Navigating the military-civilian transition: Recollections of adults who were children and young people when their parents left the Australian Defence Force

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Public Health and Behavioural Science

University of Newcastle

January 2023

This research was supported by an Australian Government Research Training Program [RTP] Scholarship

Statement of originality

I hereby certify that the work embodied in this thesis is my own work, conducted under normal supervision. The thesis contains no material which has been accepted, or is being examined, for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made. I give consent to the final version of my thesis being made available worldwide when deposited in the University's Digital Repository, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968 and any approved embargo.

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Acknowledgement of authorship

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Wells, H., Heinsch, M., Brosnan, C., & Kay-Lambkin, F. (2022). Military family dynamics in transition: The experiences of young people when their families leave the Australian Defence Force. *Child & Family Social Work, 27*(3), 454–464. https://doi.org/10.1111/cfs.12898

Wells, H., Heinsch, M., Brosnan, C., & Kay-Lambkin, F. (2022). Young people's support needs during the military-civilian transition: "I would have been a very different person if there was more support available". *Australian Social Work*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/ 10.1080/0312407X.2022.2077121

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Acknowledgements

To my brilliant supervisors, Milena, Caragh, and Frances—the A-team of interdisciplinary guidance and finesse. Thank you for pushing me beyond my conceivable limits and to the outskirts of my comfort zone. You have guided me through a period of academic evolution and for that, I am incredibly grateful. Most of all, thank you for your kindness, understanding, pride, and belief in me, especially when I found it difficult to back myself.

To my truly remarkable Da, Kevin—a man of the most profound inspiration. Thank you for endlessly fuelling my intellectual fire and my ongoing pursuit of knowledge. I have always treasured your stories and your mind. This is because of you.

To my love, Chris—the warmest glow of orange every morning and every evening. Thank you for your deepest love and endless support. You came into my life during this absolute rollercoaster, and I am so pleased you stuck it out. I adore you.

To my dear Mum, Catherine—the beautiful, the kind, the strong. Thank you for the values you have instilled in me, which are reflected in my thoughts, my actions, and my work every day. I am so lucky to have you.

To my Dad, Robert—your pride in me, both personally and professionally means the world. Thank you for your constant interest in, and support of, my work. I am so lucky to have you as well.

To my sister, Erin—my best friend. You ground me far more than you realise and have given me so many things to be grateful for over the last five years. You mean the world to me.

To the rest of my wonderful family—especially my Nanna Margaret, Aunty Helen, Uncle Robert, Andrew, Alana, Jason, and Aunty Di. They say it takes a village, and you are the most important little village in my life. Thank you for your incredible influence.

To Joey and Fii—the best housemates during a PhD… and a pandemic! Thank you for your understanding, curiosity, climbing sessions, and all the happy hours that got me here.

To the previously serving organisations and communities of Australia—this research would not be possible without your invaluable knowledge and assistance. Your commitment to the previously serving members of Australia and their families is truly commendable, and your work, life changing.

Lastly, and most importantly, to the incredible participants of this study—the heart and soul of the research. I cannot thank you enough for sharing your stories with me, and for opening up to me in a way that I will be forever indebted to. This thesis is as much yours as it is mine.

I will carry with me the contributions you have each made for a lifetime…

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Wells, H., Heinsch, M., Brosnan, C., & Kay-Lambkin, F. (2022). Military family dynamics in transition: The experiences of young people when their families leave the Australian Defence Force. *Child & Family Social Work, 27*(3), 454–464. https://doi.org/10.1111/cfs.12898

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Definitions of key terms and abbreviations

Key terms used in the thesis

Australian Defence Force

This term is used when referring to all branches of Australia's national armed services, including the 'Air Force', 'Army' and 'Navy' (defined below), their structures, operations, and/or personnel. It is used interchangeably with terms such as 'defence' and 'military', which are also used when referring to other international defence forces or armed services.

Air Force

This term is used when referring to Australia's national military branch concerned with aerial defence operations and logistics.

Army

This term is used when referring to Australia's national military branch concerned with land-based armed service and logistics.

Navy

This term is used when referring to Australia's national military branch concerned with defence operations and logistics at sea.

Military family

This term is used throughout the thesis when referring to any family where at least one member of that family is a current or previously serving member of a national armed forces institution, such as the Australian Defence Force. When considering the concept of a

‘military family’, it is important to consider how normative values within society, as well as the cultural acceptance of difference within the military, have changed over time. For example, what constituted a military family several years ago will be very different from the multiple, contemporary family structures of today (i.e., non-nuclear families, separated or divorced families, single-parent families, LGBTQI+ families, adopted families, and other forms of families now socially, culturally, and/or legally recognised).

Service years

This term is used when referring to the period of time that an individual and their family served in the Australian Defence Force (i.e., the number of years a serving member is or was actively employed).

Military-civilian transition

This term is used throughout the thesis when referring to a period, or process, where service personnel and their families leave the Australian Defence Force, thereby exiting the military community and integrating into broader society, or civilian life (non-defence connected). It is important to note that whilst the point of departure from the military is fixed, the experience of transition is not, and can vary for different individuals and military families. The dynamics of the military-civilian transition are also influenced by the points at which families and young people: (i) become conscious of transition, (ii) consider the process of transition to have commenced, (iii) feel their transition has been completed, if at all, and (iv) identify any lasting legacy effects of their military family experience.

Civil-military divide

This term is used throughout the thesis when referring to the gap between military life and the civilian setting, characterised by a range of psychological, sociocultural, structural or knowledge dissimilarities. A more detailed explanation of this term can be found in the literature review (see Chapter 2).

Children and young people

This term is used throughout the thesis when referring to individuals aged between 5 and 25 years, who are the children of previously serving parents or carers. Throughout the thesis, this term is used interchangeably with 'youth', 'adolescents' and less frequently, 'young adults.' Reference to both children and/or young people has been used intentionally throughout the thesis, as one or the other on its own was considered insufficient and less clear. While the term 'children' is often used for much younger individuals (i.e., less than 10), participants also included adolescent- and adult-aged individuals at the time of their transition, where the term 'young people' was considered more appropriate.

Military Brats

This term is used when referring to children and young people who were born into, or grew up in, a defence family. It is a common self-identifying term used by children and young people from military families themselves, as well as others, and denotes their membership to one or more defence communities (Wertsch, 1991). Throughout the thesis, this term is used interchangeably with 'RAAF Brats', 'Army Brats' and 'Navy Brats', depending on which branch of the defence force their family is from, or with which they identify.

Abbreviations

Table 1 shows the full terms of commonly used abbreviations in the thesis.

Table 1. Table of abbreviations.

Key abbreviations	Full terms
ADF	Australian Defence Force
MCT	Military-civilian transition
DVA	Department of Veterans' Affairs
AASW	Australian Association of Social Workers

Abstract

Each year, around 5,500 Australian Defence Force personnel transition from military to civilian life in a process known as the military-civilian transition. While many military families make a smooth transition, some experience psychosocial stressors that pose risks to their mental health and wellbeing. To date, research has tended to focus on the transition experiences of previously serving men and women. Few studies have examined the experiences of their children. Furthermore, existing studies have largely involved secondary accounts by adult family members rather than on the perspectives of children and young people themselves. Understanding the challenges and opportunities the military-civilian transition poses for children and young people is crucial if we are to develop effective interventions to meet their needs in the future.

This PhD research aimed to investigate how children and young people experience, perceive, and make sense of the transition from military to civilian life when their parents leave the defence force, as well as the social and cultural resources, forms of capital, strengths, and practical strategies they draw on when navigating this critical life transition. An exploratory qualitative methodology grounded in interpretive and critical constructivist paradigms was employed. Retrospective data were collected via in-depth, narrative-style interviews with 10 participants who were aged between 5 and 25 at the time their parents left the Australian Defence Force, and 18 years or over at the time they were interviewed. This qualitative and narrative-style approach enabled reflexivity by the researcher and foregrounded the voices and perspectives of participants as experts in their own lives. Data were analysed thematically and interpreted through the lens of Bourdieu's theoretical concepts of habitus, field, and capital.

Findings revealed that children and young people face a range of highly complex and multilayered experiences when their parents leave the defence force, including difficulties identifying with, and assimilating into, civilian life. These challenges were attributed to the different value military and civilian 'worlds' place on distinct forms of social and cultural capital. Findings also suggested that the differences between military and civilian life can exacerbate psychosocial challenges commonly experienced within and outside the family unit, such as mental health problems, disrupted family dynamics, and a range of social and academic issues. Compounding these issues is a lack of support for children and young people during the military-civilian transition and poor uptake of existing civilian services due to entrenched stigma around mental health and help-seeking behaviours.

As the first in-depth, qualitative exploration of the military-civilian transition focussed exclusively on children and young people in Australia, this study extends current research on the experiences of veteran families. Critically, it gives voice to individuals who are part of these families, foregrounding their recollections of the military-civilian transition as children and young people, as well as their support needs, strengths, and adaptive qualities. Findings from this research highlight the need for improved military-cultural competence among public health professionals, teachers, and the broader civilian society in Australia. They point towards the importance of developing supports that consider and address the distinct, multilevel impacts on children and young people when their families leave the defence force. Ultimately, this study offers a strong foundation on which to base future investigations of children and young people and the military-civilian transition.

Chapter 1 | Introduction to the thesis

Complexity lies within our social realities. (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 24)

Introduction

Each year, around 5,500 Australian Defence Force [ADF] personnel and their families make the transition between currently serving and previously serving, navigating what has become known as the military-civilian transition [MCT] (Department of Defence, 2019). The MCT refers to the period of permanent reintegration into civilian life and encapsulates the processes of change that a service person and their family undertake when their defence career comes to an end (Cooper et al., 2017, 2018). While the MCT has attracted a great deal of political, social, and academic interest (e.g., Castro et al., 2015), Australian and international research in this area remains limited, particularly when it comes to the experiences of young people who are the children of previously serving ADF personnel. For many ADF families, children, and young people, "military identity is a social identity", where "military experiences, social bonds, trust, and the importance of the military" become the salient aspects of one's sense of self (Flack & Kite, 2021, p. 3). So, what happens when all of this suddenly changes?

Background and rationale

This PhD research emerged from a Commonwealth Research Training Program [RTP] Scholarship awarded to the doctoral candidate in 2018, which required them to undertake research on a topic concerning the children of ADF veterans. Interest in this area of research came from a combination of the researcher's personal and professional backgrounds. Professionally, the researcher has a background in social work with

experience in a variety of clinical practice and research settings supporting individuals, groups, and communities, in addition to a particular interest in the mental health of families, children, and young people. A long-term personal interest in the support and wellbeing of families of emergency service workers and defence personnel also drew the doctoral candidate to this area of interest. Apart from some experience working with families from ADF backgrounds in a community development context, the researcher had no pre-established personal ties to, or experiences within, the ADF.

While conducting an initial scoping review of the available defence literature, the researcher became increasingly aware of gaps in the knowledge and evidence base. Although research on Australian military families has increased over the past 20 years, it has largely focussed on the medical or psychological aspects of the mental ill health of previously serving personnel, or on the long-term impacts of deployment on families, such as post-traumatic stress disorder [PTSD]. Less well explored are the psychosocial or cultural experiences of military families when they transition out of the defence force. Following a more in-depth search of the literature, the researcher identified a shortage of research on children and young people's experiences during the MCT. As a major life event in the trajectory of military families, with the potential to influence children and young people's future health outcomes and wellbeing, this represented a considerable gap. Initially, the researcher sought to locate previous empirical studies that had reported on the experiences of children and young people in Australia during the MCT. However, it soon became apparent that such data were absent from the existing literature. Due to the poorly conceptualised and underexplored nature of the MCT in Australia, the researcher decided to conduct an exploratory study to understand the possible experiences of children and

young people when their families leave the ADF, and to highlight opportunities for improved services and supports, as well as future research with, this population.

The decision to restrict the target population served to foreground the perspectives of individuals whose voices tend to be absent from existing defence research. Literature shows that children and young people undergo a series of unique identity formation processes from pre-adolescence to young adulthood, which are heavily influenced by their increased engagement with socio-cultural contexts and relationships beyond the family unit (Alfano et al., 2016; Easterbrooks et al., 2013). The development of mental illness also occurs predominantly in childhood and adolescence (Jurewicz, 2015). However, no Australian research to date has exclusively explored the MCT of children and young people. Instead, the majority of studies have been limited to the experiences of veterans or adult family members, such as spouses and partners. They have also been primarily quantitative. In some instances, parental reports of their children's experiences or collective familial experiences were included, but these were minimal, and did not include children and young people's own perspectives. However, these existing secondary reports indicate that children and young people have unique experiences of the MCT which differ from those of their parents, and that the MCT represents a major life event that can considerably influence children and young people's sociocultural development, with both positive and negative outcomes for their mental health and wellbeing (Cooper et al., 2017, 2018; Daraganova et al., 2018; Muir, 2018). This study sought to address the gap in self-report data on the experiences of children and young people during the MCT.

Aims and objectives of the research

The central aim of this study was to foreground the voices, experiences, values, and worldviews of individuals from previously serving military families by exploring their

recollections of the MCT as children and young people when their parents left the ADF. Specifically, the researcher aimed to explore the ways in which children and young people draw on various forms of capital when navigating the transition from military to civilian life, and how they mobilise pre-existing or newfound strengths, opportunities, and resources to respond to the challenges they face during transition.

This study also aimed to develop a foundational framework for public health professionals and human service providers who work with children and young people at any or all stages of the MCT, in order to enhance their understanding, and capacity to respond to, the complex sociocultural experiences of children and young people during this transition.

Research questions

The primary research questions for this study were:

1. How do participants retrospectively perceive their transition from military to civilian life?
2. What similarities and differences do they recall observing between military and civilian contexts both within, and outside, the family unit?
3. What cultural resources, forms of capital, or practical strategies do participants recall drawing on when navigating civilian life?

Theoretical perspective and methodology

Given the focus of this study on socio-cultural transition, a theoretical approach consistent with the movement of individuals and groups in and out of different cultures and social contexts was applied. Bourdieu's theory of social practice and three interrelated concepts,

habitus, field, and *capital* provide a useful framework for conceptualising and understanding power and status as a product of the knowledge, position, and resources individuals hold within and across different social settings. Translated into the MCT context, Bourdieu's concepts help demonstrate how the 'rules of the game' are different in many military environments compared to civilian communities, and that veterans and their families must navigate a complex cultural and social transition when moving between these settings (Cooper et al., 2017, 2018). Because this theoretical framework has shown promise in understanding and exploring the MCT experiences of previously serving men and women (e.g., Cooper et al., 2017, 2018), it was considered important also to examine its potential relevance in the context of their children, given the essential role of socio-cultural experiences during an individual's formative years (Alfano et al., 2016).

Bourdieu's theoretical perspectives were applied deductively to explore and understand children and young people's transition experiences and how they mobilise their existing knowledge and resources when moving from military to civilian life. More specifically, this theory was used to shape the research design, inform data collection, and analyse and interpret the research findings. Bourdieu's theoretical principles and their application—discussed in more depth in Chapter 3—ultimately provided a valuable theoretical lens through which the researcher was able to begin examining the centrality, acquisition, use, and exchange of different forms of capital among children and young people during the MCT, and how these influenced their experiences, wellbeing, and social identity, according to participants' recollections. In keeping with the doctoral candidate's disciplinary focus of social work, this thesis drew primarily on contemporary extensions of Bourdieu's work that offer psychological conceptualisations of habitus, field, and capital (e.g., Cottingham, 2016; Reay, 2015), complementing these with the application of

Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological systems theory to demonstrate how individuals perceive and experience the interplay between themselves and other actors within their lived environment.

While there are some theoretical tensions between Bourdieu's sociological concepts, and the psychosocial approach of Bronfenbrenner, significant compatibilities also exist, as demonstrated by Fossey et al. (2019). Thus, this research amalgamated the two to contextualise findings from a multi-level perspective, including acknowledgement of the individual social agent as centric to their complex lived environment in which field and capital also operate to influence the habitus. In this way, both theoretical approaches helped translate the findings from this study into a foundational framework for research and practice, designed to facilitate enhanced understandings of the MCT for children and young people, and guide improved services and supports across multisystemic levels. A more detailed overview of this framework can be found in Chapter 9.

Methodologically, this study consisted of a qualitative research design grounded in the interpretive and critical constructivist paradigms. It utilised in-depth, narrative-style interviews to collect qualitative data from 10 study participants. This methodology allowed for the analysis of rich, detailed recollections of the MCT experience from participants' own nuanced perspectives and was supplemented with the researcher's ongoing use of reflexive practice throughout the research process. Data analysis and interpretation occurred by deductively applying Bourdieu's theoretical concepts, as well as inductively interpreting datasets using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-stage model of thematic analyses. A more detailed overview and explanation of all theoretical approaches used can be found in Chapter 3, with methodological processes detailed in greater depth throughout Chapter 4.

Significance of the research

This study contributes to the fields of social work, family studies, behavioural science, and a range of other public health disciplines involved in research and practice with currently and previously serving military communities. To the researcher's knowledge, it is one of the first qualitative explorations of the MCT concerning children and young people, both in Australia and internationally. Consequently, this study offers a new, empirically grounded, perspective on the MCT for children and young people in Australia. Indeed, findings from this study extend current understandings and conceptualisations of the MCT by identifying new insights on the distinct ways in which children and young people experience this transition, as reported by participants' own recollections. These include some of the challenges they face during transition, but also their strengths and personal attributes that can help facilitate adjustment to civilian life, and hence a smoother transition. It shows that children and young people face a range of highly complex and multilayered experiences when their parents leave the defence force, including difficulties identifying with, and assimilating into, civilian life. It also reveals the connection between these experiences and key cultural differences between military and civilian 'worlds'. Through its findings, this study emphasises the complexity and heterogeneity of the MCT and proposes strategies for improving services and supports for children and young people during this transition.

Most importantly, this research gave voice to participants who were young people at the time of their transition. Many individuals who took part in the study reported that their reason for participating was to be heard, as they often felt like they couldn't talk about their experiences with others or were discouraged from doing so. Participants in this study explained that there were few avenues for sharing or recounting their experiences

and perspectives, noting that they were afraid their stories would be misinterpreted or used for non-transparent reasons, such as government agendas that differ from their own values and beliefs, the development of policies that are counterintuitive to their needs, or inaccurate depictions of their families' experiences. Many described the therapeutic benefits of sharing their story, citing feelings of relief, and appreciation that they were not alone in their experiences. This study therefore aimed to strike a balance between collecting rich, important, and valuable information, whilst also empowering participants by giving voice to their recollections and acknowledging them as the experts in their own lives.

Overall, this study represents an important contribution on the road towards improved support and wellbeing outcomes for children and young people from military families. It highlights the need for improved military cultural competence among public health professionals, teachers, and the broader civilian society in Australia, as well as the importance of developing supports that consider and address the distinct and multilevel impacts on children and young people when their families leave the defence force, rather than taking a one-size-fits-all approach. Based on its findings and recommendations, it also offers a strong foundation on which to base future investigations of children and young people and the military-civilian transition in both the Australian and international context. To date, two original articles arising from this study have been published in peer-reviewed, academic journals. These offer recommendations for future research and practice in the field of social work, with the potential for translation across other public health disciplines involved in the support of military communities.

