first couple of weeks.

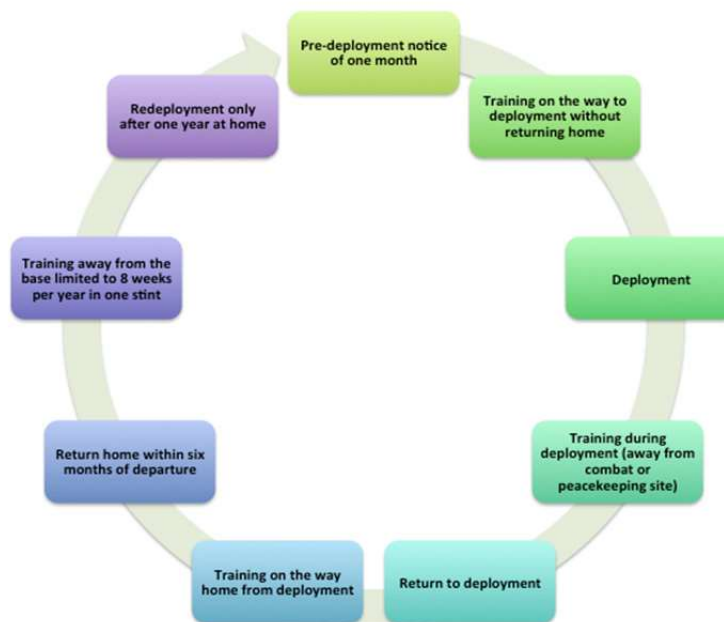
7) General: Reduce the relocation of families to once every six years.

Research has demonstrated levels of children's loneliness, their strength relationships with peers and the psychosocial adjustment of their non-deployed parent were all affected by frequency of family mobility (Kelley, Finkel, & Ashby, 2003). The proposed reduction would ensure children develop stability, a sense of place, a sense of belonging in their care, education and community by reducing relocations to only two to three within their eighteen-year childhood. It is vital for young children to build strong relationships within these areas to foster resilience. The Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) (DEEWR, 2009) states 'In early childhood, and throughout life, relationships are crucial to a sense of belonging. Belonging is central to being and becoming in that it shapes who children are and who they can become' (p.7). This stability will also assist parents to build the relationships needed for adequate support during training and deployment episodes. It also promotes the career development of the non-ADF spouse.

Parent: So we are from (names another state), but we have been stationed in bases in Sydney, Townsville, Brisbane, Townsville for a second time, Victoria and some other places in between.

Bethany (4) pointed on the map puzzle to the Sydney dot.
 Bethany: Ule (brother) and I were born there.
 Educator: That's in New South Wales. We live here now (pointing to another capital city). Have you lived here long?
 Bethany (looking thoughtful): I miss my old house (in a sad tone). But someone is looking after our old house in Sydney when we are not living there. It's another army man. A friend of Dad's.
 Educator: Oh, that is good. How long until your Dad comes home?'
 Bethany (looking down and guarded): I don't know. (pauses) A long time.
 Andrew (4) (who has been listening in on the conversation): I live here (pointing to a capital city dot).
 Educator: That's right, Andrew.
 Bethany: We live in a different house now, we moved.
 Andrew: We are going to move house soon.
 Educator: Here, or in another city?
 Andrew: Oh, no. It is near our house. I have been there, and seen it.

FIGURE 18
PROPOSED NEW MODEL OF DEPLOYMENT FOR PERSONNEL WITH DEPENDENT CHILDREN ADAPTED FROM (PICOMBE & PINCOMBE, 2010)



While these changes may seem quite radical, the alternative is children who struggle to form quality relationships with their absent parents and parents who are in a continual state of stress. Prolonged stress creates long-term developmental and epigenetic intergenerational problems in children (Grace et al., 2016) and increased health risks for all family members (Rose, Gilbert, & Richards, 2016). The importance of providing a stable foundation for health and wellbeing outcomes in the early years and throughout their life is explained by Sims (2014). The future of military children's wellbeing is vital and needs to be addressed by those that have the capacity to do so. Lowe (1998) states that the future is not a vague destination, but rather something we create through our daily decisions, directions and actions.

Therefore, it is vital we engage in critical thinking to address the underlying causes of our problems and create effective solutions because the outcome of what we do reflects the standard of our thinking (Scriven & Paul, 2016).

