ADF Families Survey
Absences and Relocations
March 2016

Findings from the 2015 ADF Families Survey:

- **Members with Dependants Unaccompanied**
- **Deployments**
- **Absences and Relocations**

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This report took 385 research hours to produce.

More information about *the 2015 ADF Families Survey* is available from the **Directorate of People Intelligence & Research**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The ADF Families Survey is a research program administered by the Directorate of People and Intelligence Research (DPIR), in collaboration with Defence Community Organisation (DCO) and the Defence Families of Australia (DFA). The research program aims to provide Defence with the experiences and perceptions of members' families, including the impact of ADF conditions of service on family members' satisfaction with service life and overall quality of life, and families' perceptions of impacts on ADF members' satisfaction with, and commitment to, military service. It also aims to measure family members' satisfaction with family support services, and seek feedback about areas for targeted improvement.

Families of ADF members were invited to participate in a survey focusing on absences and relocations over November and December 2015. Over 3500 responses were received from various categories of family members invited to participate. Family members in each Service were roughly proportionately represented in relation to the number of members in each Service; however, family members of lower ranks were slightly under-represented in comparison to more senior ranks.

A main focus of this survey was to ask family members about their experiences of Member with Dependants (Unaccompanied) (MWD(U)) arrangements. For those families who had undertaken MWD(U), the ADF spouse's employment was by far the biggest consideration, followed by the ADF member's employment and the maintenance of support networks. There was a range of experiences reported including both positive and negative, with spouses of more senior ADF members being more positive about their experiences. Positive aspects of the MWD(U) experience reported by ADF spouses included retaining their employment, enabling children to remain at the same school, and the retention of support networks (including children's friends). The most commonly indicated challenges of MWD(U) were around missing their partner and their partner missing the family. Slightly less commonly reported were practical issues such as cost, difficulty of arranging reunion trips and home maintenance.

Regarding relocations, the most common number of relocations indicated was between one and three in the last five years. Different aspects of relocation had varying degrees of difficulty, with the most difficult aspects surrounding accessing about services and developing support networks (including for children).

Most respondents indicated that their ADF member had been on at least one deployment. Regarding information for deployment, there seems to have been a decrease in the awareness of pre-deployment operational briefings since the 2012 survey, and fewer family members registering to receive DCO support calls. Family members of more senior ranked members were more likely to know how to get information surrounding deployment compared with those of more junior-ranked members.

Responses overall indicated a range of experiences with absences and relocations, and a range of perceptions of support services. Feedback on support provided to families included praise, and also indications that there were many members who felt they were independent and adequately supported by their own networks; however, of the family members who made comments, many of them expressed a view that improvements need to be made to family support of Defence members.

The 2016 ADF Families Survey will shift focus to issues around wellbeing and family employment, as well as seeking feedback on support services.

RESEARCH OVERVIEW

Background

The Australian Defence Force (ADF) Families Survey was first conducted by the Directorate of Strategic People Research (DSPR) (now the Directorate of People Intelligence and Research) in 2008, with a second administration conducted in 2012. This report provides data from the third administration of the survey, carried out in November and December of 2015.

The survey was originally initiated by the Defence Community Organisation (DCO) and later expanded to address broader strategic objectives to ensure that the needs of the three Services and other Defence stakeholders were met. This survey has been developed in conjunction with DCO and the Defence Families of Australia (DFA) to identify areas where there are information gaps.

As of 2015, the Families Survey program has been split into two separate surveys which will be administered in alternating years. The 2015 survey focused on absences and relocations with a focus on Member with Dependants (Unaccompanied) (MWD(U)) arrangements, while the survey to be administered in late 2016 will focus on support services, wellbeing and family employment.

The objectives of this survey include the collection of information on the experiences, attitudes, and circumstances of the families of ADF members, in order to inform Defence of:

- the impact of ADF conditions of service on family members' satisfaction with service life and overall quality of life;

- how families believe that this impacts on ADF members' satisfaction and commitment to service life; and

- whether the previously identified gaps in provision of and access to family support service delivery have improved, as well as obtaining advice to address opportunities that will enable Defence to continue to reduce any such gaps.

As this survey has been changed from previous ADF Families Surveys, only where questions are directly have they been compared to the 2012 survey responses and this is mostly in the areas pertaining to the demographics of the respondents.

Family composition – who are ADF families?

Key findings for family composition:
- Two thirds of respondents were civilian Defence-recognised partners in a civilian-ADF couple family;
- Over two thirds of respondents had dependants other than their partner;
- Of those respondents with dependent children, half were pre-school or younger;
- In total one third of respondents were or had been classified as Members with Dependants (Unaccompanied) (MWD(U));
- Only three per cent of respondents were lateral recruits; and
- Less than one in ten respondents were parents of ADF members.

Types of ADF families

Respondents were asked to indicate their family circumstances to enable analysis of the impacts that the ADF lifestyle had on different types of families. The respondents' family types were grouped as:

- **Civilian-ADF couples.** A family type comprising a Defence-recognised interdependent partner or spouse of a permanent ADF member who was not an ADF member themselves. This family type may or may not also include dependent children and other dependants. The survey respondent in this family type is a civilian Defence-recognised partner.

- **Dual ADF couples**. A family type comprising a Defence-recognised interdependent partnership between two permanent ADF members (including spouses). This family type may or may not also include dependent children and other dependants. The survey respondent in this family type is a military Defence-recognised partner.

- **ADF single parents**. A family type comprising a permanent ADF member who was a single parent and not in a Defence-recognised relationship but had full or share custody of dependent children. This family type may or may not also include other dependants. The survey respondent in this family type is the ADF member.

- **ADF members with other dependants.** A family type comprising a permanent ADF member who was not in a Defence-recognised relationship but has Defence-recognised other dependants only. There are no dependent children in this family type. The survey respondent in this family type is the ADF member.

- **Parents or guardian of a permanent ADF member.** A family type comprising an ADF member who is under the age of 18 and their legal guardian. The survey respondent is the parent or guardian of the ADF member.

Table 1: Respondent family type by year of administration

Family Type	2015 ADF Families Survey		2012 ADF Families Survey	
	N	%	N	%
Civilian – ADF couples	2310	67	3733	66
Dual ADF couples	564	16	738	13
ADF single parents	230	7	313	6
ADF members with other dependants	66	2	875	15
Parent or guardian of a permanent ADF member	287	8	NA	NA
Total	**3457**	**100**	**5659**	**100**

Dependants

Respondents were asked to indicate whether they had children[1] or other dependants[2] (excluding their partner). Over two thirds (70%) of respondents had dependants other than their partner. Of these, seven in ten (72%) were in civilian-ADF couples, fewer than two in ten were in dual ADF couples (17%), and one in ten (9%) were single parents.

The majority of those respondents (98%), who had dependants, had dependent children; fewer than two per cent indicated that they had dependent parents.

Of those respondents with dependants, seventeen per cent indicated that they had dependants with special needs[3]. It is not clear whether these were dependants with special needs who were recognised as such by Defence.

Dependent children

The table below shows the proportion of respondents who had children by schooling age groups of those children. Half of respondents had dependent children who were pre-school aged or younger (51%) or at primary school age (49%). Results for the 2012 survey are similar to those for the 2015 survey.

Table 2: Age groups of dependent children by year of administration

Age groups of dependent children	Respondents with dependent children 2015 ADF families survey %	Respondents with dependent children 2012 ADF families survey %
Pre-school and younger	51	53
Primary school age	49	48
High school age	29	28
Older than high school	13	11

Note 1. Respondents could report multiple children across categories.
Note 2. Not all respondents with dependent children reported the age of their children.

Lateral Recruits

Only three per cent of respondents or their partners had joined the ADF as a lateral recruit. Of these, eight in ten (81%) had emigrated from the United Kingdom, the next most represented regions are too small in number to be reported on.

The calendar years of 2006 and 2014 were when the greatest percentage (13% respectively) of lateral recruits joined. Overall, the months of January (17%), October (16%) and June (13%) were when most lateral recruits joined.

Nine in ten lateral recruits who joined Navy and Army (93% and 90% respectively) were from the United Kingdom, for Air Force this dropped to four in ten (43%).

Parents of ADF members

The parent respondents represented eight per cent of all types of respondents. Of those who responded as a parent of an ADF member, 29 percent had a child in the Navy, 43 per cent Army and 28 per cent Air Force. Half (50%) were enlisted or JNCO rank and one third (32%) were junior officers.

Seven in ten (68%) parent respondents were listed as the next of kin or primary emergency contact for their child. One quarter of parent respondents had an ADF member who had been deployed in the last 12 months.

With regards to access to information, parents were on average likely to be well informed. Seven in ten (72%) knew how to communicate with their child while they were on deployment and over six in ten (66%) knew who to contact at their child's unit if they were concerned about them. They were least likely (52%) to know how to find information about the operation that their child was involved in. It has to be recognised however, that this may be more a reflection of Defence's "need to know" policy rather than poor communication between Defence and outside interests.
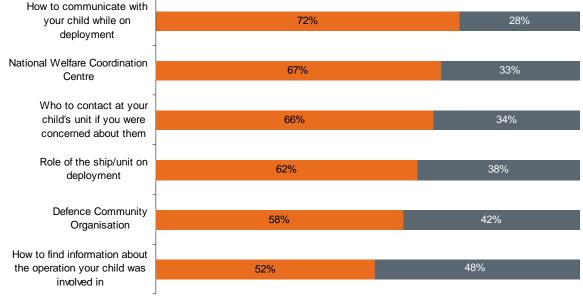
Figure 1: Percentage of respondents indicating knowledge of access to information

Members with Dependants *(Unaccompanied)*

Key findings for Members with Dependants (Unaccompanied):

- Over half of respondents cited their own employment as a consideration for being categorised as MWD(U);
- For two in ten respondents they did not want to lose their support networks;
- Across all ranks at least eight in ten respondents experienced challenges whilst MWD(U);
- The most positive experience of being categorised MWD(U) was that the respondent retained their employment; and
- Less than one third of Enlisted/JNCO would consider being categorised MWD(U) again, compared to more than fifty per cent of senior officers.

Members with Dependants (Unaccompanied) (MWD(U)) are defined as ADF members who have a home with their Defence-recognised partner and/or dependants but are unable to live in that home for Service-related or personal reasons. MWD(U) status may be granted, for example, where an ADF member is required to serve in a specific location and their dependants are unable to move for recognised reasons such as health, employment, or educational commitments.

Overall, 11% of respondents advised that they were currently classified as MWD(U) and a further 25% had been classified as MWD(U) in the last five years. There was no significant difference across ranks between those who had or were MWD(U), on average one quarter of respondents (25 %) had been classified as MWD(U) at some stage[4].

Reasons for choosing to be classified as MWD(U)
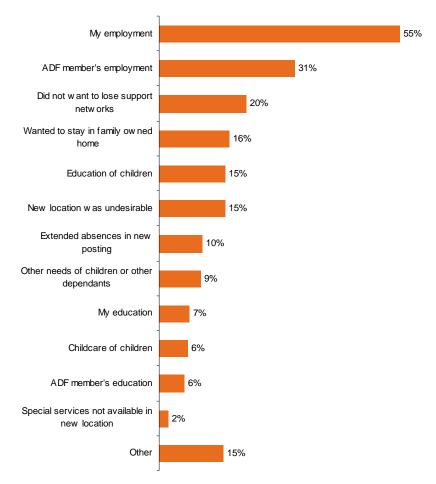
Respondents who indicated they were currently classified as MWD(U) were asked what considerations they took into account when deciding to become MWD(U).

The chart below shows MWD(U) respondents' considerations in this decision. As shown, over half of respondents cited their own employment and three in ten said their partners' employment was a factor in deciding to go MWD(U).

Figure 2: Percentage of respondents nominating considerations in MWD(U) decision

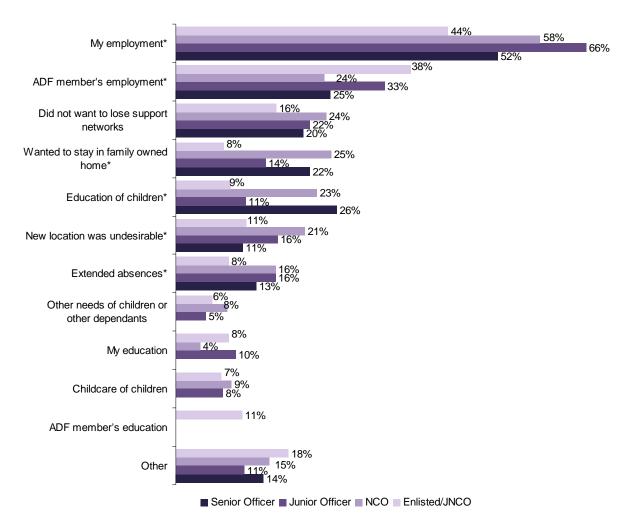| Consideration	Percentage
My employment	55%
ADF member's employment	31%
Did not want to lose support networks	20%
Wanted to stay in family owned home	16%
Education of children	15%
New location was undesirable	15%
Extended absences in new posting	10%
Other needs of children or other dependants	9%
My education	7%
Childcare of children	6%
ADF member's education	6%
Special services not available in new location	2%
Other	15%

Note 1. Respondents could choose multiple options.