Conclusion and overview of the thesis

Chapter 1 has outlined the context of the research, providing a background and rationale, describing the aims and research questions, outlining the theoretical framework and methodology, and exploring the significance of the research. Chapter 2 presents a comprehensive narrative review of the literature on defence culture, children and young people, and the civil-military divide. Chapter 3 outlines the theoretical framework of the research followed by the research methodology in Chapter 4. Chapters 5–8 present and discuss key findings from the study, with two presented as traditional chapters, and two as original articles published in peer-reviewed journals. More specifically, Chapter 5 reports on findings related to the civil-military divide and impacts of key differences between military and civilian life on the experiences of children and young people during the MCT. Chapter 6 extends on this by examining findings in relation to Bourdieu's key theoretical concepts and exploring the transferability of capital and habitus when children and young people transition from military to civilian life. Findings presented in Chapter 7 explore the mental health, wellbeing, and military family dynamics of children and young people in transition, followed by Chapter 8, which presents and discusses findings related to the overall support needs of children and young people during the MCT. Finally, Chapter 9 presents a summary of key findings, followed by the proposal of a foundational framework for future research and practice with children and young people from previously serving military families.

Chapter 2 | Literature review

Manage to think in a completely astonished and disconcerted way about things you thought you had always understood. (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 207)

Introduction

This chapter presents a narrative review of the existing literature on Australian and international defence cultures, children and young people from defence families, and the civil-military divide. It includes literature on the MCT as an important area of emerging research and investigates the experiences of military families, children, and young people during this transition. Given the limited amount of research directly concerning children and young people's experiences of the MCT, this chapter also includes broader literature on the cultural practice of children and young people including community membership, subcultural engagement, and their experiences of cultural transition across a range of settings. This literature offers some insight into the parallels that can be drawn between children and young people's experiences of the MCT and other cross-cultural experiences they may encounter relating to identity work, knowledge exchange, transfer of resources, and the mobilisation of capital. The overall aim of this literature review was to collate foundational knowledge and highlight gaps in the existing literature that required further empirical attention.

Literature review methodology

To help refine the research aims and questions, and shape the focus and context of the study, a narrative literature review was conducted. Narrative reviews provide a comprehensive synthesis of previously published information on a particular area of

interest (Green et al., 2006). They combine a large amount of information into a readable format and help describe multiple elements of a specific topic or problem along with its related phenomena (Green et al., 2006). Unlike systematic reviews, narrative reviews can address one or more questions and the selection criteria are often more flexible (Ferrari, 2015). While this level of subjectivity may result in potential biases, narrative reviews are considered incomparable for tracking the development of complex, sociocultural phenomena and the many abstract concepts related to a broad topic (Ferrari, 2015). Therefore, a narrative approach was favoured to avoid losing these nuances to the more restrictive rules of a systematic review. According to Ferrari (2015), "some issues require the wider scoping of a narrative review" (p. 231), which was determined to be the case in this exploratory research study.

Terms such as 'veterans', 'ex-serving personnel', 'military families', 'children', 'young people', 'Australian Defence Force', 'civilian', 'transition', and 'culture' were initially considered for use in this study. After consulting several military connections formed in the early stages of the research, as well as various online reports released by the ADF and Department of Veterans' Affairs [DVA], these were refined to the following key search terms: 'Australian Defence Force', 'ADF', 'previously serving', 'military families', 'military culture', 'defence culture', 'children and young people', 'civil-military divide', 'military-civilian transition', and 'MCT'. To yield more relevant results, these terms were also paired with 'public health', 'social work', 'cultural transition', and 'cultural competence'. Due to the limited amount of research into the area of interest, results were not limited to a specific time-period and both Australian and international publications were included. This approach allowed for the identification of a broad range of literature

and the examination of concepts such as change and continuity, which helped to refine the research questions.

In keeping with the doctoral candidate's disciplinary focus of social work, the search targeted literature within the behavioural science and public health disciplines, including social work, psychology, medicine, and psychiatry. While some sociological and historical references were sourced, in-depth engagement with these texts was considered outside the scope of this study and its research aims. The University of Newcastle Library Catalogue, NEWCAT, was used to search for relevant hard print materials, while several online databases were used to search for digital materials, such as eBooks and peer-reviewed journal articles. Databases used included: BMJ, Cambridge, CINAHL, EBSCOHost, Emerald Plus, Informit, JSTOR, Ovid, Oxford, Medline, ProQuest, PsycINFO, PubMed, SAGE, ScienceDirect, Scopus, Springer, Taylor and Francis, and Wiley. These strategies were also supported by a comprehensive search of Google Scholar. Australian and international publications reporting on a range of study designs and mixed methodologies in relation to the key search terms and topic of interest were sought. Relevant grey literature such as official reports, discussion papers, conference proceedings, dissertations, and theses were also included, as well as additional publications sourced from the reference lists of previously collated material.

Selection criteria

Due to the complex nature of the research topic and the narrative approach used, the selection criteria for the literature review were intentionally broad. Literature relating to a range of phenomena relevant to children and young people's experience of the MCT was incorporated, including: (i) literature on military culture and the distinctions between defence and civilian life, (ii) children and young people's experiences of military-civilian

cultural distinctions, (iii) the concept of a 'civil-military divide', (iv) the MCT and implications for children and young people, (v) other forms of cultural transition experienced by children and young people, (vi) national and international support structures for families during the MCT, (vii) transition experiences and perspectives of parents and other family members, and (viii) studies that did not examine the MCT specifically, but referred to it. To capture a holistic perspective of the MCT, the review included experiences of currently serving families, previously serving families, and families in transition. The only materials excluded from the review were those that: (i) did not examine or mention the MCT at all, (ii) did not consider the experiences of military families in relation to military culture, the civil-military divide, or the transition to civilian life, and/or (iii) focussed on the experiences of military families and/or children and young people in other defence contexts, such as parental deployment.

It is important to note that the majority of included literature reported on findings from the United States and the United Kingdom. While there are many procedural and structural similarities between international and Australian defence organisations, the culture and relationship between military and civilian populations can differ significantly between countries. Further, some countries, such as the United States, tend to have access to higher levels of research funding and resources. It was therefore important to ensure that any insights drawn from the literature were considered in context.

Findings

Defence culture

The cultures of individual countries can have a strong influence on their national armed forces (Soeters et al., 2006). However, the universal aim of military institutions to produce

“operationally ready units” and the activities associated with doing so requires global defence organisations to form distinct military cultures that share characteristics across nations (Truusa & Castro, 2019, p. 10). Indeed, several authors have explored the distinct differences that separate international military cultures from their country’s other occupational and mainstream ‘civilian’ cultures (Cooper et al., 2017, 2018; Grimell, 2015; Truusa & Castro, 2019). In countries like Australia, Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom, national defence forces are considered ‘total institutions’ (e.g., Goffman, 1961) which are highly regimented, socially integrated, and strongly controlled (Smith & True, 2014; Truusa & Castro, 2019). They promote a structured and communal lifestyle, and place a high value on authority, directives, and tightly knit social networks (Bergman et al., 2014; Blackburn, 2017; Truusa & Castro, 2019). In many defence settings, military families are also encouraged to view themselves as ‘special’ or ‘different’, particularly in relation to civilians (e.g., Dentry-Travis, 2013; Hollingshead, 1946), and individual and family military identities are often constructed in accordance with rank, as well as shared experiences during service—particularly for those involved in armed conflict (Smith & True, 2014).

From their large-scale research on culture across various international organisations, Hofstede et al. (2010) proposed that cultures have six dimensions, or measures, for the comparison of different cultural contexts. These include: (i) power distance, (ii) collectivism versus individualism, (iii) femininity versus masculinity, (iv) uncertainty avoidance, (v) long-term versus short-term orientation, and (vi) indulgence versus restraint (Hofstede et al., 2010). According to Truusa and Castro (2019), these dimensions assist in conceptualising and understanding military culture when compared to civilian life. For example, the normalities of military life include values aligned with

collectivist approaches that prioritise the group over individuals—a sense of camaraderie that leads to strong in-group identities and emotional bonds (Tajfel, 1974; Truusa & Castro, 2019). As part of this group identity, military culture promotes collective qualities such as discipline, control, fitness, commitment, and self-sacrifice (Grimell, 2015; Rahbek-Clemmensen et al., 2012). It also tends to be "more masculine, with greater power distance, less tolerance for ambiguity, and geared toward restraint" (Truusa & Castro, 2019, p. 12) in comparison to other civilian cultures. In the United States, for example, research has shown that the unique socialisation process and strong collectivist influence of the military on one's identity can even surpass an individual's racial and ethnic culture, rendering it durable and deeply oriented (Truusa & Castro, 2019).

Military life is no doubt unique. Families can often be separated for long periods of time due to different roles and deployments, and a strong emphasis is placed on adherence to rules, regulations, and orders (Truusa & Castro, 2019). For both military personnel and their families, behaviours that demonstrate commitment to the purpose of specific military operations or 'missions' is paramount (Ashcroft, 2016; Bergman et al., 2014; Blackburn, 2016, 2017; Curry et al., 2017; Keeling, 2018; Smith & True, 2014). In many countries, including Australia, the military provides comprehensive support to its members and their families, including housing, education, clothing, food, insurance, social and cultural recreation, and health care (Ashcroft, 2016; Hollingshead, 1946; Robinson et al., 2017; Smith & True, 2014; Truusa & Castro, 2019). This means that military families can be relatively isolated or separated from day-to-day civilian activities and institutions, with a lack of understanding around how particular systems and structures outside defence operate. In international military cultures, language also differs to varying degrees. This is due to the distinct acronyms, slang and humour that have been created over time, which are

often poorly understood by civilians (Curry et al., 2017; Keeling, 2018; Truusa & Castro, 2019). Overtime, certain behaviours and characteristics have become entrenched due to the way tightly knit military communities live, train, and work together as a part of different military missions. As a result, these behaviours and norms continue to be reinforced, resulting in a level of social cohesion and sense of purpose rarely found in civilian life—traits which are often shared by the whole military family, including children (Truusa & Castro, 2019).

Another area of life affected by military culture is health—both physical and mental. Military service is demanding and can involve exposure to certain physical, emotional, and social risks which are less common civilian settings. The development of chronic physical and mental illness or injury arising both during service, and in the years following, are not uncommon (e.g., Settersten & Patterson, 2006) and have been well-documented in the academic literature. Indeed, international research has explored the particularly high rates of PTSD among previously serving military personnel globally, along with the potential for secondary trauma to negatively impact the health and wellbeing outcomes of other family members—including their children (Cook et al., 2012; Craigen et al., 2014; Diehle et al., 2015; Esposito-Smythers, 2011).

Ultimately, military families experience many life transitions during service, such as starting a family, losing, or gaining relationships, experiencing multiple relocations and school or work transitions, enduring repeated deployments, and losing loved ones through death, injury, or separation (e.g., Truusa & Castro, 2019), which is true for international defence organisations in most countries of the world. As such, these communities have a range of shared experiences in service that can lead to the formation of strong bonds and a collective military identity that persists and influences their lives long after service (Truusa

& Castro, 2019). According to the life-course view, time, place, and cultural context are extremely influential during critical or sensitive periods of human development (Hutchison, 2005). It is, thus, highly likely that the events, experiences, and decisions of families within their military cultural context contribute to the way in which they navigate their transition out of the defence force as another major life event (Settersten & Patterson, 2006; Spiro et al., 2016).

Children, young people, and military life

When service personnel have families or children, the 'cultural mission' becomes shared. According to Houppert (2005), civilian life is designed to bring children and young people into independence, while military life tends to shift them towards a dependence on the military family or community. In the United States, Wertsch (1991) reported on the experiences of adult 'Military Brats' when navigating life *outside the fortress.* In her book, she describes an all-powerful military mission as the major cultural influence in the lives of Military Brats. Wertsch (1991) argued that it is this sense of 'shared mission' which provides children and young people with meaning and purpose when growing up as part of a military family, moulding their identity *inside the fortress*. According to Wertsch (1991), these experiences are tied to the highly authoritarian nature of the U.S. military, which tends to influence what military families do, and shapes their developmental life course (Wertsch, 1991). According to Wertsch (1991), enactment of military culture is seen as inherent to supporting the overarching values and goals of the military. However, once again, existing research into children and young people's experiences and their enactment of military culture has been largely U.S. based, requiring confirmation in the Australian context.

According to Siebold (2007), children and young people tend to internalise the strong cultural norms of the military when growing up in U.S. defence settings. As time goes on, there become fewer opportunities for developing a sense of independence, and to explore their own individuality outside the military context (Siebold, 2007). Whether children and young people live with their families on base, or in largely civilian communities, research has found that the U.S. military identity often becomes the most salient element of a child or young person's sense of self, irrespective of other cultural influences or physical surroundings (Atuel & Castro, 2018; Roccas & Brewer, 2002; Wertsch, 1991). For children and young people who are born into a military context, the cultural association is even more immediate. As they have had no prior exposure to an exclusively civilian context, identity formation within the defence setting forms their primary cultural background (Massia, 2015). According to Massia (2015), the "overriding (military) identity which every member shares inevitably impacts the military-raised who may, in fact, feel that identity on a deeper level, as the full impact of it occurs during the developmental years" (p. 6). Whether these same implications are the case in other countries outside of the United States, such as Australia, is dependent on further research.

Despite many shared experiences, not all children and young people necessarily experience military culture in the same way. Lester and Flake (2013) argued that each branch or sector of the U.S. military, such as the Army, Air Force and Navy, has its own distinct subculture, traditions, histories, norms, and roles within the broader sphere of defence culture, which has also been determined in Australia (Winter, 2009). Wertsch (1991) also pointed out the important class distinctions associated with holding a particular rank or grade in the military, which can determine a family's access to specific relationships, resources, and services. As well as these sorts of cultural influences, children

and young people who are military dependents can also experience a range of unique lifestyle factors that are highly distinct and can impact on their interactions and connections with people who do not share in the same experiences, including other military-raised individuals (Wertsch, 1991). Examples of these include long or multiple periods of parental deployment, disruptions to home life or family relationships, highly mobile lifestyles or multiple school transitions, exposure to many different communities and cultures, an inability to form stable or lasting connections with other children and young people, and very strict expectations of their values and roles within the family and military community, from which they are encouraged not to deviate (Atuel & Castro, 2018; Wertsch, 1991). In addition to several other countries, these experiences are also considered quite common for many children and young people who are raised in the Australian military context (Daraganova et al., 2018; Muir, 2018).

A handful of studies in Australia and the United States have suggested that children and young people from military families have different schooling experiences and needs to their civilian peers (Gilreath et al., 2013; Macdonald, 2017; Macdonald & Boon, 2018; MacRaild, 2018; Reed et al., 2011; Rogers-Baber, 2017). There is also some evidence to suggest that these children and young people experience more negative outcomes in civilian schools than their peers from non-military backgrounds, including higher rates of substance use, violence, bullying, mental health stress (e.g., Gilreath et al., 2013), and gang affiliation (e.g., Reed et al., 2011). In Australia, Gilreath et al. (2013) found that some children and young people from defence families can experience difficulties developing strong relationships with teachers or making friends with peers who have a lack of awareness of military life (Gilreath et al., 2013). Despite these challenges, Australian and international military cultures have also been shown to give many children and young

people a meaningful identity and sense of belonging associated with strength, service, sacrifice, and connectedness, suggestive of strong adaptive qualities which may serve as important protective factors during major life events (Benbenishty et al., 2016; Easterbrooks et al., 2013; Rogers-Baber, 2017).

The civil-military divide

International militaries have been described as cultures in their own rights (Fenell, 2008), with their own histories, norms, beliefs, values, traditions, behaviours, and events that are seen to differ greatly from those of civilian societies and cultures (Meyer, 2015). According to Atuel and Castro (2018), one of the key characteristics of U.S. military life is its adherence to a strict set of behaviours where group interests, and the collective 'military mission', are given priority over the individual or immediate family unit. King (2006) noted that conformity and total devotion to the key military values of honour, respect, loyalty, commitment, and stoicism are also central to upholding the primacy of group cohesion and discipline, which predict the success of a mission. This felt sense of mission is often seen as the overarching and all-consuming purpose of the military, where membership is entirely associated with serving and protecting (Hall, 2008, 2011). However, outside the military, mainstream civilian societies in countries like Australia, New Zealand, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada have their own cultural foundations, characterised by individuality, self or familial-interest and materialism (Truusa & Castro, 2019). These qualities are distinctly different to those of defence cultures, which tend to favour more collective interests, the group mission, prestige, and symbolic assets (e.g., Wertsch, 1991), leading to a cultural divide between military and civilian life.

According to Collins and Holsti (1999), the civil-military cultural divide is necessary for maintaining the U.S. military's distinctiveness and efficiency as an institution, which can be said for most international militaries. Yet the different values of civilian and military cultures can also lead to a lack of understanding between the two 'worlds' and cause relational challenges or problems upon convergence (Collins & Holsti, 1999). According to Demers (2011), this cultural divide is exacerbated in countries with an all-volunteer force, like Australia, where military families represent a much smaller subset of society than in countries with conscription or compulsory service (Duel et al., 2019). In these countries, civilian families now have less direct contact with military communities than ever before, resulting in fewer shared experiences between groups. Instead, most civilian interaction with the ADF occurs exclusively through the media—a mode through which a lack of intimacy combined with inaccurate reporting can have a polarising effect on public perceptions of military families (Duel et al., 2019).

Contemporary literature has highlighted the common misrepresentations and stereotyping of military life in the Western world, including that of Australia and the United States (Hooyer et al., 2020; Parrott et al., 2020). News programs, social media, film, and television often portray defence personnel and their families as 'superhuman' and 'heroic', or 'damaged beyond repair'—false labels based on extreme assumptions or examples that are not accurately representative of military communities (Hooyer et al., 2020; Parrott et al., 2020). These unrealistic depictions, combined with a lack of feasible strategies for bridging the divide at a public level, highlight the need to illuminate key issues that result from such discrepancies, and challenge public narratives of military families, children, and young people (Szayna et al., 2007). However, previous research has shown that the divide is not one-sided. Due to the strong camaraderie of military culture

and the formation of close psychological bonds between personnel and their families, the shared in-group identity of the military community can also lead to a further social distancing between themselves and the broader civilian community (Duel et al., 2019). Keeping military and civilian communities connected is therefore an ongoing challenge (Duel et al., 2019).

The reasons behind the maintenance of the civil-military divide are diverse and complex. One reason may be that deployments are often far from home and most people in countries like Australia do not directly experience the effects of the mission, or military service in action; nor do they understand the military way of life, or what it means to grow up as part of a defence culture (Duel et al., 2019). Additionally, research from the United Kingdom has shown that public support for defence operations and support for military personnel and their families may, in fact, mean quite different things (Gribble et al., 2012; Hines et al., 2015). For example, members of the public may no longer support a specific defence mission but continue to support those who participated in that mission. However, for many U.K. military families, criticisms of a mission can translate into feelings of criticism towards themselves (e.g., Gribble et al., 2012)—a further point of difference resulting from a lack of understanding between communities and their experiences.