Support for Families

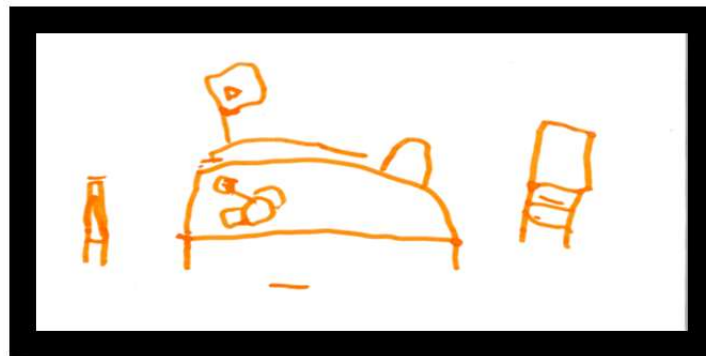
Siebler (2009) identified the need for a total review of the policies and practices in supporting defence families. Since then, some progress has been made (Siebler & Goddard, 2014), and it is evident the ADF is engaging in a number of initiatives that effectively support many families. This study revealed a need for more support in certain areas and a need to address problems of knowledge and access for other services. These recommendations also came from parental suggestions. They are outlined in Table 2 below with a rationale for the recommendations in a similar style to Table 1, including data displayed in Figure 20.

**TABLE 2
RECOMMENDATIONS TO SUPPORT FAMILIES**

Change	Details and rationale
1) Increase support and education for personnel in relationship, parenting and co-parenting education programs specifically dealing with the effects of the deployment and training cycle. This needs to include strategies to build coping strategies for children and families.	These programs could be delivered through a variety of methods and should occur for all personnel with spouses or families, regardless of whether they are about to deploy or go away for training, so they are ready when this occurs. Siebler (2009) found that the effects of deployment on children, adolescents and a number of non-deployed spouses was alarming.

Parent: He thinks he is helping me when he tries to parent over Skype™. How do you effectively parent from another continent?

**FIGURE 19
BLAKE'S (5) DRAWING OF WHAT HE DOES WHEN HE IS MISSING HIS DAD**



Blake: 'My book is on the ground. My recordable picture book is on my desk. I like listening to my Dad's voice when he is away. Sometimes when I am missing him I wake up and look at my album. The lump on the end of the bed is my pet dog Kuta. I like to cuddle him in bed when Dad is away.'

Parent: He (spouse) was able to use Skype™ most days. He said he found that really helpful being able to see us every day and know we were OK. I found it very draining. Phone calls are better as Caleb can be on speaker-phone and I can keep attending to the children and do housework while we chat. Skype™ sessions every night meant you had to be totally available for an hour at a really bad time of night. The kids and I were both tired, the kids were whiny and sometimes it was the last thing you felt like doing. I did it anyway and of course would never tell him how much I hated it.

2) Provide online and face-to-face access to free parental counselling and support groups with childminding utilising effective practitioners. Ensure families know about the counselling.

Social workers and family liaison officers could provide this if they are adequately skilled in understanding the particular challenges and needs of military families. Siebler (2009) called for an increase in mental health, family and relationship team of counsellors provided by Regional Mental Health Teams. Reintegration is the most difficult stage within the deployment cycle (Bowling & Sherman, 2008).

Director: Does he (Jack, aged 4) normally sleep with you?

Parent (yawning): Yep, since the day he overheard my husband say he was going to deploy.

Director: Oh! When was that?

Parent: Four weeks before he left.

Director: How are you when Paul goes?

Parent (looking teary): A real mess emotionally a month before he goes and the first month he has gone. I work hard not to be resentful and bitter, but this is his fourth deployment in four years, so he has been away about half of Jack's life. I don't cope at all. Jack and I just muddle through. I can't seem to cope with all the extra jobs, and we have no routine at all. We just eat when we want, sleep when we want. If Jack wants to eat on the floor in front of the TV, that's fine. The TV is on nearly all the time, and Jack can choose what we watch. It's the same for the last month before he gets home.

3) Educate both parents to understand the profound effects of a family narrative on young children and the way narratives can support children to make meaning of family life and develop a sense of self as they mature (Bohanek, Marin, Fivush, & Duke, 2006).

Parents can be educated on how to utilise their family strengths through preparing and employing these narratives with their child during pre-deployment, deployment, reunion and reintegration stages of the cycle. Creating, editing and improving family stories that discuss positive experiences as well as resilience during difficult times improves family cohesion and happiness (Feiler, 2013). This training could be made available through a variety of forms, including sessions at Unit Days and printed materials that can be distributed by the unit and online resources. It should be the unit's responsibility to make each family aware of the resources, because the data and literature revealed an overall lack of knowledge about what was available to families.