However, when analysing the data regarding considerations of MWD(U) by rank there were some small but significant differences. As discussed earlier, these differences may in part be explained by an 'age and stage' effect occurring where most of those who form the different rank cohorts are of a certain age or stage in their life. Partners of SNCOs (23%) and senior officers (26%) were more likely to state that the education of their children was a consideration as opposed to enlisted/JNCOs and junior officers (9% and 11% respectively)[5]. This is not surprising as the latter would be early in their career and on average younger so less likely to have children. Senior officers and SNCOs were also more likely to want to stay in the family home (22% and 25% respectively) than junior officers and Enlisted/JNCOs (14% and 8% respectively)[6].

Figure 3: Percentage of respondents nominating considerations in MWD(U) decision by rank group

Note 1. Respondents could choose multiple options.
Note 2. n>10 not reported.
Note 3. * denotes statistically significant difference[7]

The 'other' reasons that respondents cited for being categorised MWD(U) included whether the Service member was in training/on course, caring for illness in the family, Service posting orders (including location, length, interaction with Service partner's posting), requirement to maintain employment (financial imperative), family circumstances (such as pregnancy or child development stage, unsuitable or insufficient destination housing, family unable to move), and feeling like they had no choice.

MWD(U) experiences by Rank

All respondents were asked whether they would consider applying for MWD(U) status in the future, four in ten (41%) said they would, slightly fewer than four in ten (38%) said they would not choose to be categorised MWD(U) in the future.

As shown in the figure below, responses by rank show that half of (53%) the partners of Senior officers would make the decision to be MWD(U) again, however only three in ten (31%) enlisted/JNCOs partners responded in the same way. [8]

On average across all ranks, more than eight in ten respondents experienced challenges. Partners of Senior Non-commissioned officers were more likely than all the other ranks to

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suggest that the experience of MWD(U) had contributed to a decision to leave the ADF in the near future.[9]

Figure 4: Percentage of respondents rating MWD(U) experience by rank group

- Did the MWD(U) experience contribute to a decision to leave the ADF in the near future?
- All things considered, would you make the decision to be MWD(U) again?
- Did you experience any challenges while living MWD(U)?

Positive experiences

Of those respondents who were, or had previously been MWD(U), the most common positive experience across all ranks was being able to retain their own employment with six in ten partners of senior officers (61%), junior officers (66%) and NCOs (62%) and half of the partners of enlisted/JNCOs citing it as a positive[10].

Responses varied across the ranks with there appearing to be a possible 'age and stage' cohort effect occurring. Six in ten (66%) partners of senior officers and four in ten (44%) partners of SNCOs stated having their children attend the same school as a positive, however for junior officers and enlisted/JNCOs it was only a positive for two in ten respondents[11].

As expected, another positive outcome of undertaking a MWD(U) arrangement was being able to stay in the family home, this also showed a small association with rank.[12]

Figure 5: Percentage of respondents indicating positive aspects of living MWD(U) by rank

I retained my employment*
- 51%
- 62%
- 66%
- 61%

I continued my education
- 12%
- 6%
- 14%

I was living in my own home*
- 26%
- 35%
- 28%
- 40%

My children were able to attend the same school*
- 21%
- 44%
- 24%
- 61%

My children were able to attend the same childcare centre
- 14%
- 11%
- 8%
- 11%

I retained my support networks
- 42%
- 44%
- 40%
- 47%

My children retained their friends and activities*
- 25%
- 43%
- 26%
- 53%

Other
- 11%
- 15%
- 8%

■ Senior Officer ■ Junior Officer ■ NCOs ■ Enlisted/JNCOs

Note 1. Respondents could choose multiple options.
Note 2. n>10 not reported
Note 3. * denotes statistically significant difference

Other positives identified by respondents in the free text comments included; continuity of medical care (for self or children), ability to remain employed (and work longer hours), ability to stay connected to community (not remote, opportunity to work, connection to family/friends), stability of schooling for children, financial benefit (including promotions, retaining government home-owner grants), and opportunity for member to serve country (job satisfaction).

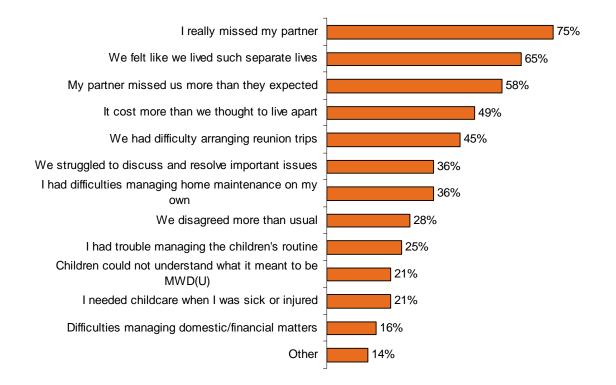**Challenges of MWD(U)**

The top three cited challenges of being categorised MWD(U) revolved around the emotional issues of separation with both partners missing each other more than they expected and feeling like they were living separate lives.

Practical issues such as arranging childcare while the respondent was sick or managing domestic and financial matters were the least cited challenges of MWD(U).

Figure 6: Percentage of respondents indicating challenges of living MWD(U)

Percentage of respondents indicating challenges of living MWD(U):

- I really missed my partner — 75%
- We felt like we lived such separate lives — 65%
- My partner missed us more than they expected — 58%
- It cost more than we thought to live apart — 49%
- We had difficulty arranging reunion trips — 45%
- We struggled to discuss and resolve important issues — 36%
- I had difficulties managing home maintenance on my own — 36%
- We disagreed more than usual — 28%
- I had trouble managing the children's routine — 25%
- Children could not understand what it meant to be MWD(U) — 21%
- I needed childcare when I was sick or injured — 21%
- Difficulties managing domestic/financial matters — 16%
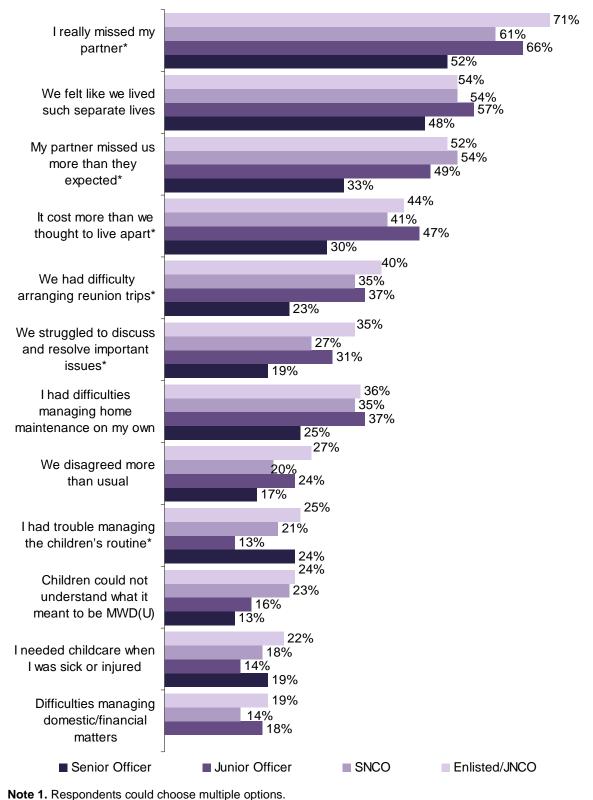- Other — 14%

Note 1. Respondents could choose multiple options.
Note 2. n>10 not reported
Note 3. * denotes statistically significant difference

Again there were some differences attributable to rank. Partners of senior officers were less likely (52%) than those of enlisted/JNCOs (71%) to state that they missed their partner more than expected.[13] Partners of senior officers were also less likely to cite having difficulties arranging reunion visits than those of enlisted/JNCOs (23% and 40% respectively).[14]

Where there were differences across the ranks it appears that the trend was for the senior officers' partners to be less inclined to find some of the aspects of MWD(U) as challenging as the other ranks. The reasons for this are unknown but offer an area for further exploration and an opportunity to draw upon what it is that makes senior officer partners better able to adjust to MWD(U) conditions.

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Figure 7: Percentage of respondents indicating challenges of living MWD(U) by rank group

Challenge	Senior Officer	Junior Officer	SNCO	Enlisted/JNCO
I really missed my partner*	52%	66%	61%	71%
We felt like we lived such separate lives	48%	57%	54%	54%
My partner missed us more than they expected*	33%	49%	54%	52%
It cost more than we thought to live apart*	30%	47%	41%	44%
We had difficulty arranging reunion trips*	23%	37%	35%	40%
We struggled to discuss and resolve important issues*	19%	31%	27%	35%
I had difficulties managing home maintenance on my own	25%	37%	35%	36%
We disagreed more than usual	17%	24%	20%	27%
I had trouble managing the children's routine*	24%	13%	21%	25%
Children could not understand what it meant to be MWD(U)	13%	16%	23%	24%
I needed childcare when I was sick or injured	19%	14%	18%	22%
Difficulties managing domestic/financial matters	18%	14%	19%	

Note 1. Respondents could choose multiple options.
Note 2. n>10 not reported
Note 3. * denotes statistically significant difference

The 'Other' negatives identified by respondents included impact on spousal relationship (poor communication, disconnection, emotional toll, relationship breakdown), impact on children (children miss parent, don't understand, negative child behaviour), impact on spouse
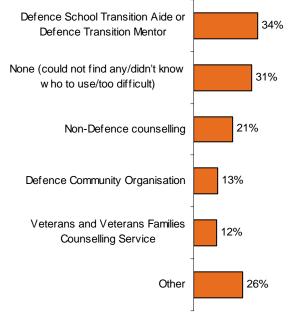
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(sacrifice career, impact on stress/mental health, feeling alone/abandoned, challenge of dealing with medical conditions alone, decision-making pressures), and challenges engaging with Defence (difficulty understanding and accessing entitlements, lack of compassion/care from Commanders for instances of extenuating circumstances).

Support services

Of those participants who responded to having, or expecting to have, difficulties living together, four in ten (41%) said that they would or had participated in relationship or family counselling. Over half (57%) used the Veterans and Veterans Families Counselling Service (VVCS), over half (51%) also used non-Defence counsellors and just over a quarter (27%) used Defence Community Organisation support services.

As shown in the figure below, nearly one third (30%) of respondents cited their children needing extra support during or after being categorised as MWD(U). Of these one third used the Defence School Transition Aide or Defence Transition Mentor system, one third did not seek any assistance citing that it was either too difficult or that they did not know who to contact.

Figure 8: Percentage of respondents indicating support services used (of those who indicated their children required extra support)

Note 1. Respondents could choose multiple options.

Additional support services for children accessed by respondents in addition to the options provided included family, friends, neighbours, community centres/groups and medical professionals (doctors and psychologists). Some respondents used this space to point out the lack of support available because MWD(U) categorisation was a choice not a posting and that they were not able to access VVCS services as they had not been deployed.

Reunion trips

Nearly four in ten (39%) respondents were able to use all of their reunion trips in the final 12 months of MWD(U) categorisation. However a quarter was unable to because their partner was away too often for Defence purposes. One quarter cited being unable to use reunion trips for 'other' reasons including deployment, coordination/scheduling challenges, difficulty accessing leave, financial strains and not being aware of the entitlement.

When analysing the data by rank, shown in the figure below, one third (32%) of enlisted/JNCOs and two thirds (68%) of senior officers were able to use their reunion trips.[15] Two in ten (21%) enlisted/JNCOs partners cited that they could not access their reunion trips because Defence would not release them.
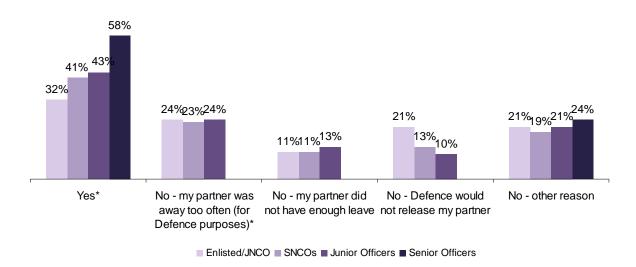
Figure 9: Percentage of respondents using reunion trips by rank group

Legend: Enlisted/JNCO ■ SNCOs ■ Junior Officers ■ Senior Officers

Note: n= >10 not reported; respondents could select more than one response

Advice to people considering MWD(U)

Advice offered to people considering MWD(U) categorisation fell into three broad groups: positive, negative, and pragmatic.

Very few respondents were positive towards, or openly encouraging of, others taking up a MWD(U) posting. Those who were positive acknowledged that MWD(U) was hard and wouldn't suit everyone, but did provide some stability for children. Shorter periods, less than 6 months, were considered manageable. Being proactive and seeking and taking advantage of support services, as well as being empathetic towards the situation of the posting member was considered valuable to the family managing during the posting.