The military-civilian transition

Military families across the globe experience a variety of transitions during service, including transfers, promotions, and deployments which can have lasting impacts. However, two major transitions are especially unique to the military life-course: (i) the cultural shift from civilian to military service, and (ii) the cultural shift from military to post-service life, known as the military-civilian transition, or MCT (Atuel & Castro, 2018; Castro et al., 2015; Robinson et al., 2017). While both are major transitions, the latter is

said to require a greater degree of cultural adjustment, as well as shifts in individual and familial identity (Adler et al., 2011; Keeling, 2018; Pinch, 1980; Sayer et al., 2011, 2014). Transitions, in most contexts, are times of opportunity as well as vulnerability, requiring social and cultural adjustments and new and existing knowledge, skills, relationships and social identities (Praharso et al., 2017; Robinson et al., 2017; Sayer et al., 2014). All people experience major life-course transitions and, while they can bring about many positives, they can also present a range of emotional stressors and life challenges. This is no different for the Australian MCT (Daraganova et al., 2018; Muir, 2018).

While there is no widely accepted definition of the MCT (e.g., Blackburn, 2017; Pinch, 1980; Robinson et al., 2017; Shields et al., 2016), several international authors have described it as a process that begins prior to military release and continues after entering civilian life. It involves preparation, psychological changes, administrative adaptations, identity shifts, socioeconomic adjustments and at times, stress, and uncertainty (Ashcroft, 2016; Blackburn, 2017; Cooper et al., 2017, 2018; Curry et al., 2017; Daraganova et al., 2018; Kintzle et al., 2016; Muir, 2018). Due to the very complexity of this process, a single definition of the MCT cannot be conceptualised. In fact, overly simplistic definitions which do not account for the variety of influences and experiences across individual life-courses can often lead to inadequate policies and programming, or blanket approaches, when developing supports (Pedlar et al., 2019).

Military families can experience the MCT differently, depending on the reason for their transition (e.g., planned retirement, medical discharge, mental health challenges, downsizing or misconduct) (Blackburn, 2016). Upon exiting the military, the majority of Research across Australia, the United States, and the United Kingdom shows that most personnel do not retire when leaving the defence force, but instead, seek continued

employment in the civilian workforce (Curry et al., 2017; Iversen et al., 2005; MacLean et al., 2016; Robinson et al., 2017; Thompson et al., 2014). In these cases, families often transition abruptly, moving from a structured, collectivist military community to the far more individualist, civilian world (Adler et al. 2011; Ahern et al., 2015; Blackburn, 2016, 2017; Coll & Weiss, 2013; Cooper et al., 2017, 2018; Robinson et al., 2017; Smith & True, 2014). Such a shift can therefore present considerable readjustment challenges for all involved, including children and young people (Coll & Weiss, 2013).

International research suggests that many families who release both voluntarily and involuntarily make a smooth transition out of their country's defence force (e.g., Cooper et al., 2017, 2018; Daraganova et al., 2018; Elnitsky et al., 2017; Muir, 2018). Others, however, face adverse experiences and psychosocial challenges (e.g., Thompson et al., 2016; Van Staden et al., 2007) such as changing family relationships, roles and responsibilities, a disrupted sense of purpose and identity, alienation from existing military connections, a poor sense of community belonging, and a lack of understanding about how things work outside the military setting (Atuel & Castro, 2018; Coll & Weiss, 2013; Keeling, 2018; Orazem et al., 2017; Robinson et al., 2017; Smith & True, 2014; Thompson et al., 2017). These challenges have been described as a form of 'culture shock' (e.g., Bergman et al., 2014), which can lead to hostility or anger toward the civilian system (Adler et al., 2011; Ahern et al., 2015; Ashcroft, 2016; Bergman et al., 2014; Coll & Weiss, 2013; Keeling, 2018; Sayer et al., 2011, 2014).

Within the military, families receive support in relation to many aspects of their wellbeing such as healthcare, employment, income support and housing (Ashcroft, 2016; Hollingshead, 1946; Robinson et al., 2017; Smith & True, 2014). However, when they leave the military, they are required to adapt to new civilian systems of health care,

employment, and support, which are often vastly dissimilar to those provided by defence and involve far less guidance and support to navigate. Unlike the civilian workforce, where it is not uncommon for individuals to move in and out of different industries, the military is structured so that careers last approximately 20–30 years. Once families leave the military, however, they must figure out how to navigate a new, and very different, workforce. Oftentimes, families also have very little concept of the costs of living, because so much is provided for them by the military, either free or at a greatly reduced cost, including school and day care fees. For this reason, many previously serving military families lack the practical experience to manage expenses and can struggle to secure or maintain employment. As a result, military families can feel underappreciated and undervalued within civilian systems (Truusa & Castro, 2019).

During the MCT, families are often required to redefine the way they relate to others in social settings, adding an extra layer of complexity (Amiot et al., 2010; Atuel & Castro, 2018; Castro & Kintzle, 2014; Jetten et al., 2012; Lancaster et al., 2018; Praharso et al., 2017; Sayer et al., 2014, 2011). Preliminary research shows that the ability to adjust to the loss of previous relationships and form new ones is key to transition success (Atuel & Castro, 2018; Lancaster et al., 2018; Thompson et al., 2017). However, this can be challenging, as families in transition have often reported feeling like "strangers in their own country" (Castro & Dursun, 2019, p. 14). Just like the experiences of some immigrant families, they may struggle to gain a sense of belonging and acceptance (Castro & Dursun, 2019; Orazem et al., 2017). Previous research on reintegrating Afghan and Iraqi veterans and their families found that participants experienced difficulties in achieving a sense of meaning and belonging in their new American communities and held negative views about the U.S. civilians to whom they struggled to relate (Orazem et al., 2017). Such experiences

can cause families to withdraw socially, increasing isolation and delaying acculturation into post-military life (Bergman et al., 2014; Keeling, 2018; Smith & True, 2014).

Across nations, the existing literature suggests it is critical that researchers direct their attention to the MCT to better understand the experiences, risks, and protective factors for military families during the MCT (Adler et al., 2011; Atuel & Castro, 2018; Blackburn, 2017; Castro & Dursun, 2019; Cooper et al., 2017, 2018; Daraganova et al., 2018; Lancaster et al., 2018; Muir, 2018; Orazem et al., 2017; Smith & True, 2014). When examining the MCT experiences of military families, consideration should also be given to sociocultural domains such as norms, values, behaviours, relationships, and attitudes (e.g., Castro & Dursun, 2019; Cooper et al., 2017, 2018; Daraganova et al., 2018; Muir, 2018), as well as the changes that occur within these domains when families embark on the permanent transition to civilian life. In the United Kingdom, it has been suggested that certain approaches, attitudes, and behaviours that were successful in the military context may not be as effective in the civilian setting, thus interfering with or impeding a successful transition (Cooper et al., 2017, 2018). However, further research is required to examine this in more depth.

Children, young people, and the military-civilian transition: A cross-cultural experience

Very little research has examined the experiences of children and young people during the MCT. According to recent literature from the United Kingdom, it is possible that, to some extent, the challenges children and young people experience during the MCT may be like those of their parents (Cooper et al., 2017, 2018). These include: (i) experiencing a loss of role, identity, or purpose, (ii) finding civilian life chaotic and unstructured, (iii) feeling isolated from, or different to, civilians, and (iv) struggling to develop new friendships and

connections (Cooper et al., 2017, 2018). However, further research is needed to investigate the extent to which these experiences are relevant for children and young people.

Previous literature on military life, along with evidence of a growing civil-military divide, tends to support the premise that some challenges children and young people experience during the MCT may be distinctly cultural (Cooper et al., 2017, 2018; Daraganova et al., 2018; Muir, 2018; Hall, 2008, 2011; Wertsch, 1991). Just as civilians carry the values and traits of their national culture, previously serving families, children, and young people carry the values and traits associated with military life. On the one hand, some of these values and traits may be useful tools that can support a smooth transition process, such as tolerance, resourcefulness, adaptability, and an attitude welcoming of challenges (Easterbrooks et al., 2013; Hall, 2008, 2011; Milburn and Lightfoot, 2013; Wright et al., 2013). On the other hand, some traits may cause further challenges, such as an inability to relate to others, and a lack of understanding about how to act and 'fit in' with one's new environment and social sphere (Castro & Dursun, 2019; Cooper et al., 2017, 2018). Castro and Dursun (2019) have shown that examining military cultures can aid our understanding of how families, including children and young people, may experience transitional strengths and challenges when they move from one cultural environment to another.

To understand the role of culture in the sociocultural transition of children and young people, Hofstede et al. (2010) conceptualised culture as being 'the software of the mind'; the non-material resources of the social environments in which children and young people both grow up and collect their life experiences. It is this software which allows them to make sense of practices within their cultural environments (Hofstede et al., 2010). However, when children and young people transition into a different cultural environment,

they may find it difficult to use their existing software to make sense of, and navigate, this new setting (Hofstede et al., 2010). It is important to acknowledge that culture is practised in various ways, even within the same social and cultural settings and among those with the "same essential software" (Castro & Dursun, 2019, p. 10). Therefore, not all children and young people from defence families will experience the MCT in the same way; in fact, some may be quite dissimilar, depending on the specific branch or sector of the military that families are involved with, as well as whether individuals grow up on or off base, or are highly mobile or geographically stable (Castro & Dursun, 2019).

Wertsch's (1991) examination of adults who had experienced U.S. military culture as children offers important retrospective insights into the cultural influences of defence contexts on children and young people. Reflecting on the MCT experiences of adult 'Military Brats', she identified a lack of civilian understanding around their unique experiences and challenges growing up in the military. These experiences not only increased individuals' perceptions of the existence of a civil-military divide, but also rendered the MCT more difficult for them (Wertsch, 1991). Wertsch's (1991) work found that children and young people from U.S. military backgrounds—and potentially others—hold different beliefs and worldviews than their civilian peers and, at times, even see themselves as superior given their strong sense of mission and cultural values. Wertsch's (1991) work was one of the first to explore individuals' feelings of loneliness and a lack of belonging when exposed to the civilian world following their separation from military life. However, this study is now more than 30 years old, meaning that both culture and global militaries have changed substantially, as well as what constitutes our understanding of military families. There is a critical need for more contemporary research studies to

compare data across time and international contexts, as well as to illuminate some of the more current implications of the MCT for children and young people.

Hall (2008) found that individuals who grew up in military communities often feel uncomfortable with the freedoms of civilian life and face challenges adjusting to the increased levels of personal choice and lack of structure in their new non-military environment. According to Hall (2008), these experiences often lead to a lack of security and difficulties forming or maintaining relationships with people who held opposing worldviews and social identities. Cruwys et al. (2014) also found that social identities allow children and young people to see their "interests, attitudes, and behaviours as aligned with those of other members of the groups to which [they] belong, but as different from those of groups to which [they] do not belong" (p. 128). People from military families become aware of themselves at a young age and begin to form personal and social identities by obtaining membership and roles in specific groups and adopting the values and behaviours from the cultures of those groups (Kroger, 2007; Sneed et al., 2006; Stets & Burke, 2000). Social identities are therefore both produced by, and facilitate, relationships and connections across children and young people's social networks. They are constantly evolving and can serve as either protective and adaptive functions, or as risks and challenges during major life transitions like the MCT (Cruwys et al., 2014; Griffin & Stein, 2015; Haslam et al., 2016). Yet the influence of the MCT on the military identities of children and young people remain largely underexplored, particularly in the Australian context.

International literature on children and young people from defence families who attend, or transition into, civilian schools may also be useful in illuminating the cultural challenges associated with the MCT. Research has found that, on average, children and

young people from military families in countries like Australia and the United States experience nine school transitions and multiple moves in and out of different communities or cultures, unlike their civilian peers (Astor, 2011; Berg, 2008; Kitmitto et al., 2011; Sherman & Glenn, 2011). While this high mobility may lead to the development of adaptive mechanisms that buffer against potential challenges associated with the MCT, it could also result in a sense of feeling 'out-of-place' in civilian life. According to Benner et al. (2017), it is possible that prior transition experiences may influence how well people adjust to ensuing transitions—such as the MCT—and ultimately acculturate into civilian life.

In recent years, several Australian studies have highlighted the need for an improved understanding of military culture and its influence on defence personnel and their families (e.g., Daraganova et al., 2018; Muir, 2018; Rogers-Baber, 2017; Macdonald, 2017; Siebler, 2009; Siebler & Goddard, 2014). However, no empirical research, to date, has explored the MCT experiences of children and young people with a particular focus on the cultural elements of transition. There is also shortage of qualitative studies which include the personal accounts of children and young people from military families. Chandra and London (2013) argued that to accurately reflect the social justice aspirations of children and young people from military families and address their unique experiences and needs, it is important to afford them the opportunity to express their own subjective worldviews in research that concerns them.

Children, young people, and culture: Transitional experiences in other contexts

From youth cultural studies, we know that 'fitting in' and being accepted by others can be an important concept for Australian children and young people, with several implications concerning their social identities (Threadgold, 2018). Fitting in involves attention to a

range of aspects, including contemporary fashion, language and communication, music and popular culture, association with peer groups or cliques and other tastes or forms of economic, social, and cultural capitals which shape these groups and individuals' statuses within them (Threadgold, 2018). These aspects can vary largely from culture to culture, including between military and civilian culture.

Cultural experiences often function as an expression of a child or young person's identity and serve as a marker that sets them apart from others. As an example, previous research in the United Kingdom found that children and young people living in affluent city areas expressed mobile and aspirational cultural identities, which expanded their cultural exchange value, and allowed them to progress and adapt to diverse fields (Allen & Hollingworth, 2013). However, the cultural activity of children and young people living in less affluent areas was characterised by a desire for 'belonging' to their local area or family heritage; qualities that are common in mainstream understandings of cultural value (Kennelly & Dillabough, 2008). This cultural gap is comparable to the gap between civilian and military culture.

In order to understand and theorise children and young people's transitions and movements between cultures, it is critical to explore the concept of subcultures. Although not all children and young people identify with a specific subculture, their dispositions and lifestyle choices are no doubt influenced by a range of subcultural styles and identities (Johansson, 2017). Processes of transition occur within socio-material spaces; and to best understand these, we must observe the dynamic interplay between subcultures and 'dominant' cultures (Johansson, 2017). According to Swedish researchers, "although subcultures feed into the common culture, they are never totally absorbed; they continue to fascinate, attract, and generate desire" (Johansson, 2017, p. 13). Therefore, transitions not

only concern how children and young people navigate the 'subculture' and the 'mainstream' but also the symbolic and cultural dimensions of identity along the way (Johansson, 2017).

Youth subcultural research may serve as a useful lens through which to view children and young peoples' MCT experiences. According to Hall and Jefferson (1975), subcultures must be analysed in terms of their relation to the dominant or 'parent' culture of which they are a subset, to reflect the "overall disposition of cultural power in the society as a whole" (p. 13). Subcultures in this sense situate children and young people in a historical, social, and cultural context as well as in their local, national, and global spaces (e.g., Johansson, 2017)—a cross-over between a child or young person's national culture, and their defence 'subculture'. By navigating subcultural spaces and social communities, children and young people can explore and cultivate new identities and accrue various resources or capital pertinent to those subcultural spaces whilst also being a part of their broader, more dominant culture (Johansson, 2017). For many children and young people, the dominant culture is civilian society, but for defence-connected youth, the dominant culture is military life (Wertsch, 1991). However, due to their unique and diverse experiences, it is also possible that children and young people from defence families may fit into other subcultures of civilian life effectively based on the pre-existing capital they have accrued. Ultimately, the flexibility and mobility of children and young people forms an important topic for research in modern society. Youth as a life-stage is particularly sensitive to social transformations (Johansson, 2017). In fact, many children and young people attempt to "erect rigid and stable walls around the identity constructs they clutch tightly" (Johansson, 2017, p.8), which, in instances like the MCT, may present distinct challenges for social and cultural integration. It may therefore seem unsurprising that

members of this age group form unique avant-gardes to ‘fit in’ when they would otherwise feel like outsiders.

Given the dearth of literature on children and young people’s cross-cultural experiences during the MCT, broader literature on other cultural transition experiences is discussed here. Pollock and Van Reken’s (2009) concept of ‘third culture kids’ and their experiences can be likened to the MCT. This refers to children and young people who grow up (or spend their formative years) in countries or cultures different from those of their parents’, or their passport countries (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). When they move back into their ‘parent’ or culture of ‘origin’—a ‘third world’—they often experience feelings of displacement (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). These can include a sense of disconnection from their peers, feeling misunderstood or having trouble relating to others. Some describe it as feeling like they lack a true sense of belonging to a particular place or cultural identity, despite having potentially lived across multiple cultural settings (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009)—a common experience reported by Wertsch (1991). While their parents may feel like they are returning home, children and young people may not always share the same ties to their parent's country and can therefore experience culture shock characterised by feelings of marginality, withdrawal, self-doubt, and depression (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). In this way, third culture kids and other groups of transculturals seem to share the experience of being required to adjust to host or temporary cultures and form ‘mixed’ identities (e.g., Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). This is also potentially the case for children and young people during the MCT.

Further parallels have been drawn between the experiences of immigrant youth, or children and young people experiencing other forms of cultural transition, and experiences of the MCT. For immigrant youth, the proximal contexts in which they are socialised (such

as their family, school, peer groups and neighbourhoods) comprise both their culture of origin and the culture of the receiving society (Berry, 1997; Brofenbrenner & Morris, 2006). However, it is not uncommon for their immigrant status to incur an additional social position, comparable with a minority, or 'other' status. They are therefore required to understand this position and adapt by learning how to use their pre-existing resources, or capital in the correct way and in the correct contexts as a means of overcoming the existing barriers to their acculturation in mainstream society. As Massia (2015) pointed out, the same can be said for American children and young people during the MCT, with many viewing their new cultural counterparts (for example, civilian young people) as the 'other', and vice versa (Massia, 2015). In these cases, it is not uncommon for young people to reject the values and norms of their new cultural milieu (e.g., Pollock & Van Reken, 2009; Wertsch, 1991), as they experience marginalisation due to poor connection with the dominant group in addition to their loss of contact with the traditional one (Berry, 2005).

Massia (2015) found that "when individuals are confronted with new values and new ways of being, they may choose to reject or conform to these values, which will depend largely on their own cultural and personal attitudes" (p. 57). However, youth cultural research has also revealed that in totalitarian cultures (e.g., defence organisations) where children and young people tend to be indoctrinated into the cultural milieus and beliefs of their parents, they will often seek maturity and independence from their parents during adolescence. It is possible that this intrinsic desire to 'find their own feet' could support military youth in adjusting more successfully during their MCT. Either way, there is a need for researchers to expand on these preliminary links between children and young people from defence families and those in the broader cultural and transitional literature to improve understandings around the potential cultural implications of the MCT. From the

literature, it is clear that although some research has examined transitions of children and young people across cultures, such as third culture kids or immigrant youth, there is still a need for more holistic and dynamic perspectives of transition which take into account the multidimensional, fluid transitions that children and young people can experience throughout various stages of their youth; for example, young people transitioning in and out of cultures, or subcultures, such as defence life, and their experiences of the MCT.