Jack (4): I went to the airport.
 Emily (2.5): I went to the airport.
 Andrew (4): When daddy went to Afghan...
 Natalie (3): I went on an aeroplane.
 Andrew: Went too far.
 Jack (4): My Daddy went to 'ghanistan.
 Emily: Only army men can go there. Not me. Not mummy.

Parent: Troy did the same routine with Emily for about three weeks before he left every night at bedtime. He would draw on the globe to show where he was going by plane and told her only Army people could go there, not Mummy, not Emily. He also showed her the Care Bear every night the Army had given him so she knew she could cuddle it when she missed him and he would feel the cuddles through his matching Care Bear in the Middle East.

<p>4) Increase parental support for the non-deployed parent in various forms so that they understand the many effective strategies to assist their children and build resilience.</p>	<p>By partnering with the Defence Community Organisation, utilise experienced defence parents who have adult children to offer support and strategies in online forums. This study revealed parents were more comfortable engaging online support. Assist these volunteer parents with training in counselling and family support. Siebler (2009) identified military families were unlikely to ask for help through traditional counselling channels.</p>
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Spouse: I am a mess for the last two weeks. I fear something might happen to him. It's when the shit happens, at the end.

<p>5) Offer similar support for war widows , linking them with overseas war widows for additional support from others in similar circumstances.</p>	<p>War widows need specialist support because their circumstances are unique and rare within Australia . They need more than the current support the ADF , Legacy and the Department of Veteran Affairs supply . Create policies to sensitively deal with these families to demonstrate they still belong to the defence community at time other than Anzac Day and Remembrance Day . Support these specialist support workers with training in counselling, grief and loss, resilience and family strengths based approaches of family support.</p>
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War widows comment: I find it hard to connect with other defence families at Army unit days. It is hard to hear the other wives whining about how tough they have it when their husbands are on night duty. I am close to other war widows in our Facebook group. They have been a great support and know what it is like.

<p>6) Increase support during the difficult reintegration period, especially with parenting, co-parenting and relationship expectations.</p>	<p>Bowling and Sherman (2008) recommend high levels of support for the whole family during this vulnerable and crucial stage. This support may come in the form of Unit Army Days where family liaison officers, education liaison officers, chaplains and social workers might provide additional support at the events and offer opportunities to make appointments.</p>
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Parent: I go to pieces in the last month again. We have to sort of prepare for him coming home. Well, Paul is like a military man. You know, routines. There are mealtimes, he says what we are watching when the TV is on. It's his sport programs we watch. There are bedtimes. So I say to Jack, 'You know what we do now is just our thing. When Daddy gets home we have to do it his way'.

<p>7) Provide culturally and age - appropriate resources for families in the form of storybooks and apps, ensure families know of their existence and ways they can access them.</p>	<p>The data exposed a lack of age and culturally appropriate resources, inadequate knowledge and access to available resources within the study.</p>
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Parent: We need Australian early childhood storybooks and apps about deployment to use at home. There are American ones; they are OK, but not really suitable.

<p>8) Provide out-of-hours care or specific funding for out-of-hours care for those who work shift work during their partner 's deployment or training episodes.</p>	<p>Non-deployed parents are trying to juggle careers and some employers are placing last minute demands on them. They are often removed from family and friends to supply this level of care.</p>
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Parent: I was told 'You are on your own until the kids go to school. There is no support, no resources. That was depressing, but true.

Educator: The parents do it really tough during deployment and training.

<p>9) To gain further insight into ADF families , encourage further independent research by streamlining ethics application procedures to ensure ADF families are easier to access.</p>	<p>This will create an increased knowledge and understanding of defence families and children and the best ways to target and deliver effective support. We need accurate knowledge to appropriately make decisions about meeting the needs of military children (Masten, 2013).</p>
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Another Australian researcher: Oh, you will be a grandmother before you get Defence Force ethics through. Another researcher I know has changed topics. It's just too hard.

Support for Educators

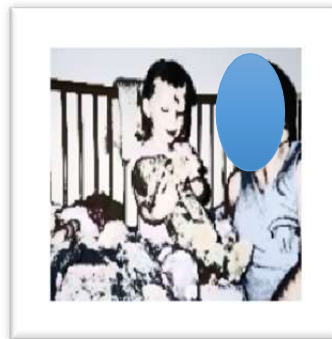
Educators play an important role in young children's lives due to increased workplace participation by both parents in Australian families. Early childhood settings are often the initial phase in children's

journeys into the wider community and provide important relationships with other adults and peers (Murray & Harrison, 2017). Educators can also provide additional sources of support and information for parents and a link to other services (Wilson, 2016). Table 3 provides recommendations to support educators in these complex roles with military families. As with previous tables, the rationale includes data in coloured textboxes and Figures 21 to 22.