> "It is hard but manageable. Be supportive of your partner. It is harder for him to come and go than it is for you to be living in a stable environment with your children and your friends." (Army Member Spouse)

> "You get the benefit of 3 lives. 1 with friends, 1 with children and 1 with hubby. The separation makes mine and my husband's love and bond stronger and we have trust in each other." (Navy Member Spouse)

> "The one thing that I always say is that you do not get this opportunity within the civilian community as you have go out and reach out yourselves to engage so much support, so embrace it whilst you can. We do have wonderful support and services, sometimes it isn't easy but there are people to help!" (Army Member Spouse)

Pragmatic advice (just under half the comments – 46%) centred on cautioning families to "*think carefully*" about taking up a MWD(U) posting, balancing a range of factors related to unique family circumstances to make the decision (including 'do they really need to', long-term benefits, resilience/independence of spouse, availability of support networks/family). Partnerships that were characterised as strong, stable and trusting before MWD(U) categorisation, were more likely to 'survive' such a posting, as were ones where the spouse was supportive of the member's decision. Not having young children also seemed to

moderate respondents' opinions of MWD(U) categorisation, and it was considered somewhat easier (although still difficult) to undertake MWD(U) postings without young children. Spouses remaining in location when the member is MWD(U) tended to do better if they were comfortable and confident in being independent and had the emotional resilience to cope with the absence and increased life-stressors of effectively being single (or a single parent).

Specific tactics that were offered to manage a MWD(U) posting included ensuring open and honest communication (discussing decision/reason for MWD(U) openly), and while categorised MWD(U), planning everything (reunion trips, communications, children's discipline, bills/home maintenance), and having strong support networks (friends, family, work, Defence-offered). Being able to proactively engage or seek out (or pester) support services was considered useful for the spouse (some advice included that 'moping around waiting for them to come to you', or being totally dependent upon only member-provided information is not constructive). Activities (such as work or study or recreation) that engaged the spouse's own interests with/in their local community were also recommended. Respondents also emphasised the need to use all reunion travel entitlements, budget for additional reunion trips, and to consider the logistics (flight time/drive distances) and their impact on the reunions. Reunion plans were also identified as helping to make the time apart more manageable, (up-front discussion of frequency, activities, focus on family time).

> *"You need to be realistic about the time of separation. It is not for everyone. It can be a great time if you are an independent person, but if you have difficulty when your partner is away for a few weeks then this isn't for you. It always helps if you have a good social network in place. With modern communication systems there is always time to see and talk with the partner who is away. This is definitely not a decision to be taken lightly and needs for the family to have open and honest discussions. Also include the children in the discussion at the appropriate level for their understanding. It takes a great level of trust and understanding to make this work, but it is doable." (Air Force Member Spouse)*

> *"Work on special ways to stay as a couple. Ask for help. Create a family atmosphere in both locations. Reunions are needed more often than Defence gives you, so budget for more reunions yourself. Work out what you both expect from reunions and make it happen. Go to the other location as well. I have learnt to make reunions holiday time together, not maintenance or jobs, as expecting things to get done when it doesn't happen can be very frustrating and lead to arguments." (Army Member Spouse)*

Negative advice (just under half the comments – 48%) was predominantly 'don't do it'. Where this assertion was qualified, the reasons for not undertaking a MWD(U) posting were primarily the impact on spousal relations (added stressors, miscommunications), and family cohesion (children not understanding absence, behavioural problems). Added financial burden (despite some cost being covered by Defence) was also mentioned as a reason not to undertake a MWD(U) posting.

> *"Don't ever do it, it will destroy your marriage and your children's relationship with the absent parent" (Navy Member Spouse)*

> *"Don't do it. Time spent apart from your partner you can never get back and no amount of money will ever compensate you. Surely family is more important then Army." (Army Member Spouse)*

> *"Don't do it. It's harder than we thought especially having young children who miss their daddy and really need him in their lives. We are financially out of pocket even though we were told we wouldn't be due to having to live two separate lives." (Air Force Member Spouse)*

Challenges that exacerbated the negative impacts of MWD(U) categorisation included a lack of support from CO/Unit, logistical challenges with Toll, not knowing reunion entitlements, not being able to take advantage of reunion entitlements, a lack of genuine support from official

support Services, and trouble adjusting to life together after a MWD(U) posting. In addition for those who were in relationships without children (either younger or older couples), feelings of abandonment and loneliness, and lack of relevant support services were particularly mentioned.

There were differing opinions over the level of choice regarding undertaking a MWD(U) posting. Several respondents clarified that being categorised MWD(U) was *not* a choice as they had a ROSO, it was an unaccompanied posting (apparently common in Navy), or it was a bureaucratic necessity. For others, the 'choice' they felt they were making was taking a MWD(U) posting or discharge, so they undertook MWD(U) categorisation in order to retain/progress their career in the Service.
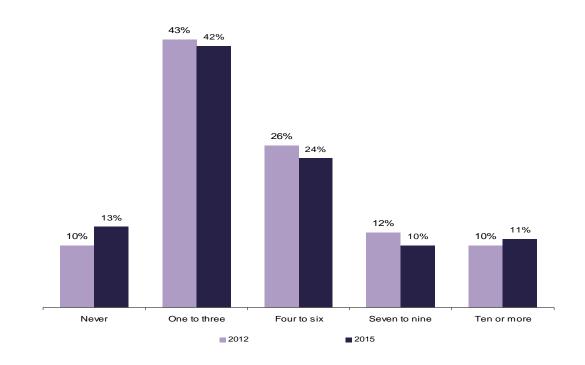
Relocations

Key findings for Relocations:

- One quarter of respondents had relocated for Service reasons at least once;

- The most difficult aspect of relocation was re-establishing support networks; and

- The most common method of accessing support services was via the internet.

Respondents were asked how many times in their Service life they had relocated for Service reasons, the most frequent (42%) number of relocations for Service reasons was between one and three times. One in ten (11%) respondents stated they had moved at least ten times for service reasons. The number of moves reported in the 2012 survey is comparable to 2015 as shown in the graph below.

Figure 10: Percentage of respondents indicating number of relocations for Service reasons

Of those respondents who had moved for service reasons, just over one in ten (13%) had done so more than 5 years ago. The remaining responses were evenly split across the time span of less than a year to under 5 years ago.
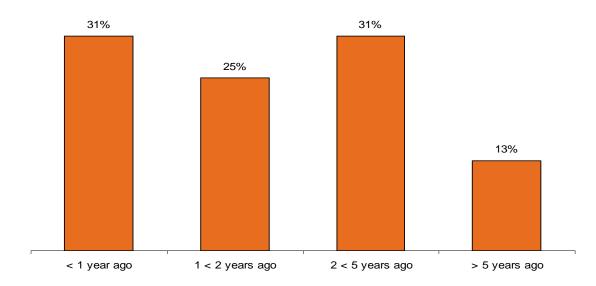
Figure 11: Percentage of respondents indicating time of last relocation for Service reasons

Re-establishing services after relocation

Respondents were asked about the ease or difficulty they had re-establishing certain things following their last relocation. The easiest aspects to re-establish after relocation were transport (52%), schooling (51%) and medical and dental services (50%).

The more difficult aspects included re-establishing employment (56%) and support networks (53%).

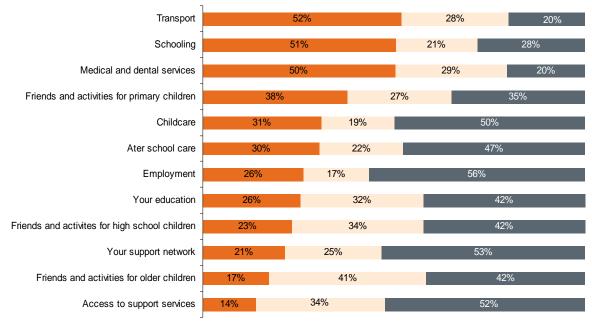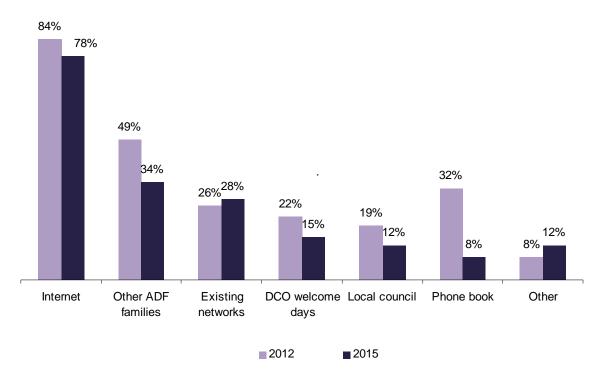**Figure 12: Percentage of respondents rating ease of aspects of relocation**

Aspect	Easy/very easy	Neither difficult nor easy	Difficult/very difficult
Transport	52%	28%	20%
Schooling	51%	21%	28%
Medical and dental services	50%	29%	20%
Friends and activities for primary children	38%	27%	35%
Childcare	31%	19%	50%
Ater school care	30%	22%	47%
Employment	26%	17%	56%
Your education	26%	32%	42%
Friends and activites for high school children	23%	34%	42%
Your support network	21%	25%	53%
Friends and activities for older children	17%	41%	42%
Access to support services	14%	34%	52%

■ Easy/very easy ■ Neither difficult nor easy ■ Difficult/very difficult

The most popular method for accessing support services was via the internet (52%) the second was by way of other ADF families (23%). Results are similar to the 2012 survey with the exception of less people using the phone book to access services, down from 32% in 2012 to only 8% in 2015.

Figure 13: Percentage of respondents indicating preferred mode of accessing support services

Mode	2012	2015
Internet	84%	78%
Other ADF families	49%	34%
Existing networks	26%	28%
DCO welcome days	22%	15%
Local council	19%	12%
Phone book	32%	8%
Other	8%	12%

■ 2012 ■ 2015

Comments

The 'Other' factors that make it difficult to re-establish after relocation which were identified (or reinforced) by respondents included the process of establishing community connections and the logistics of re-establishing a household.

Establishing social and friendship networks were identified as particularly challenging and perhaps the most difficult part about relocations, and were considered critical for thriving in the new location (offering for example, personal emotional support, emergency childcare, pet/house sitting). While often expressed as a concern for the children, it was equally important for the relocated member's spouse to develop community connections in order to mitigate loneliness and maintain a sense of self. Connection to Defence operated as a double-edged sword for many: civilians were often reluctant to make friends with you (as you would post out soon) and Defence-related friendships were either tenuous due to the posting cycle (you or them moving away) or existing groups were very cliquey and hard to break in to.

Challenges in finding appropriate spousal employment (e.g. finding work or education alternative, establishing business/clients, eligibility/process to work overseas) were cited by respondents as frustrating, demoralising, and impacting upon mental health. Employment was also seen as a (non- preferable) pathway to social networks and friendship. Several respondents desired (and offered suggestions for) more action by Defence to support spousal employment. Employment opportunities for older/young adult children were also cited as a difficulty.

Respondents reported that support services and networks offered by 'Defence' (including DCO, DHA) were limited in that they typically catered only for traditional nuclear families. Respondents in childless couples, in dual-Service couples, in areas where they were not from the dominant Service, new (second-time) mothers, those who worked full-time, and those moving out of cycle felt particularly un-catered for in regards to the Defence-related offerings available to help them settle in to their new location.

Respondents elaborated on the 'other' ways that support after relocation was accessed. The most common of these was through structured community groups and activities, including churches, community centres, mothers and breastfeeding groups, sporting clubs, and Defence-related support and location groups (including DCO and DFA). Social media and online groups were also mentioned as sources of support and establishing initial connections. Other structured, or facilitated ways to gain support in a new location were via employment (if they were able to obtain it) and through schools (for both parents and children). School liaison or Defence School Transition Aide (DSTA) were also mentioned as sources of support.

Respondents also identified more unstructured ways into community, all of which involved some level of 'self-service' such as talking to strangers and/or neighbours, seeking advice from medical professionals, Googling things or exploring their new environments. The common feature is that the respondents took some initiative to seek out and actively engage with their new community. Existing family connections and friendships with civilians were also identified as unstructured sources of support.

Deployments

Key findings for Deployments:
- Over seven in ten respondents' partners had been on deployment, or they themselves had been if a single parent or carer.
- Two in ten respondents had experienced a deployment in 2015; and
- The length of deployment appears to be decreasing over time.

Respondents were asked about their experiences relating to the deployments of their partner, or themselves (if an ADF member and a single parent or carer). Respondents were asked to relate those experiences to their most recent deployment.

In total, over seven in ten (77%) respondents had a family member who had been on deployment or they themselves had been if a single parent or carer. Over eight in ten (85%) respondents with a Navy partner in their family had been on deployment compared with seven in ten (74%) of those respondents with Army or Air Force partners.
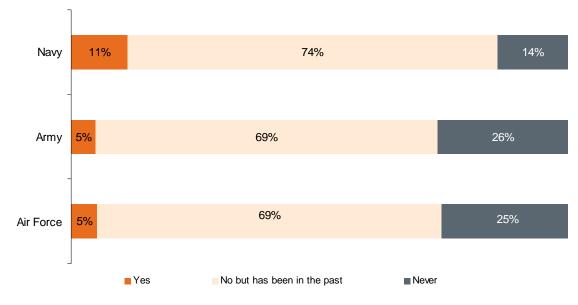
Figure 14: Percentage of respondents indicating deployment of family member

	Yes	No but has been in the past	Never
Navy	11%	74%	14%
Army	5%	69%	26%
Air Force	5%	69%	25%

The year of deployment ranged over a span of years going back to 1983. For ease of comparison the responses were aggregated to pre 2010 and then each year thereafter.