Existing supports and future directions

Over the years, international defence organisations have excelled at supporting active service members and their families. However, until recently, less attention has been paid to supporting their transition out of the military (Ashcroft, 2016; Atuel & Castro, 2018; Bergman et al., 2014; Blackburn, 2016; Curry et al., 2017; Hollingshead, 1946; Robinson et al., 2017). While there are emerging programs and services in place to support veterans and their families during transition in Australia and internationally, there is little evidence of effectiveness for many of them (Daraganova et al., 2018). Much of the existing MCT literature has focussed on negative experiences that personnel can encounter such as mental health issues, homelessness, or a sense of disconnection from civilian life, as opposed to some of the more positive outcomes they often experience because of their military backgrounds (Ahern et al., 2015; Danish & Antonides, 2013; Van Staden et al., 2007). In the same way, international research has tended to place an emphasis on pathology, positioning the veteran community as a 'social problem' to be solved (Bulmer & Jackson, 2016). Little research has considered the potential pathways to success among families transitioning to the civilian world. Consequently, several countries have developed policies and programs centred on addressing issues, more so than supporting success.

A custom survey was developed and distributed to 20 North Atlantic Treaty Organisation [NATO] countries and 5 non-NATO states to determine the nature and extent of existing transition supports (Castro et al., 2021). Results were drawn from 11 nations including Australia, Canada, Croatia, New Zealand, Netherlands, Slovenia, Latvia, Estonia, the United States, Norway, and the United Kingdom, revealing that no participating country has yet produced an official MCT policy (Castro et al., 2021). However, despite the absence of a formal policy, nations have independently developed specific supports to help previously serving personnel prepare for their transition to civilian life. In several countries, including Australia, psychological support is offered to families both currently serving and in the transition to civilian life. However, this tends to be restricted to families affected by PTSD or secondary trauma (Fossey et al., 2019; Maguire et al., 2022). Although most countries were found to involve families formally in the transition process, it is less clear what specific programs and services exist to support the needs of individual family members.

While most countries were found to offer some form of family service provision for previously serving communities, these are often a derivative form of the services provided to veterans, such as case management or care coordination, mental health and substance abuse support, or general counselling and referral; services not directly signposted towards supporting families, or the transition journey itself (Castro & Dursun, 2019). A few countries such as New Zealand, Slovenia, the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States also provide support for housing and employment assistance following exit from the defence force; and, in Australia and New Zealand, family members are eligible for case management services. In countries like the United States, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Norway, the Republic of Croatia and Canada, family members can also receive

disability compensation, depending on their circumstances. However, programs and services for veterans and their families are not being routinely evaluated. While some participating countries are beginning to collect data on families' experiences of transitioning, such data are not being collected regularly; therefore, leading to information barriers when supporting families in transition (Castro & Dursun, 2019).

While MCT support services and assistance programs are evolving in many countries, and across both national defence and nongovernmental public and private sectors, the very complexity of available supports can be a barrier to service access as families navigate the MCT (Thompson et al., 2019). This is particularly the case if they are not aware that such services exist or are reluctant to use them for one reason or another. Anecdotal evidence out of the United Kingdom and Canada has indicated that some transitioning families present late, or not at all, leading to unmet MCT problems which set them up for longer-term difficulties during life after service (Ashcroft, 2016; Forkin, 2015; Thompson & Lockhart, 2015). Therefore, more tools and strategies that prompt families to seek and use existing services are needed.

More recently, the Australian DVA undertook a family wellbeing study as part of their comprehensive Transition and Wellbeing Research Programme (Daraganova et al., 2018; Muir, 2018). This study investigated some of the impacts of military service on the wellbeing of both currently and previously serving ADF families (Daraganova et al., 2018; Muir, 2018). It focussed on the wellbeing of families after transition from the ADF to civilian life and explored some of the challenges experienced during transition, as well as help-seeking behaviours, the relationship between the wellbeing of current and ex-serving families, and future services for veterans and their families. However, once again, this research was largely quantitative and did not include the qualitative perspectives of

children and young people regarding the MCT, demonstrating the further need for Australian research targeting this population specifically.

Other emerging support approaches include the lay-friendly 'journey' concept from the United States and Canada. This concept provides a way of understanding individualised MCT experiences at a more personal level. In the United States, Robinson et al. (2017) described a 'Journey of Veterans' map which could be used to identify points during the MCT where personnel might benefit from service outreach, as well as a tool for encouraging those transitioning to reflect on their preparedness and need for assistance, prompting self-assessment across several wellbeing domains (Thompson et al., 2019). In a number of Canadian and U.K. studies, inadequate planning, and preparation for the adjustment to civilian life have also been found to be common denominators in post-service difficulty (Ashcroft, 2014; Castro et al., 2014; Forkin, 2015; Shields et al., 2016; Thompson & Lockhart, 2015). This is because individuals might not reflect sufficiently on their preparedness for major life transitions. For example, service personnel and their families might become accustomed to specific ways of life in the military and therefore not anticipate that certain aspects of the civilian world are quite different.

One study in the United Kingdom examined factors which determine MCT outcomes across four stages including before joining, during service, service resettlement and after leaving (Curry et al., 2017). In this study, those who began to prepare early in military service tend to do better after leaving than those who only engage with preparation just before leaving, or not at all (Curry et al., 2017). Therefore, one of the most important things that militaries can do is to provide adequate time for service members to prepare for their transition. This time should include things like retraining or working to obtain education or certification to allow for job and career opportunities in the civilian world.

International governments and local communities also have an important role in assisting former service members and their families in their transition. Essential programs and services must be provided to separating service members and their families and the public must play an active role in welcoming them into civilian society (Castro & Dursun, 2019).

Ultimately, there appears to be few public supports specifically aimed at supporting veterans and their families who are making the transition to civilian life, particularly in Australia. In general, existing public support for previously serving families aims to address their needs sometime following their transition out of the defence force, as opposed to at every stage of the transition process, including preparation before leaving. Moreover, it seems that specific defence or veteran-connected organisations are often the ones helping veterans and their families transition out of the military. Therefore, there is the responsibility of governments as well as civilian organisations and the public to be more actively involved in supporting defence families in transition. Studies have highlighted the importance of a system perspective and recommend that therapeutic and educational programs include all members of military families, including children and young people.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the diverse ways in which military families, children, and young people can experience military culture, and how this culture differs to the civilian 'world'. Drawing on broader youth cultural and transitional research offers insight into the complexity of the MCT for children and young people from military families and the importance of understanding their experiences of this transition from their own nuanced perspectives. Currently, not enough is known about the transition experiences of children

and young people when their parents leave the defence force. However, emerging research suggests there may be an important cultural element to such a transition.

This study sought to bridge some of the identified knowledge gaps by shedding light on the experiences of children and young people during the MCT—both culturally, and more generally. Understanding the influence of the military cultural environment on children and young people's ability to form effective relationships and establish new identities during this major life transition unlocks access to social resources that can promote wellbeing across all domains of their lives. Findings from the literature review were used to shape and refine the research aims and questions and determine the most suitable theoretical approaches for the study. The following chapter outlines the key theoretical frameworks that were applied both conceptually and methodologically throughout the research process.

Chapter 3 | Theoretical framework

Theory without empirical research is empty,

empirical research without theory is blind. (Bourdieu, 1988, pp. 774–775)

Introduction

As highlighted in the preceding chapters, empirical research that has explored the experiences of children and young people from military settings is limited, particularly in the context of the MCT. The same can be said for theoretical and conceptual analyses of these experiences, which are particularly lacking from a comprehensive and multidimensional perspective. This research attempts to address these gaps by drawing on the theoretical and methodological work of social theorist Pierre Bourdieu to investigate how ideas about individual and collective practices among, and between, different social worlds are perceived, judged, constructed, and reconstructed during the MCT. Its application includes the examination of power and status as determinants of the knowledge, position, and resources we hold within and across new and familiar social settings, providing useful insights into the ways in which children and young people experience the transition from military to civilian life.

This chapter begins with a discussion of previous developments in MCT theories and frameworks to provide a snapshot of the current landscape and where the gaps are. It then provides a brief overview of Bourdieu's background and the context in which he was operating when first developing his key concepts. Following this are the core principles of Bourdieu's critical sociology, including his theory of social practice, and an exploration of his key concepts, *habitus, field,* and *capital* which form a core component of his work. The chapter then turns to a critical review of interdisciplinary applications of Bourdieu's

concepts in the contemporary literature, in addition to theoretical extensions that serve to complement Bourdieu's work. The chapter ends with a discussion of how the theoretical frameworks were ultimately applied in the research.

Developing theories and frameworks for the military-civilian transition

The MCT is a dynamic process where each member of the military family experiences their own series of adjustments across various ecosystemic fields such as "geographic location, career, relationships, family roles, support systems, social networks and community" (Castro et al., 2019, p. 246). Several authors have argued that to support successful transitions among military families, governments need to develop overarching frameworks that help to holistically understand and define the various aspects of the MCT (Ashcroft, 2016; Blackburn, 2016, 2017; Castro et al., 2015; Cooper et al., 2017, 2018; Keeling et al., 2020; Pedlar et al., 2019; Pinch, 1980; Robinson et al., 2017; Shields et al., 2016). Such frameworks should encourage partnerships between researchers, funding bodies, clinicians, and other stakeholders to identify MCT-related activities, resources, and outcomes, and therefore assist in the design, monitoring and evaluation of MCT supports (Pedlar et al., 2019). In the absence of such frameworks, governments risk developing MCT-related policies or programs that are inadequate or do not meet their intentions (Blackburn, 2017; Pedlar et al., 2019; Robinson et al., 2017; Shields et al., 2016).

Over the years, there have been several attempts to theorise the MCT (Blackburn, 2017; Cooper et al., 2017, 2018; Pinch, 1980; Shields et al., 2016). For example, Hollingshead (1946) described a conceptual framework with three phases of life: premilitary, military and post-military. This was the first real attempt at capturing life beyond service. Faulkner and McGaw (1977) expanded on this concept through their development of a framework describing three major phases: moving from war, moving

back to civilian life, and moving toward consolidating social involvement. Soon thereafter, Pinch (1980) developed a framework for analysing the psychosocial and economic determinants of a successful MCT from the perspectives of the individual, society, and the military. In the United Kingdom, Jolly (1996) looked at the MCT through the lens of change; specifically, the stages of confrontation (where individuals acknowledge inevitable change), followed by a period of disengagement until they are ready to move forward, and resocialisation (the process of assuming a new identity). More recently, Burkhart and Hogan (2015) developed a theoretical framework to conceptualise the military life transition of female veterans in the United States. This framework consisted of seven categories, including 'choosing the military', 'adapting to the military', 'being in the military', 'being a female in the military', 'departing the military', 'experiencing stressors of being a civilian', and 'making meaning of being a veteran civilian'.

In the United States, Castro and Kintzle (2014) proposed an MCT theory which states that transitions into, during, and out of the military create both opportunities for growth and risks for negative outcomes. They described three interrelated components: (i) 'approaching the military transition', which explores the personal, cultural, and transitional factors which influence the MCT; (ii) 'managing the transition', which refers to factors that impact an individual's progression from active duty to life post-service, and (iii) 'assessing the transition' which describes transition-associated outcomes, measured through the categories of work, family, health, wellbeing, and community. While some outcomes influence other outcomes, success in one is not indicative of the overall transition (Castro & Kintzle, 2014; Pedlar et al., 2019). Later, Blackburn (2016) proposed a conceptual framework called the MCT process model which took a similar approach to that of Castro and Kintzle (2014) but expanded concepts beyond the U.S. context to suit

the Canadian climate. In his model, Blackburn (2016) identified four life course phases: (i) 'pre-release', commencing when serving men and women face the prospect of release; (ii) 'release', beginning when the release process officially and administratively begins, and (iii) 'post-release', where the released member begins to feel 'adapted' to civilian life. For each phase, Blackburn (2016) identified a start, end, duration, factors influencing transition, measures to take and the role of key support agencies, like Veterans Affairs.

One of the most recent theoretical developments regarding transition is the Model of Transition in Veterans, or MoTiVe model, proposed by Cooper et al. (2017, 2018) in the United Kingdom, which stresses the importance of understanding how service leavers carry the cultural imprint of military life with them into the civilian world. According to Fossey et al. (2019), this model proposes that,

> the cultural legacy of the military endures long into the lives of service leavers and manifests itself in both positive and negative outcomes depending on a range of factors such as acquisition of transferable skills or qualifications, rank achieved, ability and experience in negotiating the contrasting 'rules' of military and civilian environments. (p. 52)

This model also provides insight into how veterans adapt, in a cultural sense, to civilian life as a central part of understanding successful transition experiences. The theoretical framework behind Cooper et al.'s (2017, 2018) MoTiVe model was adapted from concepts developed by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu "conceived the possibility of transformation and social mobility through the application of social, cultural, economic and symbolic capital and movement between social spaces" (Cooper et al., 2018, p. 158). In this way, his work can be used to make sense of the various ways military personnel experience the MCT based on their own personal backgrounds and contextual

understandings, their capital, and their culture, offering a conceptual framework which can be applied "across national and geographical settings" (Cooper et al., 2018, p. 158).

Individually, these frameworks have offered valuable contributions to our understanding of post-military life and for informing policies and programs to support the MCT experience (Pedlar et al., 2019). However, the existing frameworks tend to be focussed on the experiences of previously serving men and women. Frameworks which consider the complex and heterogenous factors operating across their children's MCT journeys are lacking.

Pierre Bourdieu: Background and context

Pierre Bourdieu's (1930–2002) theoretical contributions have become a prominent body of work within sociology. Indeed, Bourdieu is amongst the most frequently cited of late 20th century social theorists, with contemporary applications more pertinent than ever (Thatcher et. al., 2018). His framework sheds light on the dynamics at work within and across various social structures, with a high degree of relevance to a range of sociological, educational, and public health disciplines including social work. Before we turn to examine Bourdieu's key theoretical approaches, it is helpful to gain a brief understanding of his life and the contexts in which he was operating.

Bourdieu was born in 1930 in Béarn—a small village in the south of France. In much of his work, Bourdieu reflected on his petit-bourgeois family and rural background as a central motivator for his interest in, and unease with, class-based privilege. However, little is known about his schooling and home life except for brief writings about his own experiences of prejudices towards students with poorer backgrounds in the elite educational system. These are said to have had a profound impact on the foci of his work

and thinking, as did his ensuing work in Algeria (Calhoun, 2006; Grenfell, 2014; Jenkins, 2002).

After graduating, Bourdieu was conscripted into the French Army. In 1955, he was deployed to Algeria where he spent time guarding military facilities and undertaking clerical duties during the French colony's struggle for independence. Bourdieu opposed French colonialism and supported Algerian independence, with a keen interest in its social and cultural dynamics. When his military service ended, he chose to continue living and working in Algeria as both a teacher and researcher at the University of Algiers where his focus turned to sociology and ethnography—a branch of anthropology concerned with the systematic study of individual cultures from the viewpoint of subjects. During his research, Bourdieu undertook in-depth fieldwork across a range of competing factions from the far right to the communist left, documenting his observations, interactions and experiences of various Algerian societies and cultures along the way.

It is important to note that Bourdieu did not just study Algeria, but also "sought out its internal variants, regional and 'minority' communities that were stigmatised and marginalised by both French colonialism and the construction of an Algerian national identity as modern and Arab in opposition to rural, tribal, and traditional" (Calhoun, 2006, p. 3). His notable work *Sociologie de l'Algérie* (Bourdieu, 1958) details a range of different Algerian groups, each of which had their own distinct culture and traditional social order yet were all experiencing disruption from colonialism and the influence of a more unified 'Algerian' system of social relations. It was through his own experiences of the peasant society of his native Béarn that Bourdieu developed a great affinity towards the destruction of these more unique and traditional societies (Calhoun, 2006).

Following his time in Algeria, Bourdieu had proven himself a keen observer of the daily struggles and solidarities of life as well as the impacts of large-scale social change. He returned to France and, over the ensuing years, fulfilled a range of academic positions across various Universities in disciplines such as education, pedagogy, and critical sociology. He conducted several studies on the interaction between labour markets and village life, as well as those within systems of education (e.g., Bourdieu & Sayad, 1964)—many of which were inspired by his time in Algeria. He had a particularly keen interest in examining experiences of poverty within wealthy modern societies including those of immigrants from other, less developed cultures and poorer students in elite school settings (Calhoun, 2006). Ultimately, Bourdieu's time in Algeria, along with these later studies allowed him to forge a theory of social practice which he would refine over the course of his career.

A theory of social practice

Bourdieu's theory of social practice explains human behaviour as contextualised in a sea of both structural and subjective factors (Jenkins, 2002; Costa & Murphy, 2015). Structuralist perspectives suggest that as individuals, we are socialised into the cultures and communities within which we are born, adopting the accepted norms and beliefs of that context. Subjectivist perspectives, on the other hand, propose that individuals arrive at dispositions via an independent and rational process of uninfluenced consideration (Beames & Telford, 2013). According to Bourdieu (1990), "of all the oppositions that artificially divide social science, the most fundamental, and the most ruinous, is the one that is set up between subjectivism and objectivism" (p. 25). Bourdieu therefore rejected this dichotomy under the premise that the complexities of the social world are unable to be captured by either structuralist or subjectivist viewpoints alone. Instead, he proposed that

individuals and social structures exist interdependently, where human agents have the capacity to think and act for themselves in relation to other structures of the social world (including other individuals, organisations, educational or political systems and cultures). An individual's self-determination is therefore seen to exist within the limits established by the common structures and practices of one's dominant social world, or culture (e.g., Beames & Telford, 2013); and these can vary greatly, as was the case in Algeria. For this reason, Bourdieu's theory of practice is very much a relational one.

Jenkins (2002) proposed that the subjective-objective bridge is a good starting point for understanding Bourdieu's conceptualisation of social practice. For Bourdieu, social practice came to be understood as the integration of individuals with their surrounding environment and the ways context and culture relate to, or influence, the common actions of both individuals and collectives. Every group—whether a social, cultural, or religious affiliation—holds certain theories about the world and their position within it, just as Bourdieu found with each 'group' he encountered in Algeria. He referred to these as their 'official accounts'. These form the core of one's testimony; the knowledge one learns or constructs as part of one's everyday life. However, Bourdieu considers social practice to be neither consciously orchestrated, nor random or by chance; rather a phenomenon of practical sense or logic where one thing flows on from another (Jenkins, 2002). Within a particular society, group or culture, individuals may take their own course of action, and make autonomous decisions; but they do so under circumstances, or in contexts, outside of their choosing. It is within these contexts that they have acquired specific knowledge, cultural competencies, and social identities. This practical experience of one's familiar universe can therefore lead to difficulties understanding or perceiving the norms and behaviours of social worlds outside of one's own (Bourdieu, 1990; Jenkins, 2002).

Relational concepts

As Bourdieu's theory of social practice evolved, he described three interrelated concepts—*habitus, field*, and *capital*. Extending on his work in Algeria, he used these to explain how different cultural groups operate according to their own sets of rules and accepted norms, and how members of these settings become social "actors" directed by these cultural parameters (Cooper et al., 2018, p. 160). Bourdieu posited that human behaviour and social practice are largely influenced by social structures, culture, and power, and that the social world is neither completely objective, nor subjective; but a combination of both. According to Bourdieu, each of his three key concepts cannot exist alone; yet to understand their complex relationship, it is important to first examine them individually.