**TABLE 3
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUPPORTING EDUCATORS**

Change	Details and rationale
1) Work with early childhood educators to support the child’s family narrative.	Education liaison officers need to be trained in this area, then to assist educators to work with families to help reinforce the family narrative by partnering with parents. This can be achieved through information sent to services near bases and online resources.

**FIGURE 20
FATHER AND EMILY (2.5) WITH THE CARE BEAR**



Educator: Who’s got a Dad or Mum overseas on deployment at the moment?

Jack: My Dad’s in ‘ghanistan.

Andrew: Mine is.

Educator (sighing): No, he went a long time ago, Andrew.

Blake: My dad’s going away.

Educator: Your dad’s away, isn’t he Bethany?

(Bethany (4) puts her head down and doesn’t answer).

Educator (looking around): Who else is there?

<p>2) Increase visits to schools by utilising education defence liaison officers or other defence personnel.</p>	<p>This needs to be targeted for schools near bases to create awareness of some of the experiences children from defence families face. Addressing classes and assemblies with age-appropriate messages should help to diminish misinformation and teasing that defence children are subjected to. Talks should not involve large-scale military equipment being brought onto school grounds in respect to other parent's wishes not to have their children exposed to vehicles or weapons of war.</p>
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Parent: Defence personnel should go to all the schools in the area near bases and talk to the kids about deployment so they have some understanding about what their peers are going through. This might reduce the teasing that happened to my daughter.

<p>3) Create effective programs that use appropriate narrative and acculturation for early childhood services for defence children.</p>	<p>These could contain activities similar to those within this research project that promote and empower young children to express their experiences and understanding, hence validating their lives. Research into effective programs for early childhood military families such as FOCUS from the USA (Beardslee et al., 2011). Adapting ideas from these could help to create an age and culturally appropriate program that could be available online to early childhood educators, family liaison officers, social workers and education liaison officers with the children they are working with.</p>
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FIGURE 21
BETHANY (4) 'WAITING FOR DADDY AT THE AIRPORT'



Parent: Programs like this one (research project activities) should be available in every centre near a base so kids can learn to express themselves verbally about what is happening. It has really helped my daughter. She couldn't say what it was that was upsetting her before. Now she can put it into words, it makes all the difference. They should put it in schools, too.

Parent: One of the educators even minded my son in her own time when I had an early morning work duty at the last minute. I couldn't believe work would do that to me. I was in tears when I turned up at the centre because I had no-one. Defence need to supply out-of-hours care.

4) Create similar , age -appropriate , effective programs within primary and high schools.

Education liaison officers need to ensure educators , personnel, parents and schools know about these programs and evaluate and update these programs regularly . MacDonald (2016) found that school teachers did not fully comprehend the additional needs of children experiencing parental deployment.

All parents interviewed were asked if they had accessed or used some of the resources available through the DCO (Defence Community Organisation). All responded that they had no idea anything existed or were available.

CONCLUSION

It is anticipated that the shared knowledge created through the Mosaic approach has provided a bridge for adults and young children to consider together some of the understandings and experiences of children (Clark & Moss, 2005) living with deployment. Children's voices have been heard and these must be taken into consideration when making decisions about matters that affect them as part of defence families, as mandated by the United Nations (1989) Convention on the Rights of the Child. It is now up to policy-makers, social workers, family liaison officers, education liaison officers, educators and others to ensure this occurs.

For the families in this study, the difference between their current situation and how they would like to live seems an insurmountable distance. Therefore, critical thinking is needed by the responsible organisations and professionals to think 'openmindedly within alternative systems of thought, recognizing and assessing, as need be, their assumptions, implications, and practical consequences' (Scriven & Paul, 2016, p. para. 9). If implemented, these recommendations would involve a high level of change, careful planning and effective implementation over time. The culture within the ADF has been described as averse to risk and change (Australian Defence Force, 2015). Generally, organisational change is difficult and fraught with challenges, potential opposition, setbacks and inevitable hard work. As Martin Luther King (1963) said 'We must come to see that human progress never rolls in on wheels of inevitability. It comes through ... tireless efforts and persistent work' (para. 21). Siebler (2009) states that the contribution and sacrifice of defence families need to be accredited and recognised in policy. The children, families and service personnel who comprise the ADF community are well worth the effort.

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