For one third of all respondents (33%), their partner's most recent deployment had been in 2010 or earlier. However, at least two in ten (21%) of all respondents had their most recent deployment experience in 2015.
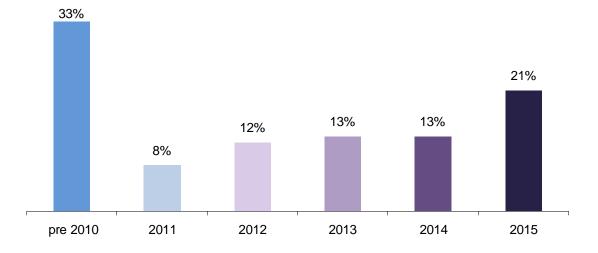
Figure 15: Percentage of respondents indicating year most recent deployment began

Length of deployment

The length of deployment did not vary greatly across the years however; in 2015 there were a greater percentage of deployments for less than one month when compared to previous years. Overall there appears to be a trend towards shorter deployments over time. This tendency towards shorter deployments should be considered when examining responses to respondents' experiences with support services. People may be less likely to seek out support in the knowledge that the deployment will soon end. Due to insufficient numbers no further analysis can be done on this data.
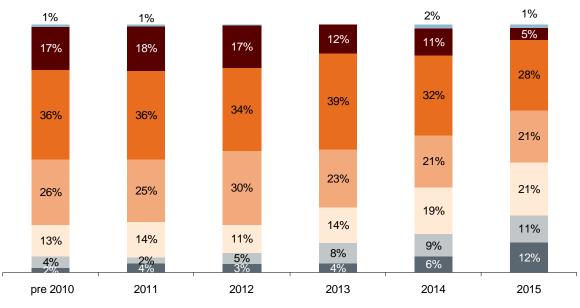
Figure 16: Percentage of respondents indicating length of deployment by year

■ < 1 month ■ 1- 2 months ■ 2 - 4 months ■ 4 - 6 months ■ 6 - 8 months ■ 8 or more ■ Unsure

Pre deployment briefings and DCO education sessions

Respondents were asked their opinions of pre-deployment sessions and DCO education sessions with regards to their partner's last deployment. Analysing the responses by the year of their partner's deployment, there appears to be a trend over time in respondents' perceptions about these programs with an increase in those who believed a pre-deployment

briefing or information session had not been organised and a decrease in those who attended finding them useful. For those respondents whose partner deployed in 2011, just over half (54%) had no knowledge of the briefings (this includes those who did not believe one had been organised) in 2015 this increased to eight in ten (81%) respondents. Of those who did attend a briefing in 2015 over half (58%) found them to be useful. In 2012 it was seven in ten (71%).

However this question asks people to reflect back in time and as such there may be a rosy retrospection effect occurring whereby the more time that has passed between now and when the experience occurred the more positively it is viewed.
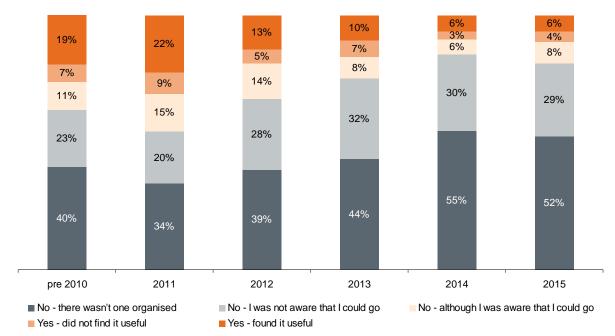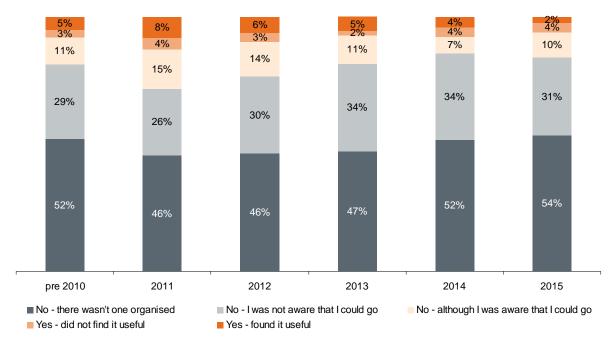
Figure 17: Percentage of respondents indicating participation in pre-deployment operational briefings

Of those who attended a DCO education session, in 2015 one third (36%) found them to be useful, whereas in 2011 two thirds (65%) found them to be useful.
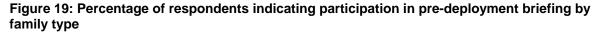
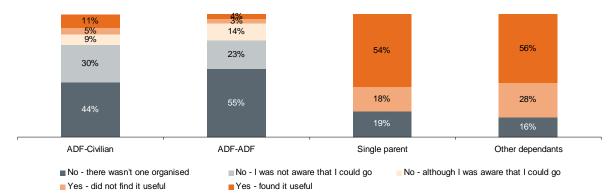**Figure 18: Percentage of respondents indicating participation in DCO education session**

Legend:
- No - there wasn't one organised
- No - I was not aware that I could go
- No - although I was aware that I could go
- Yes - did not find it useful
- Yes - found it useful

Respondents were also asked if they had been contacted by their partner's unit during their deployment. There was no difference between the Services, just under one third (30%) had contact with their partner's unit and at least one third (37%) had not had contact but would have liked to.

As shown in the figure below, analysis of the usefulness of pre-deployment briefings by family type shows an interesting difference[16]. It appears that single parents and those with other dependants (not a spouse) are more likely to find the sessions useful and less likely to state that one had not been organised. The implication of this is members may not be passing pre-deployment information on to their partners. This is an area where better direct marketing to the partner of the member may be required.

Figure 19: Percentage of respondents indicating participation in pre-deployment briefing by family type

Legend:
- No - there wasn't one organised
- No - I was not aware that I could go
- No - although I was aware that I could go
- Yes - did not find it useful
- Yes - found it useful

Due to insufficient numbers in the different response areas no analysis was done on the data pertaining to the DCO education awareness sessions by family type.

DCO support calls

DCO support calls were introduced in 2012 therefore respondents who said that they had experienced deployments prior to this were excluded from this analysis. Of those who responded there was a weak decline in those who said they registered for DCO support calls, from two in ten in 2012 (22%) to a little over one in ten (14%) in 2015. [17]

In 2012, nearly four in ten (39%) were contacted and found the calls useful, in 2015 just over two in ten (25%) were contacted and found the calls useful. In 2012 (51%) and 2015 (49%) half of respondents stated that they had not been contacted at all.[18]
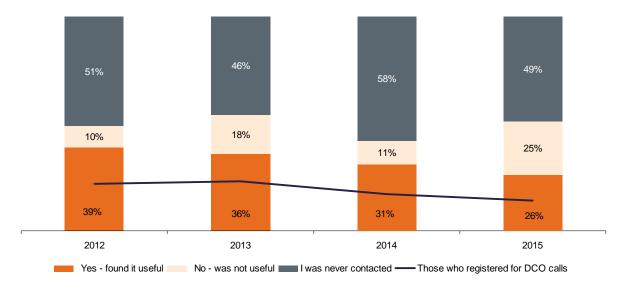
Figure 20: Percentage of respondents indicating DCO calls by year of deployment

Legend: Yes - found it useful   No - was not useful   I was never contacted   Those who registered for DCO calls

Financial planning

Of those who responded, six in ten (62%) had undertaken financial and legal planning prior to any of their deployments.
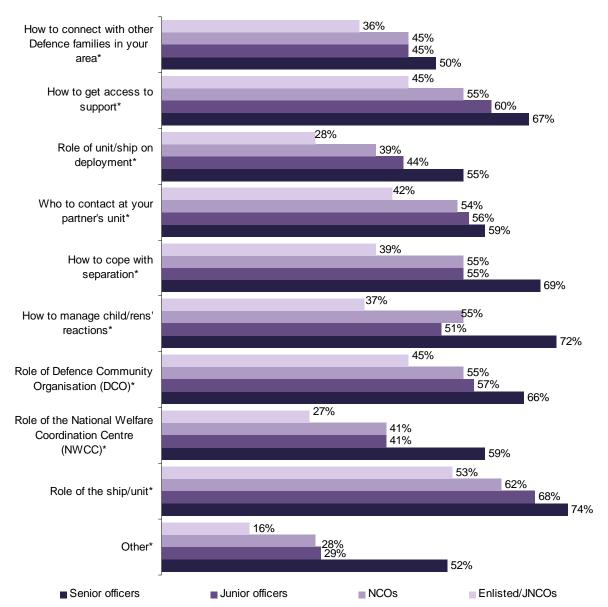
Access to information

Respondents were asked if they felt they had enough information about a range of items regarding their partner's deployment. Looking at the range of responses by rank cohort shows a similar pattern to MWD(U) categorisation with partners of senior officers being more well informed than those of the other rank cohorts.

Across all items there were small significant associations between the ranks, the strongest association though was with regards to the partners of senior officers agreeing at a rate of seven in ten (72%) as compared to enlisted/JNCOs at three in ten (37%) that they knew enough about managing their children's reactions. Partners of senior officers were also more likely to know how to access information about coping with separation.

Figure 21: Percentage of respondents indicating adequacy of information by rank group

When looking at responses regarding their ability to access information while their partner was deployed there were no significant differences across time.

There were 156 respondents who commented in the space for specifying additional information when their partner was on deployment. Most of these referred to not knowing 'anything', not knowing where their partner was going, or not having even general information about the deployment. More practically, some mentioned they did not know who at the unit to contact – in general or in case of emergency, and some had little knowledge about expected return dates and return-from deployment issues. Short-notice deployments (hours to a few days) appeared to cause the most concern amongst respondents.

> *"What to expect, how to maintain good and positive communication, how to deal with return after long absence." (Dual ADF couple, Female, Navy)*

A lack of information seemed to exacerbate feelings of oversight and lack of care/concern from the home unit during their partner's deployment. In these cases, it was not any particular piece of missing information, but missing actions that led to disappointment with Defence.

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"I received no information from the unit my husband was deployed with or his normal unit. Not to mention was never invited to his unit family days during the time he was deployed." (ADF Recognised Partner, Female, Army)

"Just total lack of information, support and acknowledgement that we even existed." (ADF Recognised partner, Male, Air Force)

"I was not even invited to the family Xmas bbq as I 'slipped through the cracks' if support was a priority there should have been no cracks to slip through or enough people supporting to help it seem like I wasn't a task for someone to forget." (ADF Recognised Partner, Female, Army)

"I was contacted by DCO 2 years after she returned to see how things were going whilst she was away." (Dual ADF couple, Male, Air Force)

Participants were asked what information would assist in coping with a partner's deployment and although 746 respondents completed this question, only a minority of the responses actually addressed what information they needed to help them cope with absence – the majority of comments reinforced themes around provision/access to support services identified and discussed elsewhere in this report. In terms of improved information though, respondents acknowledged that there were some necessary difficulties around timing, but still desired better communication or awareness of timeframes for the deployment.

"A deployment date that is within a 14 day window. A return date that is within a 14 day window. Both of these items actually staying within the period specified." (ADF Recognised Partner, Female, Army)

"Although I know not possible, exact times away. Average your wording - 8-10 months instead of saying 6." (ADF Recognised Partner, Female, Army)

There were also calls for more general information about the deployment, including likelihood of and types of communication with the deployed member, and procedural contact information for those remaining in case of emergency and to access general support services.

"Need more assistance in how to deal with things when they come home. Have done enough deployments to be ok when they are gone but struggle when they return." (ADF Recognised Partner, Female, Navy)

"It would be helpful if it were easier to access support for our children. (ADF Recognised partner, Female, Navy).

"There were also days at a time when he could not contact me, that was also stressful. When I had not heard from my husband for days, I would worry that something was wrong." (ADF Recognised Partner, Female, Army)

Respondents identified a need for additional information post-deployment, to help the member adjust, and to help the family support the member to adjust.

"PROPER follow up with the families if their partner is involved in a major incident. This includes ALL members of the patrol involved, regardless of if they are uninjured. Additional support for the families so they can properly mentally prepare for what comes home after 9 months away seeing death and destruction." (ADF Recognised Partner, Female, Army)

"For future partners, you might want to look at paying a little more attention to the mental health impacts of deployments, what to expect, what to watch for and where to get help when it is needed. The Army and DCO failed my family." (ADF Recognised Partner, Female, Army)

> *"After care! Plenty of support available during the deployment. But what about when they get home! What about preparing us for the person that is coming home to us????"* (ADF Recognised Partner, Female, Army)

A few respondents also identified that separation may result from service-related activities that are non-deployments, or deployments that are 'non-typical' (multiple short trips over one big long one, or for members who are deployed outside of a unit deployment, and particularly Navy deployments). These respondents desired access to and similar information to those whose deployments are more typical.

> *"Note that it is not only deployment that results in separation. Long courses also result in separation and isolation."* (ADF Recognised Partner, Female, Army)

> *"My partner spent a lot of time away, being 8 weeks on 4 weeks off….Long 6 month stints are hard but so is having them in and out every so often and can be very confusing for spouses and families."* (ADF Recognised partner, Female, Navy).