Habitus

The first of his three concepts, *habitus*, refers to the natural and effortless behaviours of individuals, which are shaped by their experiences and social interactions—usually within the cultural setting that they were born into or have spent the most amount of time in (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Maton, 2014). It encompasses the expression of attitudes and dispositions developed over time and embodies characteristics which are realised through long-term practice within a particular setting (Bourdieu, 1984; Maton, 2014). These characteristics take both material and non-material forms, including the tastes and judgements that are considered 'normal' or 'acceptable' in one's particular social context (Maton, 2014). In this sense, habitus is viewed as the natural and effortless way of acting in line with the core principles, rules, and values of a social group or setting (Bourdieu, 1986). While habitus is considered highly durable and can never be lost, it does have the potential to expand and evolve if there are shifts in one's social milieu (Maton, 2014). However, the incorporation of experiences in new or unfamiliar environments will always

be shaped by past experiences and the existing habitus (Cooper et al., 2018). According to Bourdieu (1986), habitus is acquired over time through exposure to the sociocultural conditions around us, so we are often not consciously aware of how strongly it socialises us into specific cultural groups or settings.

Bourdieu's concept of 'distinction' describes the difference between a 'well-formed' habitus and habitus that is not well-formed, relative to the specific context in which it operates (Bourdieu, 1984). A well-formed habitus occurs when individuals embody or possess characteristics which reflect and reinforce the tastes or rules of a particular setting. This is considered 'accomplishment' (Bourdieu, 1984). In the educational context, for example, Bourdieu contends that certain actions and achievements are given a level of praise and distinction that is otherwise withheld from practices considered less aligned with the principles of pedagogical action (Bourdieu, 1993). In this instance, a student who exhibits mathematical genius and can master algebraic equations at a considerably young age will be likely granted a consecrated position, whereby additional support and pathways are provided to that student due to their accomplishment within that setting (Bourdieu, 1993). However, it is unlikely that the same supports would be provided to those whose mathematical abilities are low, or whose skills and interests lie primarily outside of academia such as in video gaming. Accomplishment here would instead take place external to the school setting (where it may be seen as delinquent behaviour); for example, at home, online, or in social competitions (where it is recognised and legitimised as skill and talent). This example demonstrates how high levels of accomplishment in one setting may have limited transposability and therefore be out of place in other settings (Bourdieu, 1984). Subsequently, habitus seen to have the highest value is that which is both well-formed and highly transposable.

Ultimately, habitus allows researchers to explain how and why social agents interpret, construct, or reimagine the context in which they live and is therefore considered a critical concept in Bourdieu's work (Maton, 2014). More than just accumulated experience, habitus encompasses a complex social process in which dispositions develop to justify perspectives, aspirations, values, actions, and social positions. These intuitive practices allow individuals to subconsciously draw on the 'right rationale' for acting in appropriate ways consistent with the expectations of a given setting (Costa & Murphy, 2015; Ergler & Wood, 2018). In summary, habitus can be seen as the conceptual tool which ultimately provides the "mediating link between objective social structures and individual actors" (Painter, 2000, p. 242). Just like Hofstede et al.'s (2010) 'software of the mind', it views individual behaviours and intentions as shaped by, and constitutive of social, or cultural, contexts (Ergler & Wood, 2018).

Field

For Bourdieu, habitus takes shape within, and across, *fields*. These refer to the various social settings or contexts that people inhabit or are member to and are considered dynamics sites which operate across time (Bourdieu, 1984). An example here is one of the many individual Algerian communities Bourdieu encountered or, in the case of the present research, the military setting and its various 'sub-fields' (e.g., Cooper et al., 2018). They can also include contexts such as education, art, religion, music, sport, science, and a range of others (Thomson, 2014). Fields are considered distinct social microcosms with their own historical backgrounds and can exist at multiple different levels and sub-levels. Each field is "underpinned by [its] own rules, regularities, and structures of authority" (Cooper et al., 2018, p. 161), in addition to what Bourdieu referred to as *doxa*. These are the taken-for-granted, unquestioned truths which serve to distinguish one field from another and set

out the ‘rules of the game’; i.e., the characteristics that would comprise a well-formed habitus within that field (Bourdieu, 1972).

Fields exist both independently and in relation to other fields—for example, military and civilian fields—and individuals may be involved in one or more at any given time. They can also be drawn toward different fields at different timepoints based on various ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors which determine one’s likelihood of success within them (Bigo, 2011). Fields are also considered sites of struggle, where social interaction is defined and where individuals compete for resources and recognition (Grenfell & James, 2004). However, the extent to which individuals can act competently and thrive within a particular field depends largely on their familiarity with, and understanding of, its operation and social rules:

> Social reality exists, so to speak, twice, in things and in minds, in field and in habitus, outside and inside of agents. And when habitus encounters a social world of which it is the product, it is like a ‘fish in water’: it does not feel the weight of the water, and it takes the world about itself for granted. (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 127)

In this sense, one’s overall experiences within a field are greatly influenced by their “compatibilities and incompatibilities, proximities, and distances” (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 248). It is no surprise then, that difficulties arise for those who suddenly find themselves a *fish out of water* as they attempt to navigate new or unfamiliar social environments that are seemingly incompatible with their existing habitus (Costa & Murphy, 2015). Bourdieu (1984) referred to this phenomenon as being in a state of *hysteresis*, caused by a dislocation and disruption between field and habitus. With changing circumstances, habitus may fall out of alignment with the field in which it operates. This can lead to a lag

or disconnect where an individual's taken-for-granted assumptions become less relevant and new 'rules of the game' emerge (Bourdieu, 1990). According to Bourdieu, both the risks and opportunities that come with an individual's experience of hysteresis should be acknowledged (Bourdieu, 2015; Fowler, 2020).

Not only do fields have their own sets of rules and principles regulated by the development and reinforcement of beliefs and doxa over time; they also have their own internal conflicts and competitions (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Ergler & Wood, 2018; Thomson, 2014). For example, individuals who accrue a higher level of resources relevant to their advancement within a field, and who are more familiar with the rules of that field are considered to have a strong feel for the game (Crossley, 2008; Ergler & Wood, 2018). This means that not only are they more likely to succeed in that field, but they also tend to be more highly rewarded and regarded by others. This is considered hierarchical reinforcement based on the ownership of varying resources. Relevant here is Bourdieu's (1984) conceptualisation of *capital*—a third term in his theory of social practice that is essential for mediating the habitus and therefore determining individuals' positions within and across various fields.

Capital

Within fields, certain forms of *capital* are at play. These include the various resources at stake which determine one's success within that field. Generally, capital considered more valuable in a certain setting would include that which most closely reflects, or lends itself to, the core principles of that setting. For this reason, individuals strive for different forms of capital to earn a certain relative position of power in the social structure of that field (Costa & Murphy, 2015). For Bourdieu (2006), the notion of capital must be elevated beyond the economic to include the transformation and exchange of sociocultural assets.

He argued that it is "impossible to account for the structure and functioning of the social world unless one reintroduces capital in all its forms, and not solely in the one form recognised by economic theory" (Bourdieu, 2006, p. 105). Thus, in exploring other forms of capital, Bourdieu (1984) considered concepts of 'cultural', 'social' and 'symbolic' capital especially important for conceptualising an individual's experiences and social practice within and across fields as well as indicating the extent to which they are "perceived and recognised as legitimate" (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 17).

According to Bourdieu, cultural capital—related to having the 'right' knowledge—exists in different forms including objectified and embodied (Bourdieu, 2006). Objectified capital takes material form in things such as artworks, instruments, books, and artefacts, while embodied capital refers to the incorporation of certain characteristics into an individual's behaviours such as knowledge, skills, language, consciousness, tastes, and clothing (Moore, 2014). Meanwhile, social capital is considered the aggregate of resources associated with "the possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (Bourdieu, 1985, p. 249). It is linked to whether a person is believed to be a valued member of a particular group, and the significance or worth of the social connections and networks they have within that group. For Bourdieu (1986), social networks, or capital, are products of 'investment strategies' aimed at developing social relationships that are considered usable resources in the short or long-term. Finally, symbolic capital relates to qualities which denote a particular level of recognition, honour, or prestige (Bourdieu, 2006; Moore, 2014). These are usually accumulated through the possession of other forms of capital and include things such as qualifications, job titles, political ranks, and other hierarchical structures within society

(Bourdieu, 2006; Moore, 2014). These also include simpler and more taken-for-granted roles within the family, such as husband, wife, mother, or father.

Bourdieu (1990) contended that it is the acquisition of these different forms of capital that operates to distinguish oneself from others and is linked to the acquirement and maintenance of social power or reputation within a particular field. He also emphasised how cultural, social, symbolic, and economic capital operate in alliance, and in exchange with, one another in that the possession of one form can greatly influence the acquisition of another. For example, the possession of high levels of cultural capital—such as a good education—may lead to increased opportunities for accruing economic capital or, alternatively, expose an individual to new networks and relationships which inadvertently expand or enrich their social capital within a field, leading to a well-formed habitus (Bourdieu, 1990). However, different types of capital do not necessarily have the same value in different settings, or across fields. Indeed, one form of knowledge, behaviour or taste considered of high value in military life may be considered far less significant in the civilian world, and vice versa.

Applications in the literature

Scholars across a wide range of disciplines have applied Bourdieu's theoretical concepts to explore an array of sociological phenomena including education and pedagogy, social inequality, class and distinction, social reproduction, and cultural mobility (Costa & Murphy, 2015). In the education and arts sectors for example, they have been used to examine associations between class inequalities and academic or cultural attainment as a reflection of the way systems of education and fine art mediate sociocultural reproduction and taste (Aschaffenburg & Maas, 1997; De Graaf et al., 2000; Delamont et al., 1997; DiMaggio & Mohr, 1985; Dumais, 2002; Nash, 1990; Reay et al., 2001). In health science,

habitus, field, and capital have also offered expansive sociological insight into sport culture by examining the way human agents draw on various forms of capital for the construction or reproduction of class and gender-based habituses which in turn, characterise various physical activities and body images (Jarvie & Maguire, 1994; MacAloon, 1988; Sugden & Tomlinson, 2000; Wilson, 2002). In similar fashions, Bourdieu's work has also dappled various other contexts including youth studies, crime, and new and emerging digital practices—and continues to do so (Costa & Murphy, 2015).

Among some of the more recent, and perhaps most relevant applications are those which have explored habitus, field, and capital in the context of sociocultural transition. These existing applications offer a lens through which we can begin to envisage some of the experiences and challenges that children and young people might face during the MCT. For example, Li (2013) explored habitus as being critically and reflexively important for understanding the social and academic trajectories of rural students when making the transition into an elite, urban society. Findings demonstrated shifts in the habitus of children and young people as they navigated changing positions across new social and cultural fields. According to Li (2013), children and young people who acquired a specific set of social dispositions and capital within their rural home settings found themselves out of place in the new, urban elitist environment, akin to some of Bourdieu's own findings. More specifically, they experienced a challenging transition characterised by a sense of inferior habitus and difficulty translating their usual social norms into those considered 'acceptable' in the new field (Li, 2013).

Bodovski's (2015) application of Bourdieu also makes an important contribution to the sociological literature, by presenting habitus as a useful theoretical tool for understanding young students' educational expectations, internal locus of control, and self-

concepts. This research examined how early parental expectations and practices affect children and young peoples' emerging habituses and, therefore, their adolescent achievements (Bodovski, 2015). Findings demonstrated the complex ways in which one's habitus is highly influenced by relational factors. They raised important questions as to what extent the social, cultural, and structural elements of children and young people's environments affect the formation and reformation of the habitus (e.g., the roles of parents, other social actors, rules, communities, wider systems, and structures) (Bodovski, 2015).

Similar findings were presented by Davey (2009) in her qualitative research exploring the narratives of children and young people transitioning between different school communities. Themes illuminated the idea of identity as being more complex than simply 'free-floating' or 'structurally determined', but as a complex process of habitus formation encompassing cultural capital across multiple systems levels. Reflecting Bourdieu's work in Algeria, Davey (2009) argued that ultimately, it is through immersion into a new field, or social environment, that we see habitus most clearly, stating that "the collision of habitus and field brings together the mix of innocence and critical insight of the outsider questioning its otherwise taken-for-granted principles and practices" (Davey, 2009, p. 277).

While applications of Bourdieu's work are seemingly endless, these examples highlight the utility of his theoretical concepts for understanding social phenomena such as transition. They are also particularly useful examples for demonstrating the relevance of Bourdieu's work in the context of research with children and young people both within and outside the family unit, as well as exemplifying the practicality of his concepts, habitus, field, and capital. Ultimately, Bourdieu's oeuvre spans a wide range of subjects and disciplines with a considerable degree of credibility. However, certain aspects have not

gone uncriticised. The following section details some of the key limitations of his work, and implications for this research.

Exploring tensions and refining the theoretical approach

The central premise of Bourdieu's work is that individuals are constructed within the parameters of their personal experience and agency, in combination with the social and cultural processes of their environments (i.e., the structural). However, as these ideas lend themselves to the examination of social reproduction and intergenerational transfer of class patterns, some authors (e.g., Jenkins, 2002; Butler, 1999) have accused Bourdieu of being a fatalistic determinist, with a neglect for social change and the prospect of how his relational concepts might also encourage the disruption of certain social patterns. Further, despite his concurrent approach to addressing dimensions of both structure and agency, Bourdieu has been accused of taking a purely structuralist approach; frequently dismissed by poststructuralists and other critics. According to Ergler and Wood (2018) this is "possibly because he never developed a theory of agency as clearly as he developed a theory of social reproduction based on structural elements, even though through his concept of habitus, it is possible to see such potential" (p. 5). For this reason, the researcher sought to apply Bourdieu's concepts in such as a way as to understand and explain the interplay between structural and agentic factors during the MCT, but from a more psychosocial and emotional perspective given participants would be sharing their own 'subjective truths'. Just as Bourdieu conceived autonomous thinking and decision making to be influenced by sociohistorical and cultural factors, the researcher sought to investigate how participants made sense of their own experiences within the subconscious and subjective parameters of military life. In doing so, theoretical extensions of Bourdieu's concepts were introduced and applied.

The researcher combined interpretations of Bourdieu's original concepts with new and emerging theoretical contributions, such as the socio-psychological works of Cottingham (2016) and Reay (2015), which focus on the role of individual agency and the psyche in Bourdieu's theory of social practice. These authors explored the potential of two of Bourdieu's concepts, habitus and capital, to provide a window into the psychosocial—an idea that Bourdieu's work hinted at, but never pursued theoretically. They argue that notions of habitus can be deepened and enriched through "inquiry into the mutual constitution of the individual and the social relations within which they are enmeshed" (Reay, 2015, p. 9)—i.e., the agent, or individual, and the structural. This suggests that psychosocial understandings of habitus and capital can be achieved, or explained, through observation and analysis of the way an individual's psyche (interior) experiences and mediates social and cultural phenomena or structures (exterior) (Reay, 2015).

Reay (2015) revealed the psychological and emotional elements at play when individuals experience struggle inhibited by social practice in and across competing fields. This is demonstrated by her case study of an individual managing his dedication to, and actions across, two very different and seemingly opposing fields; the academic classroom, and his working-class, male peer-group culture. For this individual, Reay (2015) found that striving to maintain a dual perception of the self while simultaneously navigating these fields took a large psychological toll, stretching his mental capacity for coping. Considering this, Reay (2015), like Bourdieu, conceptualised habitus as adaptable to new fields, but went further to conceptualise its emotional and affective dimensions in terms of psychological repression, internal sublimation, and an individual's defensive responses. This extension enables links between internal emotional processes and external sociocultural processes, offering an understanding of how individuals not just experience,

but internalise, the social world, the structures that subconsciously influence their actions and decisions, and their movement between different fields.

Like Reay (2015), Cottingham (2016) also acknowledged the capacity for agentic dimensions within Bourdieu's concepts, and in particular, the potential of psychosocial forms of capital, such as emotional capital. According to Cottingham (2016), emotional capital exists as an embodied form of cultural capital that both mediates, and is mediated by, the habitus. It operates alongside other forms of capital and refers to an individual's emotional resources that are "activated through emotional experience and management as an everyday feeling/doing practice at the conscious and nonconscious level" (Cottingham, 2016, p. 466), once again demonstrating the duality of structure and agency. For Cottingham (2016) assessing how children and young people acquire emotion-based knowledge, skills, and capacities is an important factor in determining how they develop or acquire emotional capital through socialisation and vice versa. In her own work examining the emotional capital of male nurses, she noted the importance of reflexivity, and practical experiences in shaping emotional capital, with different experiences leading to not necessarily more or less of it, but rather different configurations of it (Cottingham, 2016). More specifically, her data revealed the relationship between "emotional capital as a trans-situational resource and emotion practice as situationally embodied and mobilised capital" (Cottingham, 2016, p. 467).

Ultimately, the contributions of Reay (2015), Cottingham (2016) and other authors (e.g., Belliappa & deSouza, 2021; Zembylas, 2007) have demonstrated credibility in their work for understanding some of the psychosocial elements of habitus and the role of emotional capital in social practice and movement between fields. In the context of the present study, these were particularly useful for interpreting and understanding a subset of

empirical findings related to the emotional embodiment of structural factors in the form of capital and habitus during the MCT (see Chapter 6), as well as the mental health and military family dynamics of children and young people during the MCT (see Chapter 7). In Chapter 8, Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological systems theory was also applied to explain the interplay of biopsychosocial elements across the multiple levels or systems which comprise an individual's lived environment, including the role of both agency and structure. Introduced at the analysis and reporting phases of the research, this theory was used as a lens for interpreting a subset of findings related to supports for children and young people during the MCT (see Chapter 8). It was also used to complement Bourdieu's theoretical concepts and develop a foundational framework for research and practice that considers the interplay of structural and relational factors during the MCT (see Chapter 9). Overall, the incorporation of these theoretical approaches offered a durable set of thinking tools which allowed for a rich theoretical analysis of participants' recollections of the MCT in which both external systems and human experiences—structural and subjective worlds—could be interdependently considered and examined.

The current research

The complementary theoretical frameworks discussed in this chapter, and particularly the psychosocial and emotional dimensions of these, offer a lens through which we can begin to explore and understand children and young people's MCT experiences and how they mobilise their pre-existing knowledge, resources and capital when moving from military to civilian life as separate cultural milieus with distinctly formed habituses. As Moore (2014) pointed out, assets such as social and cultural capital, although 'institutionally distinct', can echo the logic of structural inequalities and power relations observed within economic fields. He argued that inequalities associated with these forms of capital reflect inequalities

in capacities to acquire them (Moore, 2014). Capital cannot be divorced from the person, and the formation of new cultural and social capital requires long-term exposure to a new or unfamiliar social world. This has implications for the mobilisation of capital between different cultures or communities, and the value they place on various fields and forms of capital.

In the United Kingdom, conceptualisations of both Bourdieu and Bronfenbrenner's work have gained early, yet promising, traction in the context of the MCT. Indeed, Cooper et al. (2017, 2018) were the first to apply a Bourdieusian framework to make sense of the way in which military personnel experience the transition to civilian life based on their defence background and identity, as well as the capital they accrue during their service years. In their MoTiVe model, Cooper et al. (2017, 2018) suggest that the rules of the game and the capital needed to flourish are different in many military fields compared to civilian settings and that veterans must navigate a complex cultural and social transition when moving between these fields (Cooper et al., 2017, 2018). This involves mobilisation of various forms of capital and expansion of the existing habitus, which can lead to struggle and the need to navigate a state of hysteresis where veterans may not feel equipped to identify, occupy, and thrive in their new field position (Cooper et al., 2017, 2018). However, the degree to which transition manifests a mismatch between field and habitus for their children is not currently known.

While the MoTiVe model proposed by Cooper et al. (2017, 2018) calls into focus the importance of cultural elements during the MCT and explores the acquisition and mobilisation of various forms of capital during the transition, the experiences of service members, children and young people were not considered in this framework. However, Fossey et al. (2019) has shown promising application of this model with families of

veterans, suggesting there are several transferrable aspects to the context of children and young people. This research thus sought to extend on the work of Cooper et al. (2017, 2018) and Fossey et al. (2019) by deductively incorporating concepts from the MoTiVE model and the Military Family Systems Model to facilitate an improved understanding of children and young people's own experiences of the MCT; namely, its use of theoretical concepts associated with the work of Bourdieu and Bronfenbrenner. If researchers and clinicians can understand and articulate the strengths and challenges of children and young people when negotiating differences between military and civilian fields, frameworks and policies can be developed to aid in their transition experiences (Cooper et al., 2017, 2018).

Conclusion

Bourdieu's contribution to critical sociology is a fine example of the capacity for theoretical frameworks to transcend disciplinary boundaries across a range of settings. Indeed, this chapter demonstrates how his relational concepts have the potential to facilitate the creation of new interdisciplinary understandings across socio-cultural contexts in relation to the MCT. Recent conceptual applications of habitus, field, and capital to the experiences of veterans and their families offer a segue into exploring children and young people's own experiences. By drawing on and expanding the potential of Bourdieusian frameworks, this research aimed to explore participants' social realities from their own perspectives and translate their recollections of the MCT into tangible and visible forms of knowledge. The next chapter explores, in detail, the methodology and research processes involved.

Chapter 4 | Research methodology

To be able to see and describe the world as it is, you have to be ready to be always dealing with things that are complicated, confused, impure, uncertain—all of which runs counter to the usual idea of intellectual rigour. (Bourdieu et al., 1991, p. 259)

Introduction

This chapter details the research methodology of the study. Beginning with the aims and objectives of the research, it then describes the research framework and study design, including the target population and recruitment strategy. Following this, it provides a detailed description of the data collection and analyses, examining researcher reflexivity and trustworthiness of the data, along with several ethical considerations that were essential for the appropriate conduct of the research. Finally, this chapter discusses the potential benefits of the research for both the researcher and the researched. Key principles of reflexivity are considered throughout.

Aims, objectives, and research questions

The experiences of children and young people during the MCT are considerably under-researched. Much of the existing literature has focussed either on the experiences of currently serving families, or on the experiences of previously serving men and women. Largely missing in the literature is research exploring the implications of the MCT for children and young people. That which does exist tends to examine their experiences from the perspectives of their parents or other adult family members. There is, thus, an evident lack of qualitative studies that give voice to children and young people themselves, or the recollections of those who were children and young people at the time of their families'

transitions. The purpose of this research was to begin to address this gap by attempting to understand the complexities of the MCT, to discover how children and young people themselves make sense of, and navigate, this life transition.

While research suggests that family members may share certain experiences during the MCT, it is unlikely that all generations and age groups experience this transition in the same way. In fact, depending on their developmental stage, children and young people's experiences of the MCT may be especially unique, with potential ramifications for their mental health (Daraganova et al., 2018). It was therefore considered essential to seek a better understanding about how age-specific processes and characteristics may influence, and be influenced by, the MCT. This study centred its investigation of the MCT on children and young people aged between 5 and 25 at the time their family left the ADF (the limitations this broad age range posed are discussed further in Chapters 5 and 9). The main objective of the study was to explore and understand the potential lived experiences of children and young people when their parents leave the ADF. Three primary research questions were posed:

1. How do participants retrospectively perceive their transition from military to civilian life?

2. What similarities and differences do they recall observing between military and civilian contexts both within, and outside, the family unit?

3. What cultural resources, forms of capital, or practical strategies do participants recall drawing on when navigating civilian life?

As such, the study aimed to:

1. Give voice to individuals from military families by exploring their recollections of the MCT when they were children and young people whose parents left the ADF.

2. Explore and understand, retrospectively, the possible experiences, emotions, values, and worldviews of children and young people related to the MCT from participants' own nuanced perspectives.

3. Identify some of the strengths, opportunities, resources, and forms of capital that participants recall drawing on as children and young people when navigating the MCT.

4. Develop a foundational framework for guiding longer term research and practice focussed on the MCT for children and young people and the diverse experiences associated with this multidimensional process.

Qualitative methodology

Due to the broad and exploratory nature of the research questions, a qualitative methodology was chosen, grounded in an interpretive, critical constructivist framework. This framework was considered the most appropriate for meeting the aims of the research, as well as the most likely to provide feasible answers to the research questions under investigation. The paradigms underpinning this framework are discussed in more detail below.

Interpretive constructivism

The interpretive constructivist paradigm originates from the German philosophy of 'hermeneutics'—the study of knowledge through interpretation and understanding (Dilthey, 2002; Eichelberger, 1989; Mertens, 2005). It posits that there are many different

realities that are socially constructed and seeks to understand the world of human experience in relation to these realities (Cohen & Manion, 1994; Mertens, 2005; Waller et al., 2016). Within the interpretive constructivist paradigm, researchers rely upon the views and perceptions of participants who are direct subjects of the phenomenon under study (e.g., Creswell, 2003). Their analysis is holistic and contextual rather than reductionist and isolationist, focussing on the language, signs, and meanings participants connect with their distinct experiences (Waller et al., 2016). Interpretive constructivism is a useful paradigm for revealing hidden issues and emerging questions for future research. This makes it well-suited for exploring intricate, multidimensional, or previously underexplored, phenomena and social processes, such as the experiences of children and young people during the MCT.

Because interpretive researchers view social reality as being embedded within, and impossible to abstract from, social settings, they interpret this reality through a sense-making, rather than through a hypothesis testing, process. Interpretive constructivist approaches do not generally begin with—or test—a theory (e.g., deduction). Rather, they "generate or inductively develop a theory or pattern of meanings" (e.g., induction) throughout the research process (Creswell, 2003, p. 9), leading the researcher to new or evolved theoretical insights. This approach ensured that new and unexpected findings—and theories—could be generated in the analysis phase.

Critical constructivism

Critical constructivism both extends on and adjusts interpretive constructivism by amalgamating interpretivist principles with critical epistemology—a school of thought that encourages critical thinking in relation to knowledge (e.g., Freire, 1970). Influenced largely by the work of Kincheloe (2005) and Kincheloe et al. (2011), critical

constructivism posits that knowledge is contextualised and situated, and that an individual's interpretations of the world, the self, and the other are shaped by their social, cultural, economic, institutional, historical, and political context. Beyond this, it posits that knowledge from some societies is privileged over that from others, exposing elitist, or discriminatory assumptions embedded in mainstream discourse and elevating more subdued forms of knowledge to foster alternative ways of thinking. Critical constructivism, thus, encourages a greater individual and collective social consciousness, by examining knowledge in relation to power. This fits nicely with the work of Bourdieu which conceptualises the translation of knowledge, capital and resources into social status, progression, and success in particular socio-cultural fields.

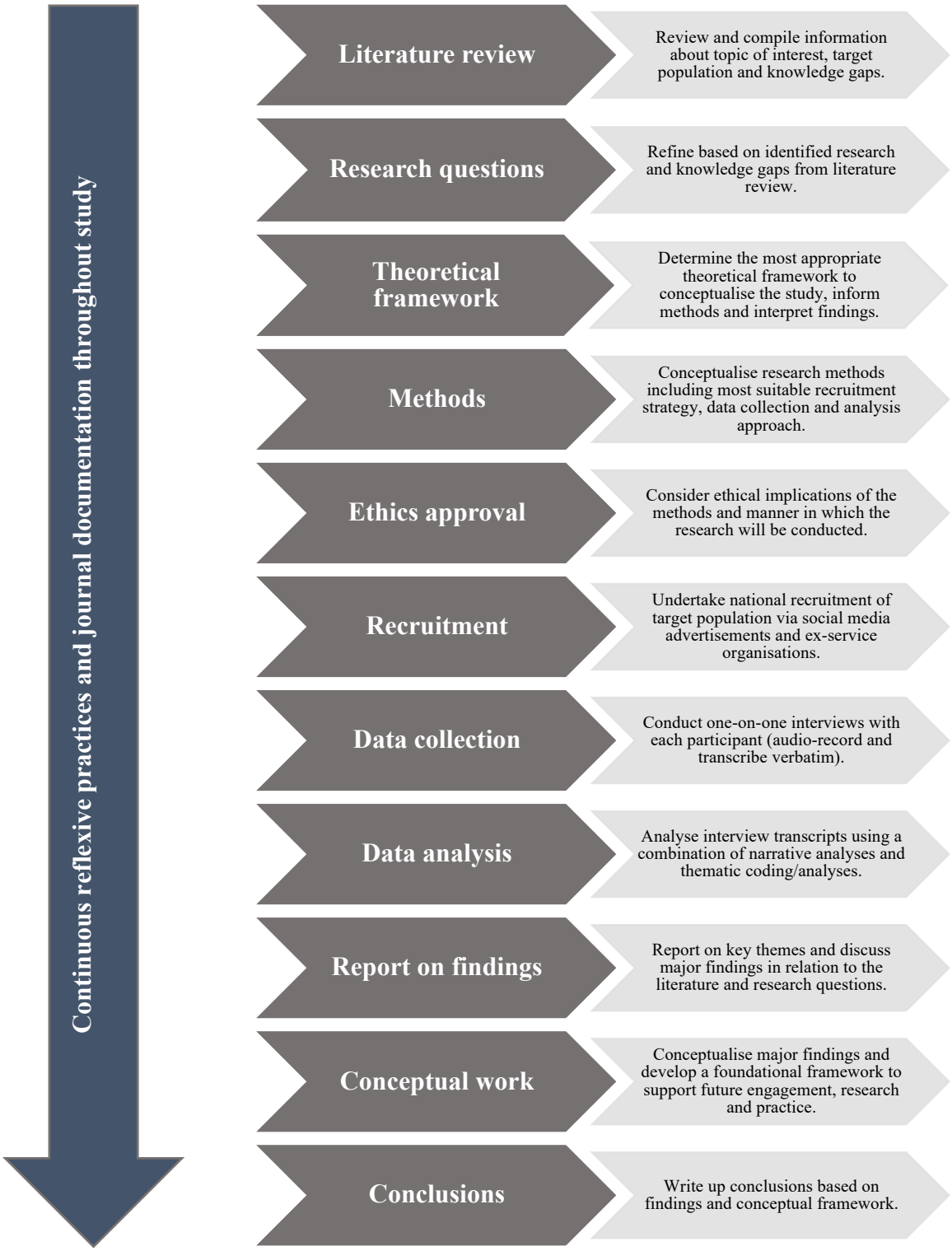
According to Kincheloe et al. (2011), critical constructivism encourages the achievement of mutual understanding by opening dialogue based on critical awareness. In the case of this research, critical constructivism informed the researcher's analytical approach to examining the ways in which knowledge is created, valued, and reproduced in the military setting, as well as how this knowledge is perceived externally i.e., within civilian societies. It enabled the researcher to identity marginalised forms of knowledge situated within and beyond these communities, such as children and young people's knowledge. In military settings and broader communities alike, the opinions, perspectives, and experiences of children and young people have often received lower levels of credibility in comparison to those of adults or have been largely neglected in research processes (Carel & Gyorffy, 2014; Fricker, 2007). By drawing on principles of critical constructivism, the researcher sought to address these 'epistemic injustices' (e.g., Fricker, 2007) by exclusively examining the ways children and young people interpret and discuss

their experiences of the MCT and validating the knowledge they hold within their broader communities.

Study design

Figure 1 provides a detailed overview of the research design used to explore the aims and questions of this study. First, a narrative literature review was conducted to broadly explore the existing research on defence culture, military life, children and young people, and the MCT. As stated in Chapter 2, this style of literature review was deemed the most suitable for providing a "comprehensive overview of the knowledge available on a topic", and therefore a critical and informed perspective (Baker, 2016, p. 265). It was also useful for further establishing the focus and context of the research. Findings from the narrative literature review helped to identify gaps in the research on children and young people from currently and previously serving military families and drew out key areas requiring further investigation. Such information helped shape the research questions and formulate ensuing aspects of the research design. This included determining the most appropriate theoretical and methodological frameworks for the study as well as specific ethical processes and the recruitment strategy. The literature, in combination with these frameworks, subsequently informed methods of data collection and analysis, as well as the way in which findings were interpreted and reported. Throughout the research process, actions and decisions were recorded iteratively and reflexively using a journal.

Figure 1. Study design.



Sampling and recruitment

For this research, non-probability purposive sampling was used. This involved the recruitment of participants according to a specific set of inclusion criteria developed by the researcher (Waller et al., 2016). After the researcher's careful consideration of qualitative sampling methods, purposive sampling was determined to be the most feasible and appropriate choice for two reasons: (i) it allowed for the recruitment of a particular subset of the previously serving military community, and (ii) it was appropriately suited to the research questions, as well as the scope of the PhD timeline and budget. The initial inclusion criteria for this study were any child or young person aged 13–17 whose parent or carer had left the ADF in the last two years, and who were living in Australia at the time of transition. This initial age range was selected to capture individuals of high school age, as during these years, children and young people undergo a series of unique identity formation processes, heavily influenced by their increased engagement with socio-cultural contexts and relationships beyond the family (Alfano et al., 2016). They would also be old enough to understand and make informed decisions about the research, with support from their parents or the researcher where needed.

Given the wide geographical distribution of the previously serving ADF community, a national recruitment campaign was employed, using completely online and tele-based methods. In the first instance, a digital advertisement (see Appendix A) was disseminated via the professional networks of the PhD candidate and her supervisory team across social media platforms Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. In the early stages of recruitment, the PhD candidate was also contacted by ABC Radio Newcastle and asked to participate in a breakfast interview to promote the research. Information about the study and the digital advertisement was shared by the ABC media outlet. Originally, the digital

advertisement contained a hyperlink which, when clicked, redirected prospective participants to a secure, third-party online form (REDCap), where they could complete an online expression of interest, download a copy of the Participant Information Statement and Consent Form, and request that the researcher contact their parents to provide further information and complete the informed and parental consent process. However, the researcher experienced a high degree of difficulty recruiting participants using this original strategy, due to a combination of the hard-to-engage target population (e.g., Cook & Doorenbos, 2017), narrow inclusion criteria, and several unforeseeable restrictions imposed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Further details about these recruitment issues and the limitations they placed on the research design and outcomes are explored in Chapter 9.

Due to the significant recruitment challenges, an amendment to the recruitment approach was deemed necessary. The amendment sought approval to expand the target population to anyone >13 years old, who was aged between 5 and 25 years at the time their parents left the ADF. According to the World Health Organisation (2011), those between the ages of 10 and 24 are defined as 'young people' in most youth studies. However, ongoing challenges in recruiting this hard-to-reach population during the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated a revision of the inclusion criteria to individuals aged 5–25 at the time of discharge. The amendment also sought approval to expand the specific recruitment strategies used. This involved the researcher liaising with key Australian ex-service organisations, many of whom offered to share advertisement details about the study through their own communication channels, including on their social media pages, official websites and newsletter mailing lists.

The new advertisement also no longer included a hyperlink to the REDCap form but asked any interested individuals to contact the researcher directly for more information. This change permitted a more immediate and personal sense of engagement between the researcher and prospective participants, which was found to enhance recruitment and rapport. At the initial point of contact, the researcher provided participants with additional details about the study, including a copy of the updated Participant Information Statement (see Appendix D) and Consent Form (see Appendix E) via email. Although no one under the age of 18 expressed an interest in participating in the research, a detailed protocol was put in place prior to recruitment to ethically manage this contingency. In this event, the researcher would text or email a reply, advising the child or young person to ask their parents/carers to contact the researcher to discuss the research, complete the participant and parental consent process, and arrange a suitable interview time.

The initial aim of the study was to recruit approximately 20 participants. This sample size followed the advice of Baker and Edwards (2012) on the appropriate number of interviews to ensure saturation in a PhD study (Mason, 2010). However, despite the exhaustive efforts of the PhD candidate and her supervisory team, recruitment of this population remained challenging, and by the end of the recruitment period a total of only 10 participants were recruited nationally. Seven additional individuals had contacted the researcher expressing interest in the study. However, three did not meet the inclusion criteria, three did not respond to the researcher following the provision of information and consent forms, and one could no longer be contacted after completing a consent form. Despite this small sample size, in-depth interviews were able to elicit rich data on the recollections of participants who were children and young people when their parents left the ADF. It should also be noted that small sample sizes are not uncommon in research

applying an interpretive constructivist framework and are considered acceptable provided they fit the nature and purpose of the research.

Data collection

All data were collected between July and September 2020 via synchronous telephone (n=7) or Zoom interviews (n=3) (depending on participant preference). Due to the national recruitment process, as well as the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, an in-person approach was not considered feasible within the timeframe and budget of the PhD study. Online, or virtual, methods of data collection have been shown to be particularly effective—if not more effective—in research with children and young people (Harris & Porcellato, 2018; Spriggs, 2009, 2010). In line with the interpretivist and critical constructivist frameworks applied in this qualitative research, in-depth, narrative-style interviews were considered the most appropriate method of data collection, positioning participants as the most accurate epistemic source about their own lives and experiences (Mazzoni & Harcourt, 2014; Reissman, 2008).

In-depth narrative inquiry

Defined as the study of personal and experiential stories that researchers gain from others (Polkinghorne, 2007), narrative inquiry has been described as a useful approach for studying people, experiences, or other social phenomena (Reissman, 2008). According to Wells (2011), narrative inquiry is particularly useful when there are limitations concerning sample size, or when there is a need to elicit more in-depth explanations and draw connections or distinctions between individual and collective experiences. Narrative inquiry encourages participants to take the researcher on a 'journey' to a past time or world through storytelling. Narrative research, thus, offers a unique and creative means of

learning about the experiences of others; their worldviews and perspectives of the social, cultural, or political contexts in which they live (Reissman, 2008). Indeed, narrative inquiry is less about the story that participants tell, and more about the significance and meanings they attach to these stories; the way in which they make sense of, explain, or navigate certain phenomena (Baber, 2016).

The decision to employ narrative inquiry in this study was influenced by the work of Moen (2006), who highlighted the importance of capturing the whole context or complete 'picture' of a major event in a person's life (Clandinin, 2016). In this study, the researcher, thus, sought to encourage participants to tell their personal stories and recollections of what it was like transitioning from military to civilian life, to develop a holistic 'picture' and capture the "cultural conventions on which the broader narrative is based" (Waller et al., 2016, p. 145). This approach helped to illuminate the broader phenomenon of the MCT, and what some of the most important or meaningful experiences may be for children and young people during the MCT journey. It was also considered a suitable approach for placing participants' voices and perspectives at the forefront of the research process (Wells, 2011).