> *"Patrol boat families get no information or support. The only option we have is to find the contact ourselves and speak to DCO. Information sessions would be great!"* (ADF Recognised partner, Female, Navy).

> *"There was little to no recognition or support for small boat families… was meant to sail for 4 weeks and often would not return for 7-8 weeks. No warning given…..We never knew what was going on or when and defence never ever recognised the toll on members or their families during that time."* (ADF Recognised partner, Female, Navy).

Respondents were also asked to detail their best experiences of being supported during their partner's deployment. They were to describe what was organised, by whom, and why it was important.

Respondents used these three answer spaces related to this question to describe a range of experiences engaging with Defence and the support accessed while they/their partner was on deployment. This question was not bounded by a timeframe, so the collated responses reflect these experiences from the 1990s through to the present.

Rather than describing a single great support experience, over 400 of the 1173 responses indicated that they received no support from Defence while their partner was on deployment. Some of these responses were factual (no support, nothing) and a small proportion (less than 10% of these) knew there were things on, but preferred not to get involved. However, many responses were quite emotive, elaborating on, or describing the impact of, missing out on support. These respondents were unimpressed and often offended that Defence had ignored the needs of all those impacted by deployment.

> *"I WASN'T supported! I wasn't contacted by ANYONE and I badly needed help! It was a farce, a joke, and a slap in the face!"* (ADF Recognised partner, Male, Air Force)

> *"Nothing was organised they did not give a rats NO email NO phone call NO text not a thing and I had ticked to be contacted but nothing To make matters worse they never even contacted me to tell me when my husband would be arriving back in Australia after 8 months away yes they really care don't they."* (ADF Recognised partner, Female, Army)

> *"Honestly, nothing. I attended a DCO brief that I found insulting and ill-informed. No other 'support' was offered to me as a single parent whilst deployed."* (ADF Single Parent, Air Force)

> *"I've never attended a DCO / equivalent function - and my partner never will. We see these events as being run by mindless busybodies that inject fake interest into our very private lives (when away from work). As both serving members, we're fully aware of what support if available if we need it - and the last thing we need is a stranger 'checking in' on us if one of us is deployed."* (Dual ADF couple, Air Force)

"I didn't engage in any activities, didn't need to be engaged - working full time and already having strong friendships in play all provide enough support. I can see that living without family or friend support in a location you are new to could be challenging especially when an emergency happens - decision making can be difficult. I think focus on families that have recently moved to a new location and having partners deploying should be a primary focus - it might reduce cost to Defence for moves on BDOM or support moves. Defence should also consider who is deployed or deployable in relation to relocation activity." (ADF Recognised partner, Air Force)

A few respondents indicated they received support calls, but this was too late or even well after their partners had returned home (1 to 6 months later). These respondents appeared fed up and exasperated – even more so than those who received less/no support intervention – that they had been forgotten and that Defence, despite its rhetoric, did not actually care about member families.

"The first time my partner was deployed DCO never contacted me til 3 days before he returned so I have never registered since." (ADF Recognised partner, female, Army)

"I've never felt supported during deployment. The only time anyone reached out was for family bbq days which were in a different state. On one deployment I was told someone would check in every week I got one phone call days prior to my partner's return." (ADF Recognised partner, female, Army)

"Nothing, I received no contact from anyone. This actually upset me after the fact when I was told by my husband on his return that someone should have been in contact with me - especially because he is the one that calls and checks on families while their partner is deployed in his current role." (ADF Recognised partner, female, Army)

"There was never a truly good experience whilst my husband was away. I generally found his work to be standoff-ish and when I was contacted it was rather hesitant in nature." (ADF recognised partner Female, Army)

"To be honest there has been little to no support apart from the DCO helpline to talk to someone. You seem to have to know people to ask about services as DCO aren't very forthcoming in what services are available." (ADF recognised partner, female, Navy)

It should be noted here that the process whereby families have to 'opt-in' for deployment support only came into affect in 2012.

Overall, the comments provided in this section show that there is a risk that when poor or inadequate support is provided during early deployments, this has the potential to alienate or discourage engagement with, and support from, Defence during later deployments.

The remaining respondents indicated what they considered their best support experience, however many of these responses were tinged with despondency or cynicism, lamenting what could have been, but in reality was less than that expected. Just because the support accessed/identified is recorded, does not mean that respondents thought it a good experience (perhaps the best of the bunch, or all that was offered).

Organised or structured social activities, including official functions, family days, morning teas, and BBQs, comprised the next-largest group of responses (179 responses). Respondents mentioned how these activities served to either establish or regularly engage them with the Defence community. Respondents noted that the level of activity/frequency of gatherings was variable by location.

Information was (101 responses) identified as another well-received form of support. This included pre-deployment information sessions, regular information flow from the unit while deployed (including newsletters, Facebook groups, and letters from the CO). For some, the initial information pack received which contained unit contact numbers and emergency procedures/information was sufficient to provide reassurance around the deployment.

Private support (108 responses) such as that provided by family or friends was also identified as the best support experience. In many cases, the respondents rejected the services available (or not) from Defence and preferred to seek out support needed from within the civilian community. However, there were instances where Defence/DCO facilitated the family support, such as organising for the immediate family to join the left-behind partner, usually in the case of medical emergency. Informal gatherings and catch-ups with friends (Defence and non-Defence), accessing childcare and playgroups were also a source of support.

> *"I'm not sure what this question means. I received no support from the military. I have my own work and my own friends and had help whenever I required it." (ADF Recognised partner, Female, Air Force)*

> *"I've never had support during a deployment. I have found community activities very helpful, but they have not been supplied by Defence as part of deployment support." (ADF Recognised partner, Navy)*

> *"I have not felt supported by the ADF whilst my husband has been deployed (on any of his deployments). I did receive an information pack from NWCC but the only support I have received was from friends informally (not from the ADF)." (Dual ADF couple, Navy)*

Phone calls (99 responses), either from someone at the unit, or directly from, or organised through, DCO, were considered useful support tools. The timing and frequency of calls, and to a certain extent the consistency of contact, were important considerations for respondents to assess the calls as useful.

The ability to maintain contact with the deployed partner was also considered the best support (68 responses). Often this contact was technology-enabled (Skype, internet, email etc) and was able to be used regularly by the member while away.

The unit and practical support (43 responses each) were also a source of support during the deployment time. The references to the 'unit' generally spoke of people who went above and beyond to ensure the family felt cared for or was not left alone. Lawn mowing and garden maintenance were considered small, but particularly useful gestures of caring which provided some respite for those left behind. Often these tasks were completed by members of the unit, and/or friends of the deployed member.

Ⅴnadequate support

A consistent theme across the responses was that many of the structured DCO/Defence organised support activities did not meet the needs of spouses. This in particular was problematic when the event/activity that was offered consistently catered only to one group, such as mothers' morning teas, which those with jobs could not attend, and family days, at which those without children did not feel welcome. Encouraging a variety of activities in a single location may be a way to alleviate these concerns.

> *"As a perm ADF member my needs are not considered when my partner deploys. The cookie cutter civilian spouse support plan does not apply to service spouses." (Dual ADF couple, Army female)*

> *"I don't think I've ever had a great experience of support while my partner is deployed. DCO try their best but don't have the resources to provide much practical support. Their strength should lie in small groups but they are encouraged to attempt large get-togethers to make it appear that they are getting value for money, however many (perhaps most) Defence partners are turned off large group events due to perceived rank bias." (ADF Recognised partner, Navy, Female)*

> *"It would have been advantageous to have had the opportunity to be involved with different forms of support, however, none were offered or made available." (ADF Recognised Partner, Female, Army)*

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"The unit should make sure that members' spouses' are contacted and should be made a priority. Even if the job of welfare officer is changed through the tour. It is just not acceptable that this priority slips through the net. I understand all spouses don't need constant babysitting and of course their choice not to be contacted should be adhered to BUT the unit must at least appear to be looking after its soldiers' families and if that means contacting at least once a month then so be it." (ADF Recognised Partner, Female, Army)

Others whose spouses had deployed without a unit, or were located in a different city to the unit (MWD(U)) noted the lack of support activities for their situation.

"whilst this was our best 'support' experience during one of his deployments, it also happens to be the worst, as mistakenly I felt supported enough to share some of the challenges I had been struggling with…This information was then relayed [to the member] via the unit commander…We place a great deal of trust in the people that organise and attend these events, and we shouldn't have to censor ourselves when we feel we are seeking and receiving 'support'." (ADF recognised partner, Female, Air Force)

Support provider

Where identified (638 responses), respondents tended to name either an organisation/group or an individual as the source of the support they received. The ADF partner's unit was most frequently identified as a source of support (approx. 160 references) and this was primarily related to the pre-deployment briefings, coordinated social activities and general unit contact/phone calls. DCO was the next most frequently identified organisation to provide support (approx. 98 references) and this was primarily in relation to family days, structured social gatherings, and individual case support/intervention. The only other group/organisation type to receive more than 10 references was DSTA (15 references) which included support from school liaison officers and DSTA. There were only a couple of references to DFA as a source of support.

Where individuals were identified as being responsible for the support, respondents named (Defence) positions which mainly referred to immediate supervisors /CO and unit welfare officers (approx. 83 references). The support offered by these positions was likely to be part of the supporters (broad or specific) job description; however, instances were described where these members went out of their way to make the family member feel like they were supported and valued. For COs, in particular, fostering a culture of genuine care was valued by those who were left behind. Further to this, a number of DCO staff as well as colleagues of the deployed member were identified by name (approx. 34 responses) and that their concern and actions that went above and beyond made a real difference to, and consequentially had a lasting impact upon, the respondents.

"The DCO phone calls. It was nice to talk to someone without judgement on just how you are feeling, how are the kids. Is everything ok? I wish I had remembered to take down the lady's number who rang. It was the same beautiful lady each time and it was the first time out of four deployments I had the support and an 'ear' to listen. She was so helpful and supportive." (ADF Recognised partner, Army, female)

These results highlight the importance of the unit as a key source of support for families of members on deployment, and that often it is the CO who is central in fostering a broader unit culture of support. The importance of building relationships, personalised advice, and genuine care are also highlighted by the recall of names of those who provided support or assistance, often many years ago. Overall, where an individual takes responsibility (making a call/visit, putting on an event, making themselves accessible) the support outcome for those left behind is greatly improved.

Reasons why support is useful

Just over half (656 respondents) of the total respondents who provided an answer to this question series, also provided commentary in the 'Why' space. Overall, the 'why' comments can be broadly classified into actions which provided either practical or emotional assistance/support to people. It must be noted that these categorisations are not mutually exclusive: the same support action can be considered by different individuals as offering practical or emotional support or even both simultaneously. Keeping this in mind, specific reasons as to why the support was important, included:

- access to information (83 responses)

- opportunity to connect with the deployed member (67 responses)

- opportunity to connect with others socially (69 responses)

- opportunity to connect with others with similar experiences (75 responses)

- feeling like they were cared for, that their family was important (109 responses)

- respite from the day-to-day pressures (54 responses)

Some examples of the above are below.

> *"Was awesome knowing someone cared about what we were doing leading up to xmas and was interested in whether we needed further support. During the phone call I elected not to receive others, but I knew how to contact DCO if I required it." (Dual ADF couple, Air Force)*

> *"I am very honoured to have received this [Family Pin] as I do feel that it recognises that it is not easy with partners being deployed for extended periods of time and much as it is hard for them to be away from home - it is also very hard for us to have them away." (ADF recognised partner, Navy)*

> *"It is a very lonely life for the people who are constantly left at home, it's important because when it's a War deployment, you have a support system that understands how scary it can be. The people at work don't get it, you can't talk about what your partner does. The rest of the country doesn't know that people are putting their LIVES on the line for them. The rest of the country has no compassion if you're having a crap day because you're on your own and your skype call dropped out due to insurgent activity etc.. It's not like you can go to work and tell everybody. So it is important to have the partners of the deployed in your life, so you can help each other. It helps keep you sane and grounded." (ADF Recognised partner, Air Force)*

> *"DCO is known for phone calls no action, unless it is coordinating suitability of a member to continue to serve. I believe sitting face to face with clients in their home would be a good start. It is difficult to provide real assistance in your office, looking over a spread sheet, emails. This does not equal job done or real help has occurred. I believe real help means tangible help. Go see your clients at their door they have children sometimes lots of them. It is easier for you to visit them, than have them conduct a logistic super plan to get to you." (ADF member with dependants, Male, Army)*

> *"Words are empty without tangible assistance. Provide relief to the parent who is home alone, take their kids out for the day, have someone mow their lawn be good to them first then ask how they are going. This action builds trust. Without trust you can not help." (ADF member with dependants, Male, Army)*

Some respondents identified and specifically referred to genuine versus pro-forma communications or interactions, and valued those personalised touches much more. While clearly there is no capacity for such individualised support for everyone all the time, where there is capacity, even a small personalised gesture (e.g. from DCO liaison, unit or chain of command) can build rapport and reaffirm or reassure the family of the deployed member that the organisation cares about their wellbeing.