Interview procedure

Interviews were conducted with 10 participants and ranged from 1 to 2 hours in length. Following introductions and informal conversation to build rapport with participants, the researcher reiterated information about the study and outlined the principles of confidentiality and informed consent. Participants were asked to provide verbal consent and written consent and were informed that the interview would be audio-recorded for transcription purposes, before proceeding with the interview. The interview began with a central question, which prompted participants to tell their story of the MCT: "What was it

like for you when your parent left the defence force?" This question was followed by a series of sub-questions which aimed to elicit more information where needed. These questions were divided into 'social experiences' (such as hobbies, interests, behaviours, clothing, and tastes), 'cultural experiences' (such as relationships and social connections both within and beyond the family unit), and 'other experiences' (such as living arrangement, school and community involvement, and other significant changes and experiences). Finally, a handful of closing questions were asked to elicit overall reflections on the MCT. These included questions around participants' key strengths and challenges during this period, and what sorts of resources and supports were—or would have been—helpful at the time (see Appendix F for the full interview schedule).

In the interest of transparency, the researcher disclosed her own civilian background to participants during the interview. Interestingly, this did not appear to impact on the rapport established with participants. In fact, many reported that it was refreshing to share their experience with someone who was not from a defence background. This transparency and self-disclosure reduced the power imbalance between the researcher and participants and allowed the interview to feel "more equal" (Waller et al., 2016, p. 89). However, some participants did suggest that the recruitment challenges experienced during this research may be partly attributed to the tightly knit nature of the military community and the reluctance among some previously serving members to engage with researchers who are considered outsiders. These issues are explored in greater detail in Chapter 9.

On several occasions, participants became emotional while discussing sensitive or personal experiences during the interview. When this occurred, the researcher gave participants space to express their feelings before checking in with them to ask if they would like to (i) continue with the interview; (ii) pause and return later; or (iii) stop and

withdraw their interview altogether. Participants were also offered a list of relevant support options if the researcher deemed this to be appropriate (this decision-making process is discussed further in the ethical considerations section of the current chapter). However, all ten participants chose to continue their interview on the day and did not express any need for these additional supports. Throughout the interview, the researcher drew on her experience as an accredited social worker and applied the principles of active listening (e.g., Waller et al., 2016) to ensure that the participants' stories were heard, and appropriately acknowledged.

At the end of the interview the researcher reiterated information about the research process and what would take place following the interview (e.g., transcription of audio-recorded interviews and data analysis). Participants were advised that, if requested on their consent form, they would be emailed a copy of their interview transcript for editing prior to analysis. Participants were also advised that they would be given a three-week window in which to edit their responses and return the modified transcript to the researcher. The researcher clarified that participants could withdraw their responses at any time prior to data analysis and that, if requested, they would be emailed a preliminary report of the research findings. The researcher contacted all participants via email three days after their interview to check in and ask if they had any questions or concerns in relation to their interview or the research. The email included a list of relevant support services.

Field notes were taken by the researcher during and after each interview, to assist with iterative data analysis, and to refine the interview process. Field notes documented contextual information not captured by the interview such as non-verbal cues (for participants interviewed over Zoom), mood, and certain emotional tones. Audio files of the interviews were sent to a professional transcription service (Pacific Transcription) and

transcribed verbatim to preserve meaning. Transcripts were then emailed to facilitate member checking. All 10 participants remained in the study for its duration and no participants opted to edit or withdraw their interview transcript during the member checking process. Therefore, all original data were included for analysis.

Data analysis

Data analysis for this study consisted of two phases: (i) an iterative or pre-analysis phase, conducted in between individual interviews, and (ii) a more formal or primary analysis phase, undertaken at the conclusion of all interviews. These are described below.

Iterative or pre-analysis

In interpretive constructivist research, data collection and analysis can proceed both iteratively and simultaneously (Bonfim, 2020). Prior to formal data analysis, the researcher engaged in a preliminary analysis, which involved reviewing the audio file of each interview to identify early codes. Iterative analysis also enabled the researcher to address any issues that arose during data collection and refine the interview protocol to appropriately capture the phenomena of interest. For example, the researcher recorded her own responses to, and interpretations of, participants' emotions, established the best order in which to ask certain questions and tailored her introductory and concluding dialogue to maximise rapport building with participants. Once the final transcripts were received, all text files were imported into NVivo for electronic coding and categorisation of the data. At this stage, all identifying information was removed or replaced with pseudonyms.

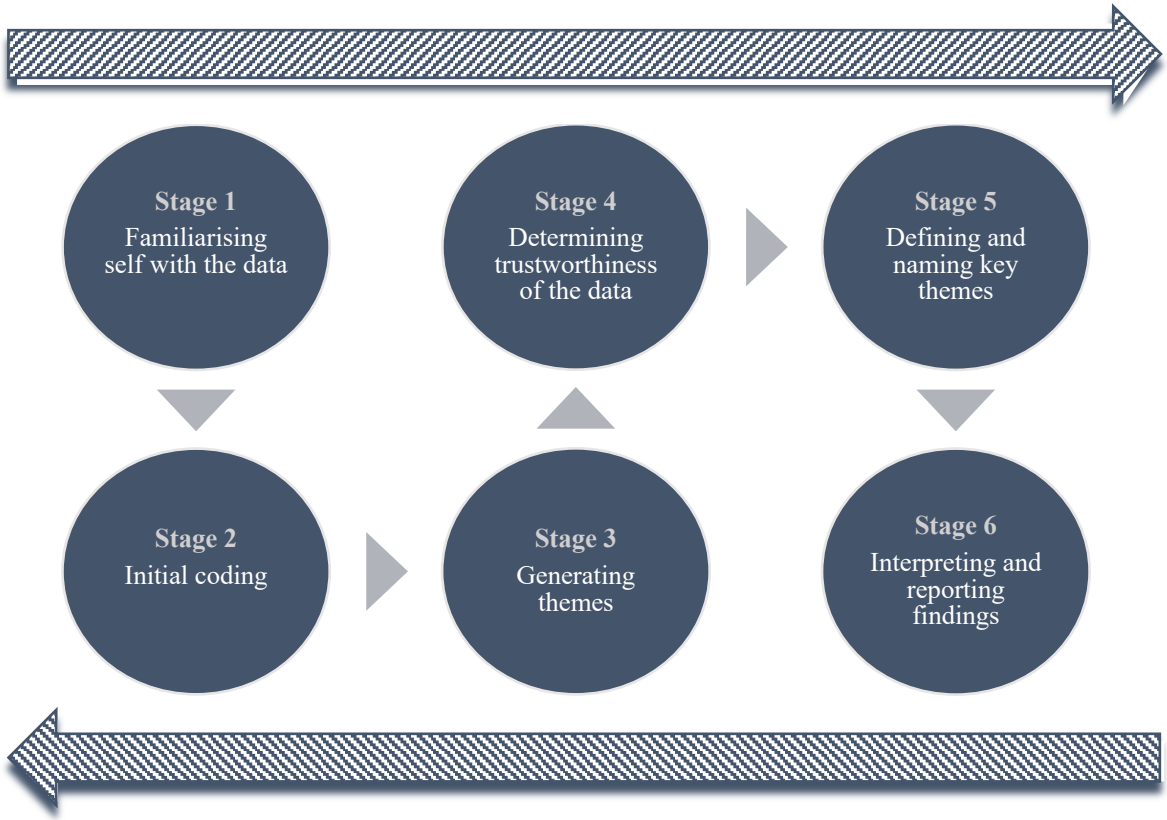
Primary data analysis

For primary data analysis, thematic analysis was used. This analytical method is valuable for looking across cases, highlighting commonalities and differences in participants' experiences and allowing the researcher to engage with participants' own detailed perspectives and the meanings they associate with them (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In the first instance, thematic analysis was applied broadly to explore participants' MCT stories and trajectories. It allowed the researcher to identify the various 'parts' or 'stages' of transition, as well as the different actors, organisations, and circumstances within and across each interview. The researcher then turned to examine the similarities and differences across participant experiences in greater detail, identifying participants' distinct and nuanced interpretations and using these to sharpen codes and themes.

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is a flexible method that allows the researcher to examine data in many ways. For example, researchers can choose to focus on one aspect of a phenomenon, or to examine an entire dataset. It can also be used to report on the more obvious, surface-level experiences in the data, as well as the latent ideas and assumptions that underlie these (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis comes in many forms and is therefore suitable for a wide range of topics and research questions.

To conduct thematic analyses in this study, all interview transcripts were coded thematically in NVivo using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-stage approach (see Figure 2). Because this approach is more of a back-and-forth process than it is linear, on several occasions the researcher was required to return to previous stages. This was done to re-familiarise herself with the data and generate additional codes at later timepoints. In Figure 2, two directional arrows have been used to demonstrate this dynamic process.

Figure 2. Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-stage thematic analyses.



Stage 1: Familiarising self with the data

As Esterberg (2002) emphasised, it is incredibly important for the researcher to become "intimately familiar" with the data (p. 157). Familiarisation took place both during the pre-analysis phase, and at the start of the primary analysis phase. In the first instance, it involved playing back audio files of the interviews to absorb verbal cues and nuances. Ample time was then dedicated to reading and re-reading the 10 individual interview transcripts, along with any field notes documented during the data collection and iterative review phase. This process of reading and re-reading facilitated deep familiarisation with the data and transitioned the researcher from the narrative headspace to the thematic world. It also minimised the risk of cherry-picking elements of the data that were a strong fit with the literature and theoretical framework. The familiarisation of data and subsequent coding

process was conducted using NVivo, as according to Waller et al. (2016), the "search, retrieve and coding functions can be much more efficient than pen and paper" (p. 168).

Stage 2: Initial coding

When generating initial codes (or 'nodes') in NVivo, it was important for the researcher to keep things relevant in terms of the research questions and paradigms, but also to be open to other possibilities. Because this study was informed by Bourdieu's theoretical concepts of habitus, field, and capital, a handful of initial codes were created 'deductively' to reflect these concepts. This allowed the researcher to consciously apply the theoretical framework during data analysis and explicitly link the findings to these concepts. However, in following the key principles of interpretive, critical constructivism, it was also important for the researcher to look for unanticipated information in the data to generate new codes (e.g., Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019, 2021), also known as 'induction' or 'open coding' (Waller et al., 2016). As such, the process of initial coding involved the researcher re-reading each individual transcript in NVivo, highlighting relevant data extracts (i.e., quotes) and dragging them into either the pre-established NVivo nodes, or any new nodes created along the way. In some instances, data extracts were double- or multi-coded under two or more nodes. Coding in this manner continued until informational or 'coding' redundancy was reached, at which point a total of 38 initial codes had been created.

Stage 3: Generating themes

The abductive approach (combining 'inductive' and 'deductive' techniques) was used to identify both pre-established and newly created codes (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012) This allowed the researcher to interpret and analyse a multitude of data across a variety of contexts and begin to categorise and group them into broader themes, noticing

commonalities across the dataset. A table was generated to sort and collapse the 38 individual codes into broader sets of codes. This was achieved by searching for links and relationships between the nodes created in NVivo, and then continually reordering and combining these nodes into larger groupings. During this process, it was vital for the researcher to consciously consider the research questions and refine the codes accordingly (e.g., Mason, 2002). At the completion of this process, the initial 38 codes were collapsed into a total of 14 sets of codes, or themes. To reflect these, the table included relevant quotes from participants that were previously extracted and coded from the transcripts.

Stage 4: Determining trustworthiness of the data

Credibility and confirmability of the coding was increased through extended engagement with the PhD candidate's supervisory team to ensure agreement on themes. This was supported by the development of a codebook containing explicit definitions of coding categories which allowed for shared understandings and mutual decision-making, helping to increase consistency and transparency. However, even the most rigorous and standardised procedures cannot fully discount the effect of the researcher-as-interpreter, and therefore, the distinct and individual experiences or social positionings they bring to the research process, especially during data analysis. This research, therefore, focussed on achieving Sanders and Cuneo's (2010) concept of 'social reliability'—a process in which "the personal backgrounds and theoretical or methodological preferences of researchers interact with one another" as they code data and validate themes (p. 327).

Stage 5: Defining and naming key themes

Once the 14 major themes had been reviewed for trustworthiness, they were refined and named. Finally, they were divided into four overarching subsets, based on core topics that

were relevant to the research questions and aims. Table 2 demonstrates these overarching subsets and the core themes within each (these reported on and discussed across Chapters 5–8).

Table 2. Overview of datasets and themes.

Data subset	Themes
Fields apart: Navigating the civil-military divide	Difficulty relating to civilian others
	Military stereotypes and assumptions
	Opportunities to bridge the 'gaps'
Bourdieu applied: Exploring the transferability of capital and habitus during the military-civilian transition	Cultural capital
	Social capital
	Symbolic and economic capital
	Identity and the habitus
Military family dynamics in transition	Increased mental health stress
	Shifts in family relationships and dynamics
	Domestic violence and maltreatment
Young people's support needs during the military-civilian transition	Military and civilian supports
	School supports
	Stigma and receptiveness to supports
	Ideal transition supports

This process of grouping and re-grouping the data under initial codes and themes allowed the researcher to move towards answering the specific research questions and aims of the study.

Stage 6: Interpreting and reporting findings

Interpretation, analysis, writing and reporting of data occurred iteratively, and in a back-and-forth manner. Although codes and themes were identified, named, and refined prior to the reporting stage, it was through the formal write-up of findings that the final stages of analyses came together and began to provide answers to the research questions. Findings for each subset were reported under thematic sub-headings and included text designed to create a 'flowing story' about each theme, anchored with insightful quotes to foreground participants' voices.

Trustworthiness and researcher reflexivity

In line with the interpretive, critical constructivist framework, rigour was viewed as a transparent and systematic approach to data collection and analysis (Waller et al., 2016). Since researchers bring different perspectives, experiences and backgrounds to the research process, this study aimed to achieve 'trustworthiness'. According to Waller et al. (2016), trustworthiness refers to the ability to demonstrate rigour and consistency in the application of the chosen research paradigm and largely involves the integral aspect of 'researcher reflexivity'. This refers to the instrumental role of the researcher in shaping the interpretation, analysis, and reporting of the social phenomena under investigation (Hsiung, 2008; Waller et al., 2016). For this reason, the researcher's role and involvement in the research process was made clear from the outset of the project, and crucially, in the data collection and analyses phases. Specifically, the researcher endeavoured to take a neutral and unbiased stance, and ensure that her personal and professional experiences, values, and expectations did not taint the subjective experiences, perspectives, voices, and meanings derived from participants.

For Bourdieu, 'reflexivity' is achieved through a shared effort to make visible the "unthought of categories, perceptions, theories, and structures that underpin any pre-reflexive grasp of the social world" (Deer, 2008, p. 202). In doing so, reflexivity is said to allow for methodological rectification of some of Bourdieu's theoretical shortcomings explored in Chapter 3. According to Costa and Murphy (2015) it affords the researcher, in collaboration with participants, the opportunity to bring unconscious knowledge to a conscious level. It also helps make sense of the social narrative and achieve empowerment for both the researcher and the researched. A reflexive approach, thus, required the researcher to put in place a range of measures to ensure that the study was congruent with these principles.

Because the researcher was not personally embedded within the social context under study, and did not come from a military background herself, it was important to maximise her observational and reflective skills, and the level of trust and rapport built with participants, and to minimise any personal biases and preconceptions that may have interfered with the ability to accurately report on the findings. This was achieved through the ongoing use of a reflexive field journal to record and evaluate methodological and theoretical processes, interpretations, and decisions; through extended engagement with participants; and through regular consultations with the PhD supervisory team. Member-checking was also used as a means of breaking down power relations and affording participants as much control as possible over the data. This allowed the researcher to gain deeper insight into participants' meanings and interpretations of the data, further minimising the 'researcher as instrument' effect during analysis.

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), trustworthiness also involves dependable and credible research that is said to be 'believable', and which instils a sense of confidence

in those reading it. It requires the researcher to demonstrate high quality research processes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Often, this requires extended engagement in the field, triangulation of data, and meticulously analytical procedures. While triangulation was not possible in this study, the researcher sought to ensure extended engagement with participants through interview follow-up and member-checking procedures and adopted a rigorous approach to data management and analysis, including verbatim transcription of interviews, secure storage and management of participants' information and data, and clear documentation of all research decisions made. This information was stored across password protected Microsoft Word and Excel files, as well as the reflexive journal kept by the researcher, and the NVivo library.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) also consider confirmability relevant in determining trustworthiness. This involves the extent to which qualitative or interpretive findings can be independently confirmed by others. This typically relates to validation by participants themselves of how accurately they feel the findings reflect their experiences and truths (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It is demonstrated in the form of 'inter-subjectivity'—the agreement of participants with the interpretations of the researcher, and the way the data is reported, or the story told. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), if participants generally agree with the conclusions drawn by the researcher, then the findings can be considered confirmable. To achieve confirmability in the present study, the researcher engaged in follow-up and member-checking practices with participants as previously described. These procedures allowed participants to discuss their contributions with the researcher, review verbatim transcriptions of their interviews, and edit or withdraw these accordingly. The researcher also disseminated a preliminary report of the findings to all participants, allowing them to review findings following analysis.

Lastly, the concept of transferability was considered. This refers to the extent to which findings can be applied in other settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). While transferability is often more challenging and ambiguous in qualitative research, it was important for the researcher to develop and document rich or 'thick' descriptions of the research context, assumptions, and methodological processes, which would, in turn, allow readers to independently examine the extent to which reported findings can be applied to other contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In doing so, she aimed to address transferability by keeping detailed records of the research conditions, methods, and procedures at every stage of the research process, and documenting these in this thesis, and in academic journal articles, ensuring readers can make informed decisions and assessments about the extent to which aspects of the research are transferable to other settings.

Ethical considerations

Throughout this study, it was critical for the researcher to adequately balance the pursuit of knowledge with her ethical responsibility to participants, organisations, and all other stakeholders involved. Accordingly, ethics clearance for this study was sought and granted by the University of Newcastle's Human Research Ethics Committee in July 2020 [approval no. H-2019-0175]. Ethical considerations were guided by the Australian National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (National Health and Medical Research Council, 2018) in conjunction with the Australian Association of Social Workers' [AASW] (2020) Code of Ethics and other relevant literature on ethical conduct in human research. Aspects of the study were considered in relation to six key ethical domains, including: (i) social media and organisational recruitment, (ii) voluntary participation and informed consent, (iii) power, privilege, and positionality, (iv) participant

safety and harm minimisation, (v) data management, confidentiality, anonymity, and disclosure, and (vi) communication of findings. These are outlined in detail below.

Social media and organisational recruitment

A range of benefits have been associated with online engagement, including improved access to knowledge, education, and resources, increased social and support networks, and the opportunity for social participation and identity formation (Livingstone, 2003). Indeed, several authors have identified the internet as an important medium for empowering adults, as well as children and young people to engage with research and other knowledge that they would not otherwise know about, or have access to (Harris and Porcellato, 2018; Spriggs, 2009, 2010). However, when recruiting in an online space, via social media campaigns or website advertisements, it is important to consider the potential risks and complications, as well as the appropriateness of the recruitment strategy, particularly when prospective participants include those under the age of 18.