"The colonel delivered himself in way that made me feel that my children and I were important. We weren't just a 'dependant', like some units make me feel now... The worst feeling for any spouse/dependant is the 'unknown'." (ADF Recognised Partner, Female, Navy)

"I felt that the Unit was genuine in their commitment to support their deployed employees' partners and their families and not 'just going through the motions'." (ADF Recognised Partner, Female, Army)

"It provided a brief amount of relief that my husband was going to be looked after, and I have a channel of support if required. However; later on throughout the deployment, it became obvious the letter was more a requirement to send out, as opposed to actual concern for ADF members." (ADF Recognised Partner, Female, Navy)
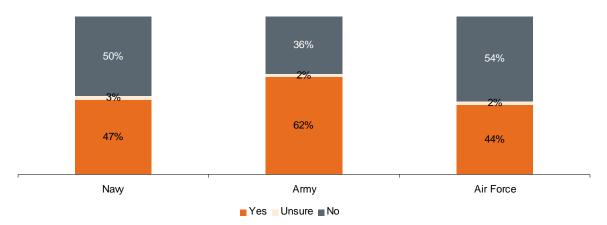
Absences

Key findings for Absences:

- Army members were more likely than Navy or Air Force to have been absent in the last 12 months for at least a consecutive month;
- One in four respondents knew who to contact at their partner's unit if needed;
- On the whole partners of senior officers were better informed about where and how to access support.

Army members (62%) were more likely to have been absent in the last 12 months for at least a consecutive month and Air Force members (54%) were the least likely to have been absent[19]. This is probably due to the individual environment of each Service rather than any systemic difference in absence rates.

Figure 22: Percentage of respondents indicating absence of partner in the last 12 months by Service

Respondents were asked if, while their partner was absent, they had access to enough information regarding a number of matters. Over half of the respondents (57%) felt well informed about the role of their partner's ship or unit. Two thirds (67%) of respondents felt least informed about the role of the National Welfare Coordination Centre (NWCC) and

where to find information about their partner's work (61%). This latter aspect may be more related to the nature of the work and Defence's need to know policies rather than there being an actual lack of information.

Figure 23: Percentage of respondents indicating adequacy of information

Further analysis (see the figure below) shows an interesting pattern, partners of enlisted/JNCOs were less likely to agree that they were informed or had information than those of all the other ranks.

Figure 24: Percentage of respondents indicating adequacy of information by rank group

Bar chart legend: ■ Senior Officer ■ Junior Officer ■ SNCO ■ Enlisted/JNCO

Item	Senior Officer	Junior Officer	SNCO	Enlisted/JNCO
Role of NWCC*	45%	29%	31%	18%
Where to find information about your partner's work*	54%	46%	39%	24%
How to connect with other families	44%	44%	43%	35%
Role of DCO*	57%	50%	48%	36%
How to access support*	61%	45%	48%	32%
How to cope with separation*	71%	48%	51%	34%
How to manage your child/ren's reactions*	71%	50%	53%	33%
Who to contact at your partner's unit*	63%	54%	49%	36%
Role of the unit/ship*	76%	72%	66%	48%

Three in ten (36%) partners of enlisted/JNCOs knew who to contact at their partner's unit or ship if needed, whereas for senior officer's partners it was six in ten (63%). Similarly, only three in ten (32%) enlisted/JNCO partners knew how to access support whereas for partners of senior officers the figure was twice this at six in ten (61%). The only item where there was no significant difference across ranks was in regards to connecting to other families with fewer than five in ten respondents agreeing that they knew how to access such information.

Comments regarding short absences

Those who accept the uncertainty, develop resilience, and/or adjust expectations appear to have a better outlook on life as a spouse of a Defence member.

"This is frustrating but workable when it happens in isolation but we have gone from thinking he would be gone for 2 months this year to having him be just about to come home and then being told he is going again. It is a good thing that we have learnt to laugh at Defence incompetency rather than get angry because otherwise I think I might have gone mad." (ADF Recognised Partner, Female, Army)

"My life now continues as is as a single parent whilst my partner is away - I have no other expectations that there will be any support and then you can't be disappointed when none is received!!" (ADF Recognised Partner, Female, Army)
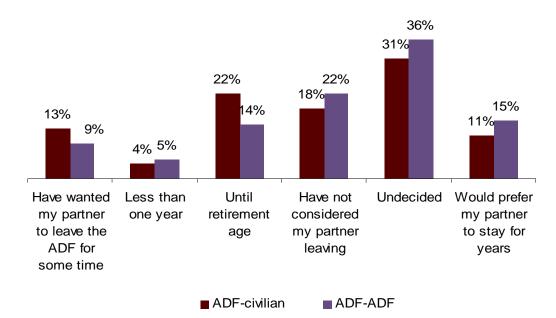
"I always find my own feet, rely on myself. I am independent." (ADF Recognised partner, female, Air Force)
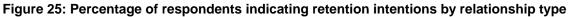
Retention

Key findings for Retention:
- Those in a civilian-ADF relationship were more likely to want their partner to stay until retirement than those in an ADF-ADF relationship;
- Three in ten respondents regardless of their family type were undecided about how long their partner should stay; and
- There was little difference across ranks however partners of senior officers were less likely to agree that they would encourage their partner to leave if posted to an undesirable location.

Respondents were asked about how long they would prefer that their partner stay in the Service and what they believed were their partner's intentions to leave. Just over one in ten (12%) respondents stated that they have wanted their partner to leave the ADF for some time. Two in ten (20%) stated they wanted their partner to stay in until retirement age, three in ten (32%) were undecided[20].

Figure 25: Percentage of respondents indicating retention intentions by relationship type

Of the single parents who responded, three in ten (29%) did not have any intention to leave, a further four in ten (40%) were undecided. Four in ten (38%) of those who were an ADF member and had other dependants were also undecided about their intentions.

Of those who were in civilian-ADF or ADF-ADF relationships, three in ten (33%) agreed that they would encourage their partner to leave if they were posted to a location that the respondent did not want to go to, four in ten (42%) disagreed.

Overall there was little difference across the ranks regarding who would encourage their partner to leave if given a posting to an undesirable location. Slightly more partners of

enlisted/JNCOs, SNCOs and junior officers (34%; 32% and 35% respectively) than senior officers (24%) would encourage them to leave[21].

Final Comments

People used this opportunity to reiterate many of the same themes that emerged throughout the other comments fields. Some key themes and examples are discussed below.

There were comments regarding the rethinking of the value proposition (maintaining relevance) of Defence/ DCO Support Services and how these are communicated to the member's family (without relying on the member to pass information on). In the digital age support services need to go beyond provision of basic information about location and services to add real value. It is clear that many people are still looking to Defence for help/assistance with coping with the demands of Service life, future studies could investigate what those exact triggers are for seeking further assistance. Regardless of the reasons why, respondent interactions with service providers need to be consistently positive in order for them to feel supported unfortunately for many respondents this was not the case.

> *"DCO are a joke. They direct you to local services (which I can google myself) there is no physical help in times of need." (ADF recognised partner, Female, Army)*

> *"I am quite self sufficient and have solved all problems / issues myself, at times with spousal assistance and guidance while he is deployed or away from home as it is easier and resolved quicker than using defence avenues. As the people I have been in contact with are useless!!!!!!!!! really have a lack of understanding of issues outside their very limited knowledge/experience." (ADF recognised partner, Female, Army)*

> *"DSTA/DTM need to be up to date with relevant pay and conditions with certain school aged children. There is no doubt in my mind the ADF turned into a 'self-help system' but it's not acceptable when you approach someone who should know, but they don't... And they refuse to offer assistance to help." (ADF recognised partner, Female, Navy)*

> *"I am an independent person and do not easily ask for help and to have my cry for help shoved back in my face from a 'family' organisation was not the best time of my life…Since then I have held a poor view on DCO and support provided by Defence. Once you are on location or you own your own home, you are on your own whether you like it or not." (ADF recognised partner, Female, Army)*

Further to previous discussion, feelings of alienation and reduced worth are experienced by those families who do not fit the 'traditional' nuclear family model. It seems apparent that in Defence policy, there is assumed stability in family composition over the career of the member, and that this becomes challenging when the family structure breaks down, or re-forms as a blended family (e.g. blended families, changes in status of dependants). When a variety of dependants (including grandparents living/caring for children) are recognised in civilian society but not by Defence society, this becomes an additional source of frustration.

> *"Defence has improved BUT it is now so overly 'family focused' that if you don't have children or are career-focused it can very lonely & isolating. All support networks and social events seems to only be geared towards mothers (i.e. Morning tea at 11am on a weekday means I can never attend!). I feel like there is little consideration for working partners and certainly no encouragement to retain your independence." (ADF recognised partner, Female, Army)*

> *"Defence itself is not an issue if you understand where to go and who to speak to. So called service providers and support organisations are a challenge and don't cater for*

today's military families - 2nd marriages step children spouses who work." (ADF recognised partner, Female, Army)

"I do not consult the defence support networks for help. I find they are too focused on families with young children, there is nothing in place for families with adult children, or for partners with careers. We are continually ignored in regards to support networks for this cohort." (ADF recognised partner, Female, Navy)

A number of respondents expressed concern they were not equipped or supported to be able to adequately support the serving member. They found this particularly concerning given the current media profile around mental illness and PTSD.

"Treatment of spouses of soldiers with PTSD is appalling. I am angry and ready to walk away due to ridiculous treatment of my husband and no support for our family." (ADF recognised partner, Female, Army)

"Absolutely no info provided on how to support my child on her return from active service. What to expect, suggestions for management or where to go for support for her or us as parents. It's as if as parents of an adult child, we were not expected to want or need any support or info on how to support our child. … I know there are privacy issues but we are all aware of the stigma attached to members reaching out for support or acknowledging there is a problem. Families need support too often and no attempt is made to ascertain if this is so." (ADF Parent, Army)

"My husband had a mental breakdown last year. The support he got from the unit was appalling. The unit was no help and did not know what to do. There was no support for the family or assistance for me in helping him through the issue at home." (ADF recognised partner, Female, Army)

Many comments revolved around the need for Defence to 'walk the talk, that is that the rhetoric of caring for Defence families must be followed through on. Even small gestures that show Defence acknowledges that families exist and/or are also are impacted by ADF Service can be enough to reassure respondents. There is a risk that families who perceive being ignored or excluded (when believing there may be some sort of support) may find the experience psychologically and emotionally damaging.

"As a Defence member I feel forgotten by the external support agencies like my partner was forgotten when I was deployed last year. He did not receive any contact or offers of support either." (Dual ADF couple, Navy)

"[Following birth of a high-needs child, husband was sent on exercise at short notice] The needs of the family have zero bearing on anything in Defence." (ADF recognised partner, Female, Navy)

"Families sacrifice a lot for their serving spouses, just a bit of respect and a little understanding about our situation would have been nice." (ADF recognised partner, Female, Army)

Given the diversity of the Defence community, it is unrealistic that Defence will be able to meet all of (and sometimes the very specific needs of) each individual and their family. Nevertheless, being able to access appropriate support in a timely manner was considered key by respondents, many of whom did not feel that they were able to.

"Counselling/psychology support. I think its unfair (and many others agree) that a Defence partner should have to pay for their own psychology when the only reason they need to see one is due to their spouses deployment." (ADF recognised partner, Female, Navy)

"Could not get recognition or support during our diagnosis phase. THERE IS NO HELP. When trying to get answers, this is the hardest time where you DO NEED HELP. Once diagnosed you get support coming out of your ears. If you really want to

help members. Give real help when there is not a formal diagnosis but suspicion."
(ADF recognised partner, Female, Navy)

At a more practical level, eligibility for, quality of, and access to Defence housing services and assistance continued to be a source of frustration and exacerbated the stresses of having a partner categorised as MWD(U) or deployed. Respondents identified communication breakdown or a lack of information sharing between the different stakeholders involved, difficulty accessing, checking and correcting information from the service providers, and lack of flexibility and general customer service focus from the service providers. These problems are compounded by Defence's perceived rigid policy rules around access to housing and rental assistance (RA), low-quality properties, lack of choice around properties, and short-notice changes to agreed housing.

> *"More communication between Toll and DHA and correct information provided by them as well as following up member requests to confirm the re-location/posting information provided by the member and/or Defence to both DHA and Toll would make moving easier. This is demonstrated by DHA informing us Toll handles the relocation information, and Toll informing us that DHA provides the information, and in both cases in contacting these organisations, the member provided the official information, which was ignored by both organisations." (ADF recognised partner, Female, Army)*

> *"Please make RA more accessible or invest in housing that isn't for families with children" (ADF recognised partner, Female, Navy)*

> *"The administration processes within Defence are painfully slow and this is a well-known fact. Even if there is no way of speeding up the process, a friendly reception and some understanding from DHA staff would be a welcome change." (ADF recognised partner, Female, Army)*

> *"Having to deal with multiple companies in relation to relocation was confusing and frustrating when information was contradictory." (ADF recognised partner, Female, Army)*

> *"Housing issues with DHA. DHA are very black and white with little consideration given for the families. No outside agency wants to get involved with DHA and I was forced to take the matter high into my chain of command. DHA were not understanding of [our family structure and work commitments]." (Dual ADF couple, Male, Army)*

The comments around housing are similar to those who identified challenges in relation to engaging with the Defence bureaucracy. Policy was often thought to be out of date, or at least out of sync with contemporary standards (e.g. it was too inflexible), paperwork frequently got lost, policy actions were too slow, and there was questionable interpretation and application of policy (even in the face of actual policy evidence). Respondents experienced feelings of, and actual, disadvantage and frustration.

> *"Frustration regarding mixed information- PACMAN & Support services saying two different things, or different support services saying different things." (ADF recognised partner, Female, Air force)*

> *"Having Defence fail to recognise the two children who are, by any other definition of the word, my legal dependants is becoming increasingly unacceptable. Defence has been advising for the past 10 years that policy on separated families would be reviewed and this has STILL not occurred." (ADF single parent, Male, Army)*

> *"Defence does not recognise my particular circumstance under the PACMAN. So I am detrimented when it comes to an inability to be a recognised as a MWD(U), to receive flex working arrangements and housing conditions to support my circumstance. Defence is caught in an era where you are either considered a member with dependants, where your dependants are a wife (who doesn't work) and children, or you are single." (Single Parent, Male, Air Force)*

The comments provided in the space for general comments echo the general themes already identified and discussed. Respondents continued to identify challenges with

- sourcing appropriate housing and the move logistics

- the posting process (accommodating member wishes) and the posting cycle generally (timing and impact of moving)

- support of the Defence spouse to find, keep, or accommodate employment

- issues around accessing childcare and school enrolment/transitions

- general lack of support options/activities for specific family types and

- the tangible and psycho-social impacts of narrow and often rigid policy and definitions.

"Army life does add an extra set of pressures to families and relationships. Moving is never fun and I think the system has improved dramatically. The continual deployments, and for long periods, is something that needs to be reviewed. Families struggle to reintegrate after 6 months apart, let alone 13 months." (ADF Recognised partner, female, Army)

"Although my partner is still in the Reserves, and loves the RAAF and really misses being a full time permanent member, he left because we knew that moving every 2-3 years with postings would not work once our kids started school…. My husband would most probably rejoin the PAF (at least strongly consider it) if there was a way that we knew our kids' schooling didn't have to be disrupted." (ADF Recognised partner, female, Air Force)

"We felt it was unfair of DHA to provide us with such vagueness regarding access and it was also unfair for them to ignore our personal circumstances. Nowhere is this more evident than in the fact that a member can reject a property based on the grounds of it being unsuitable for their pet, but cannot reject a property based on where their partner works." (ADF Recognised partner, female, Navy)

"Access to housing in the gaining locality is a bit of a joke and one of the most stressful things about being a defence family. In most areas there doesn't seem to be enough housing stock and families are forced to wait 4-6 weeks before they move before any real assistance is given (i.e. houses offered at greater entitlement, RA offered). It's ridiculous, especially when families have schools to sort out. There seems to be a lot of undue stress placed on families around the posting period, particularly with regards to service residences." (ADF Recognised partner, female, Air Force)

In addition, respondents discussed perceived unfair treatment in postings, particularly related to (perceived) agreements falling though, not ever being able to access the 'reset phase' (Army) and continual movements after being promised a period of stability by Defence. Such perceived unfairness or ill-treatment seems to weaken the psycho-social contract of ADF Service and push people towards separation.

What came through in the general comments very strongly were the great variety of Defence family structures and how policy around communications, support, posting and housing has not kept pace with these structures (although some recent changes were noted, e.g. Au pairs). In particular, single ADF parents (without custody) struggle to sustain positive relationships with their children when Defence posts them and does not recognise them as MWD(U) (in so doing not providing access to reunion trips), as their children do not stay with them more than 90 nights a year (in contrast to Centrelink, where calculations of benefits/obligations is not location-based). Single ADF parents with custody of children often struggle (financially, logistically) with care arrangements and incur additional costs to obtain out of hours care or fly in family members to assist.

"ADF support is focused solely on families with children where one of the spouses (most commonly the female partner) in non ADF. There is a huge proportion of ADF couples that don't have kids or where both partners are serving that need greater attention." [Dual ADF couple, female, Air Force)

"If you are not a young woman with little kids there is no level of support provided. Too bad if you are middle aged, with adult children, have no children, are the partner in a same sex relationship or have a career." (ADF Recognised partner, Navy)

"An area that Defence does not manage well is non-custodial parents. Even in this survey, there was no place to acknowledge our family make up - we have been married for 5 years, his children spend 50% of their time with us and 50% with their mother." (Dual ADF couple, Air Force)

"I am a full time member. My Ex partner is a full time Defence member. She relocated interstate with my child. I had nil say in the relocation and was afforded none. Defence makes zero allowance for the fact that I am still a father. I still pay Child support. I cannot list my child as a dependant because I cannot accumulate 90 nights of care and if I choose to have my child nominated as my next of kin for NOK travel I still pay FBT which adversely affects my child support. I cannot use my child as NOK because should I die she cannot perform the required actions of my NOK. The only way to maintain contact is at my own expense." (ADF Single Parent, Male, Air Force)

"Same sex families are not well represented we are practically invisible. Also women who deploy and who are parents and caregivers are not well represented - it's all focused on men. Women deploy too!!! Where is the Comms and support for them??" (ADF recognised Partner, Female, Navy)

As well, parents of ADF members feel they are excluded from supporting their children appropriately, as they cannot access sufficient information and resources when not provided by (or unable to be provided by) the ADF member.

"There is no true and effective system in place to care for soldiers while serving or after serving in Defence. If there was an effective system in place we would not be hearing about their mates who had committed suicide since deployment. Parents are not encouraged to attend or be part of Defence life. Not to the same degree as a partner of a Defence member. I have felt like an outsider from day 1. Having no experience with Defence …. I am shocked and disgusted with the lack of communication with parents. And yet I do see and condone the contact once a son gives his life in battle. Only then do parents have the support and contact they need and deserve." (ADF Parent, Army)

"We have responsibilities to support more emotionally these days our families which comes at quite substantial financial cost as it is usually at short notice. I think the Defence Forces are leaving their members emotionally vulnerable and I see this within my own family where family links are weakened by distance and uncertainty regarding future postings." (ADF Parent, Air Force)

Not all comments were critical. Several respondents related positive experiences or support towards recent changes and services targeted at specific groups. It is clear from these responses that there is good work in supporting families being done, but that people are most likely to express dissatisfaction when services don't meet their expectations. This dissatisfaction is also likely an indication that people care about, or at least are invested in, their relationship with Defence, and that there is likely an underlying desire for this relationship to be non-detrimental to the family unit.

"ADF Family Health. This is a fantastic initiative which has made it a lot easier for us to budget and afford health care." (ADF Recognised partner, female, Navy)

"At several occasions during my son's Gap Year and his time at ADFA I found the communication from his superiors and the medical staff to be most reassuring when he

has been in hospital for various reasons. I used the Defence Family Help Line and they also were able to connect me to the right people for my questions." (ADF Parent, Air Force)

"All good - DCO and other support has come a long way over the last 10 years, keep it up." (ADF Single Parent, Army)

"[Child at ADFA were] members of the 'Foster Parents' program which is a fantastic initiative and helped them with the move away from home, but more importantly this relationship has continued and this family have now become mentors for their future career and for any issues they may have in their army life. This program should be supported and promoted to all young people moving into the Defence Force as it is valuable in so many ways." (ADF Parent, Army)

Others more broadly reflected on the sense of community that exists amongst Defence spouses, and how that is a real and positive support system.

"[partner didn't know who to contact, contacted Defence friend ('wife network') who contacted unit, who actioned support immediately] So you don't always have to know what to do, as everyone always looks out for each other when it really matters." (ADF Recognised partner, female, Army)

"Defence does a very good job of looking after spouses and families. It is important that we engender a sense of independence and responsibility for spouses and families to adapt to service life and be able to sustain themselves as a family unit. Yes we should be there to provide support in times of need, but we shouldn't be the first point of call every time the tap breaks." (ADF Recognised Partner, Male, Army)

"I am a very happy ADF wife, we have a very strong family unit and I know that the support is there when required." (ADF Recognised partner, female, Army)

DCO and DHA both received criticism in this comment space, mainly for being inflexible and too bureaucratic, not sympathetic to the respondents' situation, for being a waste of resources, and for focusing too narrowly on traditional families. Couched within this criticism, is identification of constructive suggestions for change and improving services offered to Defence families. Information about DCO and its services is seen to mainly come from information the ADF member passes on to their family (or, doesn't). As the lynch-pin in communications between Defence and families, the role of the member in passing on information should be reinforced. A few examples are provided here.

"ADF members need to be reminded of the importance of communication with family when deployed and also adjusting to home life after being deployed." (ADF Recognised partner, female, Navy)

"DHA is the most difficult and uncooperative entity to deal with. Their administration and approval processes are lengthy and complicated and often unnecessary. This organisation needs immediate restructuring and all of its policies to be modified and streamlined." (ADF Recognised partner, female Army)

"I think that this survey has failed to address one of the most difficult and stressful things about military life - interaction with external agencies such as DHA and Toll during moving. This may not be the right forum; however this system is appalling and reflects negatively on Defence. We are currently organising our 6th move and once again both DHA and Toll have been a nightmare and made the process exceptionally stressful (especially in a period where my husband has been away for an extended period)." (ADF Recognised partner, female Army)

"It would be great to see more events organised (especially weekend or evening ones to be inclusive of those that are working) especially around posting in time for members and their families new to the area to help welcome them and to truly build the spirit of community amongst Defence families." (ADF Recognised Partner, Female, Air Force)

Similarly, awareness around the types and limits of support that can be offered needs to be made clearer to families. Many respondents complained they were never reached out to, but perhaps they didn't know that they had to register to receive such assistance. Continuing to develop and improve ways for this message to get out to those that need it (and possibly working in addition to the ADF member) may be an area worth investing in.

> *"DCO are an extremely under-utilised organisation which can and does provide wonderful support to Defence families. There is a lack of awareness within the Defence community on how restricted they are in being able to contact families due to the Privacy Act. DCO are unable to engage with families unless the contact is initiated by the partner or spouse. The perception is they have to tell their personal story a number of times to get assistance. It definitely needs to be workshopped to be able to provide the service they are skilled at." (Dual ADF couple, Air Force)*

> *"I did not realise that I had to 'register' for support with DCO. I thought that I had ticked a box on the pre-deployment form my husband completed." (ADF Recognised Partner, Female, Army)*

> *"DCO is a valuable resource to Defence, I hope that it is isn't ruined by the behaviour of our senior Defence leaders, in particular the senior public servants who don't get it and make savings to meet some dumb agenda. None of them have ever deployed and treat ADF families like an encumbrance not a large asset." (ADF Parent, Navy)*

> *"I am generally very disappointed how poorly the family events are supported by people. DCO do set up events and I try to attend many of them to meet people, but few people attend. I am not sure they are advertised in the right places, although I do hear of them through email and my husband. Some of the events which are organised are not ideal timing wise, and perhaps not in locations suitable for many people to attend." (ADF Recognised Partner, Female, Air Force)*

The survey itself received some critique and this may wish to be considered in future survey design and administration. While asking similar questions, it may be prudent to offer more tailored or separate surveys/answer options for each of the family types (and possibly identify new family types), which are more specifically tailored to address/respond to identified needs. In particular, this would apply to parents of ADF members and single parents (sole custody, shared custody, and non-custodial parents), and members with dependants in multiple places (e.g. via shared custody). Some considerations for future iterations include:

- Addressing reservists explicitly

- Including options for impacts of activities that take members away (e.g. training courses, exercises) that are not deployments

- Focusing on specific issues faced by some family types (e.g. dual ADF couples, members in training, single member

- Conducting an issues-specific survey (e.g. MWD(U), Removals, etc – one per survey). Allows people to focus on one issue and to develop specific approach to addressing targeted issues.

> *"I completed this survey as a single parent however this survey didn't identify any of the issues relating to being a single parent in Defence." (ADF Single Parent, Male, Army)*

> *"I don't see how this survey is helpful. How about a survey on removals?" (ADF Recognised Partner, Female, Navy)*

> *"I am glad that I've had the opportunity to complete this survey as the type of information gathered is important. I have also realised that I should probably start reading the Defence families magazine because it is likely that it is the primary*

communication mechanism of the information I have been missing." (ADF Recognised Partner, Female, Army)

"Once again - WAY too many issues to write here! I would prefer an interview if 'ADF Families Survey 2015' really wanted to know...These issues are not just limited to our family - many friends who WERE in the Army who have since left - probably wont have their voices heard now that they've discharged. I do appreciate this survey and the opportunity for my concerns to be heard." (Dual ADF couple, Male, Army)

"The survey seemed to be aimed at couples who have been together for the majority of their service within the ADF. A lot of couples in the ADF have had previous marriages and children from previous relationships. This survey didn't discuss any of that." (Dual ADF couple, Female, Army)

CONCLUSION

The composition of an ADF family is varied. However the largest group of respondents to this survey were civilian-ADF families followed by ADF-ADF family composition. This year parents of ADF members were included in the survey representing less than one in ten of the respondents.

Whilst it is easy to summarise Defence family compositions as has been done for the purposes of the survey, many commentators spoke negatively of Defence's narrow recognition of what constitutes a family. Family should no longer be considered as husband, wife and two children but rather an organic and fluid structure that can change over time. Blended families, where there are dependants from previous relationships, the new sandwich generations where the member has both dependent children and parents and those families where there is only the member and their significant other need to be recognised in the policy or at least acknowledged when support services are required.

Across a variety of areas regarding absences, such as MWD(U) and deployments, there was a noticeable, albeit statistically small, difference between different rank cohorts. From the data it appears that partners of senior officers are better able to access information and support services during periods of absence from their partner.

This could be explained by the partners of senior officers and NCOs having had more time adjusting to service life and its unique challenges. One could assume that time has given them greater knowledge of what services are available and more importantly how to navigate the system to obtain access to all of those services. Future administration of this survey should test this assumption to ensure that is isn't an access and equity issue.

Notwithstanding any access and equity issues there is scope for better understanding what makes partners of senior officers and in some cases SNCOs appear more resilient to change brought about by a member's absence or relocation. Based upon the current findings there may be scope for measures to increase the resilience of others to such changes. For example, respondents of senior officers may be able to mentor or offer guidance to those families that are new to Defence on how they manage emotionally with separation and what families need to do to ensure they get authorised reunion visits and access to services.

At a general level the data appears to show that there is a lack of information, or respondents are unaware of how to access it, on the emotional challenges of MWD(U) specifically (and absences more generally). Rather than focusing on support services for when issues arise more pre-emptive action could be done to prevent negative occurrences such as resilience and coping training.

From the comments it was noted that the unit played a significant role in the respondent's view of how a deployment or absence was perceived. Those who cited positive experiences often spoke of having been contacted by the member's unit to see how they were and if they needed anything during their partner's absence. Although it is probably impracticable in all instances for the unit to contact the families of those member's who are absent, each unit could be tasked with development of a communications protocol for occasions when family contact would be advised. The responsibility for contacting the family should rest with a position so as to ensure that task carries forward to the next person.

If a respondent's partner was not currently categorised as MWD(U), or deployed or absent they were asked to reflect upon a time (if applicable) when their partner was away under those circumstances. Trend analysis was only able to be conducted on those who had experienced a deployment and in some cases revealed small significant differences with events further away in time being viewed less negatively than those closer to now. This was especially the case with those who had attended pre-deployment briefings or a DCO awareness session.

Caution in interpreting this as a confirmation that services are not improving is advised as it may be that respondents are unwittingly glorifying the past. This temporal bias could also be affecting other historically positioned questions and a note for future surveys would be to only ask questions related to the immediate past or to use additional evidence from other resources regarding the efficacy of some of the services.

In addition to the comments made regarding Defence's narrow view of what makes a family it must also be acknowledged that there was concern regarding how information was not being disseminated to family members. This is further evidenced through single parents and those with other dependants having greater knowledge of the services on offer than those in civilian-ADF and ADF-ADF relationships. Perhaps, rather than relying on the ADF member to forward on information via email or word of mouth, all providers of services to ADF families need to develop better communication methods so as to get more direct access to the client.

From the comments there was also a distinct lack of knowledge that to receive support services one has to first register. This again is an area where increased and improved communication methods would assist in disseminating what DCO has to offer.

ANNEX A: SUPPLEMENTARY ANALYSIS INFORMATION

Participants and response rates

The target population for the 2015 ADF Families Survey were specific individuals in specific family types:

- **Civilian Defence-recognised partners** in a **civilian-ADF couple** family.
- **Military Defence-recognised partners** in a **Dual ADF couple** family.
- **ADF members** in an **ADF single parent** family.
- **ADF members** in an **ADF members with other dependants** family
- **Parents** of full-time ADF members.

A **civilian-ADF couple** is a family type comprising a Defence-recognised interdependent partner or spouse of a permanent ADF member who was not an ADF member themselves. This family type may or may not also include dependent children and other dependants. The survey respondent in this family type is a **civilian Defence-recognised partner**.

A **dual ADF couple** is a family type comprising a Defence-recognised interdependent partnership between two permanent ADF members (including spouses). This family type may or may not also include dependent children and other dependants. The survey respondent in this family type is a **military Defence-recognised partner**. Both ADF members in this couple were invited to complete the survey. Therefore, this is the only family type that may be represented by two separate responses.

An **ADF single parent** is a family type comprising a permanent ADF member who was a single parent and not in a Defence-recognised relationship but had full or shared custody of dependent children. This family type may or may not also include other dependants. The survey respondent in this family type is the **ADF member**.

An **ADF member with other dependants** is a family type comprising a permanent ADF member who was not in a Defence-recognised relationship but had

Defence-recognised other dependants only. There are no dependent children in this family type. The survey respondent in this family type is the **ADF member**.

A **parent or guardian** of an ADF member was anyone who had a child working full-time in the ADF. There was no assumption made with regards to the age of the child therefore some parents who answered did so for an ADF member above the age of 18.

The target population contained an estimated 33,198 individuals based on the 2011 Defence Census.

Throughout the report, where relevant, comparisons have been made between the results of the 2012 ADF Families Survey to highlight possible differences between Defence serving members and Defence families.

Comments

At a number of points throughout the questionnaire there was the opportunity for respondents to provide comments. These comments have been incorporated into the report at the applicable sections.

A detailed thematic analysis of comments that were specifically sought with regards to the respondents' views on Deployments has been included at the end of that section.

Demographics

Table 3: ADF partner's Service by year of administration and respondent's Service in 2011 Defence Census

Service	2015 ADF Families Survey respondents	2012 ADF Families Survey respondents	2011 Defence Census respondents
	%	%	%
Navy	22	21	24
Army	45	49	51
Air Force	29	29	25
Service not reported	4	0	NA
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**

Table 4: ADF partner's rank group by year of administration and respondent's rank group in 2011 Defence Census

ADF Partner's Rank Group	2015 ADF Families Survey respondents	2012 ADF Families Survey respondents	2011 Defence Census respondents
	%	%	%
Enlisted/JNCOs	35	36	57
SNCOs	30	29	19
Junior officers	27	26	21
Senior Officers	8	9	3
Unsure of partner's rank	0	0	NA
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Table 5: Type of residence by year of administration

Type of residence	2015 ADF Families Survey respondents	2012 ADF Families Survey respondents
	%	%
In a Service residence off base	48	49
In a home that you are buying/paying off	29	29
In privately rented accommodation (with rental allowance)	13	13
In a Service residence on a base/barracks	4	4
In a home that you own/is fully paid off	3	2
In privately rented accommodation (without rent allowance)	2	2
Rent free/Other	1	1
In a barracks/mess	1	1

Table 6: Location by year of administration and location in 2011 Defence Census

Location	2015 ADF Families Survey respondents	2012 ADF Families Survey respondents	2011 Defence Census respondents
	%	%	%
Australian Capital Territory	13	13	10
New South Wales	29	29	28
Northern Territory	7	8	8
Queensland	27	26	24
South Australia	7	7	5
Tasmania	0	0	0
Victoria	9	11	11
Western Australia	7	6	4
Outside of Australia	1	0	3
Currently on ship	NA	0	5
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**

Table 7: ADF partner's length of service by year of administration and respondent's length of service in 2011 Defence Census

Length of service	2015 ADF Families Survey respondents	2012 ADF Families Survey respondents	2011 Defence Census respondents
	%	%	%
Less than 1 year	0	<1	8
1-5 years	13	17	36
6-10 years	24	23	22
11-15 years	20	18	11
16-20 years	15	14	8
21 years or more	27	28	15
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**

Table 8: Family type by year of administration and gender of respondent

Family Type	2015 ADF Families Survey respondents		2012 ADF Families Survey respondents	
	Male	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**
	%	**%**	**%**	**%**
Civilian-ADF couples	5	95	4	96
Dual ADF couples	34	66	34	66
ADF single parents	57	42	64	36
ADF members with other dependants	78	22	90	10
Total	**15**	**85**	**24**	**75**

Note: Parents of ADF members were not asked for their gender.

Cohorts

When looking at the respondents by their different demographics such as rank and age and cross referencing this with some of the items in the questionnaire it is possible to posit a theory on why there are differences among the cohorts. Care must be taken however in interpreting the results for while the results may be statistically significant the absolute numbers in each group and cohort continually decreases with each cross analysis. Also provision has not been made to weight the responses of each group dependent on their sample size as opposed to population size as represented in the 2011 Census data.

Notwithstanding the above, of note is where there are statistical differences between the cohort ranks of enlisted/JNCOs, SNCOs, junior officers and senior officers, this may be due to an "age and stage" effect occurring. For example, nearly nine in ten (87%) respondent partners of senior officers fell in the 35 to 54 year age bracket, whereas seven in ten (71%) of enlisted/JNCO were between 20 to 34 years of age. Aligned to this, nearly eight in ten respondents with senior officer partners cited their partner as having had 20 or more years in the Service, for SNCOs it was nearly five in ten (46%). Partners of enlisted/JNCOs were more likely to have partners with six to ten years of service (43%).

Corresponding with the above age demographics, a stage of life effect can be shown with those respondents whose partner is a senior officer nearly half (45%) living in a home that they are buying compared to less than one in five (18%) of enlisted/JNCOs. Also two thirds (62%) of enlisted/JNCOs are living in a service residence off base as opposed to two in ten (22%) senior officers. In addition at least seven in ten partners of senior officers (75%) and SNCOs (77%) compared to six in ten partners of junior officers (60%) and enlisted/JNCOs (63%) had dependants.

While the above is not surprising it may be useful to consider any differences between cohorts or groups in the results detailed below in the report through the lens of these demographic differences.

[1] **Dependent child(ren)** - an ADF member's own child or children (including a biological, adopted child, step-child, child of a Defence-recognised interdependent partner, ex-nuptial child, foster-child or ward) who is financially dependant on the member.

[2] **Other dependants** - a person who normally lives with an ADF member at their posting location and has an interdependency relationship with the member that is recognised by Defence. This person can be a parent or family member who requires care, or a person acting as a guardian or housekeeper (only if the member has a dependent child and no Defence-recognised partner at the location or if the partner is disabled). An 'other dependant' is not the ADF members' Defence-recognised partner or a Defence-recognised dependent child.

[3] **Dependants with special needs** - People who required assistance for disabilities or gifts that may be medical, mental or psychological. They may be recognised by Defence as having special needs.

[4] Current or past MWD(U) by rank not significant (x^2 (6) = 9.218; p = .162; Cramer's V = .044).

[5] The consideration of the education of their children showed a significant and moderate association (x^2 (3) = 39.317; p = .000; Cramer's V = .212).

[6] The consideration of staying in the family home as a factor for going MWD(U) showed a significant but weak association (x^2(3) = 31.562; p = .000; Cramer's V = .190).

[7] Other considerations for going MWD(U) that showed weak but significant associations – Respondent's employment (x^2 (3) = 27.669; p = .000; Cramer's V = .178), ADF member's employment (x^2(3) = 14.540; p = .002; Cramer's V = .129), New location was undesirable (x^2(3) = 10.491; p = .015; Cramer's V = .110), MWD(U) would lead to extended absences (x^2(3) = 8.736; p = .033; Cramer's V = .100).

[8] Decision to be MWD(U) again by Rank showed a weak association (x^2 (6) = 22.313; p = .001; Cramer's V = .139).

[9] Intention to leave after MWD(U) by Rank showed a weak association (x^2 (6) = 15.813; p = .015; Crame's V = .109).

[10] Positive experience of MWD(U) was the respondent being able to retain their employment showed a weak association across ranks (x^2 (3) = 12.359; p = .006; Cramer's V = .119).

[11] A positive that showed a moderate association across ranks was children being able to attend the same school (x^2(3) = 74.696; p = .000; Cramer's V = .292).

[12] A positive of MWD(U) was being able to stay in the family home this showed a significant but weak association across ranks (x^2(3) = 10.068; p = .018; Cramer's V = .107).

[13] A challenge of MWD(U) was missing their partner showed a significant but weak association across ranks (x^2 (3) = 13.063; p = .005; Cramer's V = .122).

[14] A challenge of MWD(U) showing significant but weak association across ranks was the arranging reunion trips (x^2(3) = 9.262; p = .026; Cramer's V = .103).

[15] A significant but weak association across ranks for those who got to use all their reunion trips (x^2(3) = 20.847; p = .000; Cramer's V = .154).

[16] Only analysis on family type by Pre-deployment briefing was conducted and showed a moderately significant association (x^2(8) = 350.218; p = .000; Cramer's V = .292).

[17] There was a significant difference across years as to the numbers who registered for DCO Support calls, (x^2 (3) = 11.547; p = .009; Cramer's V = .102). Of those who were contacted there was no significant difference in those who found the call useful by (x^2 (3) = .5.356; p = .147).

[18] Of those who were contacted by DCO for support calls there was no significant difference in those who found the call useful by (x^2 (3) = .5.356; p = .147).

[19] A small significant difference was found between those who had been Absent for longer than a month in the last 12 months by service (x^2 (4) = 72.791; p = 000; Cramer's V = .122).

[20] Respondent preferences for leaving by family type showed a weak association (x^2 (5) = 29.263; p = .000; Cramer's V = .109).

[21] A very small significant difference was found across ranks by those who would encourage their partner to leave if posted to an undesirable location (x^2 (6) = 13.593; p = .035; Cramer's V = .053).