For this research, thoughtful measures were taken to ensure the digital advertisement (see Appendix A) was appropriate in its design and language. For example, a member of the University of Newcastle's School of Business and Marketing was consulted, and feedback was sought from several independent reviewers of diverse ages and backgrounds before posting and disseminating the advertisement across platforms. The researcher also ensured that appropriate contact options were made clear on the advertisement, and where and how additional information about the study could be accessed.

During the recruitment process, it was also important to consider the ethical aspects involved when approaching organisations for assistance. When asking organisations to

assist with recruitment, some service users may feel coerced to participate due to their pre-existing relationship with, or sense of commitment to, the organisation (Wilson et al., 2008). To mitigate this risk, the researcher asked all organisations disseminating the research advertisement to encourage prospective participants to contact the researcher, rather than the organisation, to ensure interested individuals remained anonymous to the organisation. Prospective participants were also informed in the information statement that if they decided not to participate, this decision would not impact on the service they received from the organisation, or on their relationship with employees of the organisation.

When recruiting through ex-service organisations, there were also ethical considerations regarding the confidentiality and anonymity of participants, as it was possible others known to them could also be participating. To mitigate potential risks, the researcher did not speak to participants about other interviews or disclose any information relating to other participants or the data. Participants were also discouraged from discussing the research with people they knew in case they were also involved.

Voluntary participation and informed consent

When conducting research with participants of any age, informed consent is critical. However, when recruiting children and young people under the age of 18, informed consent takes on a particular level of importance. Indeed, consideration of the following three aspects is essential for all ages: information giving, competency to consent, and voluntary participation (Kirk, 2007; Mazzoni & Harcourt, 2014); each carefully considered in the study design, recruitment, and data collection phases of the study.

While no one below the age of 18 expressed an interest in participating in the research, it was important for the researcher to have a protocol for informed and parental

consent in place. Measures included: (i) providing participants with an easy-to-read, age appropriate, information statement so they could be adequately informed about the nature of the study and what was required of them, as well as encouraging them to share and discuss this with their families (information giving); (ii) encouraging participants to discuss the research study with the researcher and assessing their mental, emotional and intellectual capacity for participation (competency to consent); and (iii) seeking written and verbal consent from participants throughout the study (voluntary participation).

Consent to participate was sought at three separate timepoints: (i) via written consent prior to the interview, (ii) via verbal consent at the beginning of the interview, and (iii) via a member-checking procedure following audio transcription of the interview. For participants under 18, the consent process involved written parental approval as well as consent by from the child or young person. This enabled the researcher to ensure the protection and rights of participants, whilst considering their developmental level and wellbeing.

Power, privilege, and positionality

One of the most important ethical considerations when undertaking qualitative research with human subjects is the power, privilege, and positionality of the researcher-participant relationship (Harden et al., 2000; Kirk, 2007; Punch, 2002). It was therefore critical that the researcher maintained an awareness of, and acknowledge, her own privilege and role in interpreting and co-creating participants' experiences, stories and the meanings ascribed to them (e.g., Kirk, 2007; Mazzoni & Harcourt, 2014). To facilitate this, the researcher employed a reflexive approach, described earlier in this chapter, ensuring that the interpretation, analysis, and reporting of data remained as true as possible to participants' own personal narratives (Simpson & Quigley, 2016).

In line with ethical research principles of participation and equity (e.g., AASW, 2020; Blythe et al., 2013), the researcher also made every effort to ensure participants understood their role and involvement in the study, as well as their right to withdraw prior to data collection, following the interview, or prior to data analysis. During data collection, participants were positioned as the primary 'tellers' of their stories and given maximum freedom to tell their stories on their own terms. In accordance with narrative principles, it was acknowledged from the outset that the researcher had a role to play in the construction and interpretation of these stories, and that this external influence cannot be fully removed (Blythe et al., 2013). However, the researcher sought to mitigate the extent of this position of power through continuous discussion, reflection, and clarification, both with participants and with the doctoral supervisors, to minimise researcher bias in the interpretation and analysis of results (Kirk, 2007; Mazzoni & Harcourt, 2014; Simpson & Quigley, 2016). Time was also taken at the beginning of the interviews to build rapport and connect with participants through informal conversation, which helped to break down barriers and minimise the power imbalance. This allowed participants to feel safe and confident when sharing their experiences.

Participant safety and harm minimisation

While this study was considered low risk, it was acknowledged that there may be instances where participants could become uncomfortable or upset during the interview. Several measures were put in place to monitor participant wellbeing, identify vulnerability, reduce the likelihood of emotional distress or re-traumatisation, and ensure adequate supports or referral pathways were made available if needed. It is also important to note that the researcher is an accredited social worker with clinical experience in the biopsychosocial assessment, counselling and risk management of children, young people, and adults, as

well as in conducting interviews with vulnerable and at-risk populations. The safety and wellbeing of participants was therefore of paramount importance throughout each interview.

To reduce the likelihood of harm or discomfort to participants during the interviews, any questions which appeared to trigger such discomfort or distress were redirected, following acknowledgement of the participant's emotions, and supportive discussion provided where appropriate. Research shows that disclosing sensitive, or painful, experiences in a supportive setting can enhance coping and facilitate a sense of cohesion (Bay-Cheng, 2009). The researcher would then re-establish whether the participant wished to proceed with the interview, and provide information about available supports (e.g., Lifeline, BeyondBlue) if needed.

To ensure participant wellbeing following data collection, a follow-up email was sent to each participant three days after their interview. This email was designed to ascertain whether the interview had raised any further issues for participants that required attention, and to provide information on support services if needed. This strategy also allowed the researcher to put an appropriate researcher-participant boundary in place i.e., ending the research relationship, while ensuring that every participant had knowledge of, and access to, appropriate information and support services if needed.

Data management, confidentiality, anonymity, and disclosure

Mazzoni and Harcourt (2014) emphasised the importance of ensuring that participants have the capacity to understand the entire research process, including how the data will be managed and stored and the measures in place to ensure confidentiality, anonymity, and the management of personal or identifying information. It was therefore crucial to ensure

that participants understood the purpose and structure of the study. To facilitate this, information statements included clear, transparent information about the process of data collection, management, and storage, specifying who would have access to the material and how it would be used (Kirk, 2007; Mazzoni & Harcourt, 2014).

While all data from this study were kept confidential (i.e., between the researcher and doctoral supervisory team), the AASW (2010) Code of Ethics states that participants should be informed, both in writing and verbally, prior to data collection that complete confidentiality cannot be guaranteed due to the researcher's duty of care. Because the researcher is an accredited social worker, participants were informed of her ethical obligation to report any risk of significant harm to themselves, or others, disclosed by participants during the research process.

Participants were also advised that all information and data collected throughout the research project, including names, telephone numbers and emails, would be stored in accordance with the University of Newcastle's safe data storage requirements, using the password protected data storage solution, 'OneDrive'. The researcher assured participants that all identifiers would be removed and replaced with codes and pseudonyms, that the data would only be accessed by the doctoral candidate and her supervisory team, and that the data (including all audio recordings and interview transcripts) would be stored for a minimum of five years on the University of Newcastle's secure OneDrive server. Any hard copies of data or other study materials would be scanned and saved before being destroyed. At the appropriate time, all data, including the secure storage of any names and contact details, would be safely destroyed in line with the University of Newcastle's research policy provisions.

Communication of findings

As an ethical commitment to the participants of this research and in recognition of the value and importance of their contributions, each participant was emailed a summary of the research findings prior to submission and publication of the PhD thesis. Participants were also informed of the different means by which findings from the research would be disseminated, including the doctoral thesis, peer-reviewed journal articles and conference papers or presentations.

Potential benefits of the research

While many researchers consider research benefits as a nonessential bonus, Bay-Cheng (2009) argued that beneficence is an important consideration when working with the most vulnerable of individuals on the most sensitive of topics. Accordingly, the benefits of this study for participants and other stakeholders were considered in both the analysis and planning stages of the research and included: (i) sharing voice and feeling heard, (ii) self-reflection and altruism, and (iii) increased knowledge base. Each of these are discussed in more detail below.

Sharing voice and feeling heard

Giving participants the opportunity to confide in someone and be heard was one of the most important benefits of this study and was an intended by-product of the research aims. According to Rossetto (2014), sharing personal experiences with a researcher (i.e., a neutral third party) can encourage emotional release and therefore has a degree of therapeutic value. In this way, interviews were not only effective for collecting rich data, but were also considered beneficial in terms of facilitating healing and positive change. This included the opportunity for individuals to share their stories and experiences in an

independent setting, such as outside the defence community or formal service providers. This safe research space, and the anonymity that came with the reporting of findings, allowed participants to share their stories without feeling guilty or judged.

Self-reflection and altruism

According to Rossetto (2014), sharing information, stories, and experiences can also increase participant self-awareness and facilitate reflection about their own attitudes, perspectives, feelings, motives, and desires. This research gave participants the opportunity to reflect on their lived experience of the MCT and gain new personal understandings and insights into certain events and what may have shaped them. The study also offered participants a sense of altruism in terms of contributing to an area of research that concerns them, and which they would like to see more accurately understood and supported.

Increased knowledge base

As Bay-Cheng (2009) stated, researchers and human service professionals can "gain tremendously from the ability to collect and produce more accurate and sophisticated knowledge" which ultimately "trickles down to affect participants and their communities" (p. 245). Therefore, as well as benefiting participants in a personal and therapeutic sense, it is hoped that the findings of this study will also be of benefit to the researchers, organisations, practitioners, and other stakeholders that consume it, with the aim of providing new insights and knowledge pertinent to the MCT for children and young people. The ability of these stakeholders to gain more nuanced understandings of the complexities involved will in turn, help improve the existing knowledge base and support climate for these previously serving military populations.

Conclusion

The phenomenon of the MCT for children and young people was found to be a largely underexplored area of research. Further, there is a noticeable lack of self-reported experiences among this population generally. In response, this qualitative study sought to capture the potential perspectives and lived experiences of children and young people from military families when their parents leave the ADF. A total of adult 10 participants were interviewed, who were children and young people at the time their parents left the ADF. Their stories and recollections of the MCT contributed rich, in-depth data for analysis. Findings from this data are presented and discussed across Chapters 5–8.

Chapter 5 | Fields apart: Navigating the civil-military divide

Introduction

This chapter is the first of four chapters documenting findings from the 10 in-depth interviews. It presents and discusses the experiences of participants during their MCT in relation to a 'civil-military divide'. Findings reveal the distinct differences between military and civilian life in Australia, along with the impacts of these on the experiences of children and young people during the MCT. They also offer a segue into Bourdieusian analysis, by suggesting that the civil-military divide may be best conceptualised as the result of key differences between military and civilian 'fields.' An ensuing discussion highlights the need for greater examination of the role of Bourdieu's concepts in this space, as well as improved strategies and supports to strengthen civil-military relations and help foster more positive MCT experiences for children and young people. The chapter begins with a recap of literature on the civil-military divide, followed by the demographic profile of participants, key findings, and discussion. In keeping with the interpretive constructivist paradigms, and the reflexive and ethical principles underpinning the analyses, all findings have been reported in a way that reflects participants' stories as accurately as possible.

Understanding and conceptualising the civil-military divide

To recap findings from the literature review, Australian civilians often engage with the ADF only through news coverage of casualties or other major events, and civil-military relations are usually only discussed within the realms of military operations and defence policy. This can lead to disconnection from, and misinformation about, the experiences of military families (Daraganova et al., 2018; Muir, 2018)—a phenomenon described as the "familiarity gap" (Schafer, 2017; Williams, 2019). In turn, previously serving defence

families increasingly report feelings of isolation from broader society and a perceived lack of understanding by civilian society about the experiences of people from military backgrounds (Daraganova et al., 2018; Muir, 2018). This disconnect may therefore present certain challenges for families, children, and young people when they leave the defence force (Cooper et al., 2017, 2018; Williams, 2019).

According to Demers (2011), the civil-military divide is compounded in countries with an all-volunteer force, as civilian families in these countries often do not have direct contact with military personnel. In Australia, for example, defence families represent a much smaller subset of society than in countries with conscription (Fossey et al., 2019). As a result, there are fewer shared experiences (e.g., Fossey et al., 2019) and sharper 'cultural' distinctions between defence and civilian 'worlds', leading to disparate values, practices, and ideologies (Dobos, 2020). For example, military values such as sacrifice, camaraderie, patriotism, and discipline are often considered far less important and useful in the civilian world, where self-interest and autonomy are more highly regarded. Transitioning from a culture focussed on collective interests and into a highly individualistic one presents considerable adjustment challenges for military families (Fossey et al., 2019; Coll et al., 2011).

Cultural differences between defence and civilian life have been identified as necessary for maintaining the military's distinctiveness and efficiency as an institution (Collins & Holsti, 1999). However, these differences can also augment the social divide for military families upon transition. The 2019 Military Family Lifestyle Survey in the United States found that 50% of serving personnel, veterans and their families believed their local civilian communities had limited awareness, understanding, and respect for their experiences (Sonethavilay et al., 2019). Further, 40% of respondents did not feel a sense of

belonging to their civilian communities (Sonethavilay et al., 2019). Emerging research has also demonstrated that the cultural divide can give rise to a 'warrior-class consciousness'; a conscious separation by military families based on a sense that they are part of a superior class (Dobos, 2020). This can lead to contempt towards civilians, further jeopardising social relations and increasing the likelihood of transition challenges (Collins & Holsti, 1999).

Existing literature also highlights the frequent misrepresentation and stereotyping of defence families in media, film, and television, which serves to maintain, and likely increase, the civil-military divide (Hooyer et al., 2020; Parrott et al., 2020). For example, defence personnel and their families are often portrayed as either "superhuman" and "heroic", or "mad", "bad" and "damaged beyond repair" (Hooyer et al., 2020; Parrott et al., 2020). These extreme and unrealistic depictions are not only insensitive but can have a polarising effect on defence and civilian communities. By emphasising the 'worst' or the 'best' of things, these narratives tend to homogenise military families and emphasise their 'difference' from civilians, leading to increased stigma and lack of appropriate support, and ultimately, exacerbating transition challenges for military families (Fossey et al., 2019). Findings from this study build on the existing literature, by revealing some of the distinct experiences of children and young people when 'bridging' this civil-military divide during the MCT.

Demographic profile of participants

Table 3 presents the demographic profile of all 10 participants in the study.

Table 3. Participant demographics.

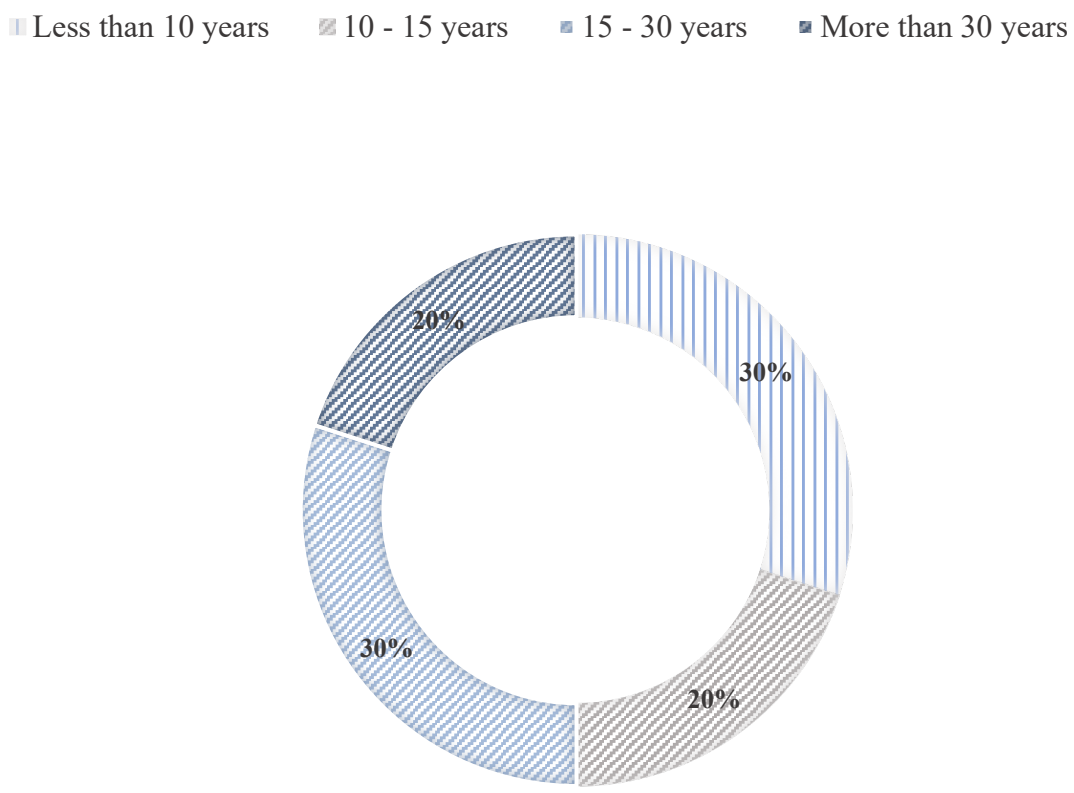
Participant pseudonyms	Gender	Age bracket at time of interview	Age bracket at time of transition	Time since family's transition	Parent's ADF organisation
Jasmine	F	20–25	15–20	1–6 years	Air Force
Samuel	M	30–35	10–15	17–22 years	Air Force
Grant	M	50–55	5–10	43–48 years	Navy
Jennifer	F	30–35	20–25	10–15 years	Air Force
Alice	F	25–30	20–25	2–7 years	Air Force
Catherine	F	25–30	20–25	5–10 years	Air Force
Georgia	F	15–20	5–10	8–13 years	Army
Clare	F	30–35	10–15	18–23 years	Army
Holly	F	50–55	15–20	33–38 years	Army
Lucy	F	35–40	20–25	15–20 years	Air Force

Of the 10 participants, two were men and eight were women living in Australia; all were aged between 5 and 25 years when their parents left the ADF and between 18 and 55 years at the time they were interviewed. In Table 3, participants' ages at both time of interview and at time of transition have been presented as an age range rather than their exact age for de-identification purposes. It is important to acknowledge that some participants were recalling their MCT experiences from several years ago; including one up to 48 years ago, when he was five years old. Although other participants had more recent experiences to reflect on, the limitations of extending the inclusion criteria and including the retrospective data of all participants need be considered.

Several authors have pointed out particular methodological limitations regarding oral history interviews with adults about their experiences as children or young people (Hardt & Rutter, 2004; Mechling, 1987; Wright & McLeod, 2012). In particular, concerns about memory discrepancy and social, cultural, and historical changes over time have been raised. According to Mechling (1987), an adult interviewee reflecting on their childhood, "will be perceiving and interpreting that childhood through their adult, learned categories—from adult notions of propriety to the special vocabularies of popularised psychology" (pp. 580–581). Retrospective responses pertaining to one's autobiographical memory can also be functionally and structurally influenced by cultural and social narratives of childhood expressed in popular culture, which are generation specific and shift across time (Nelson, 2003).

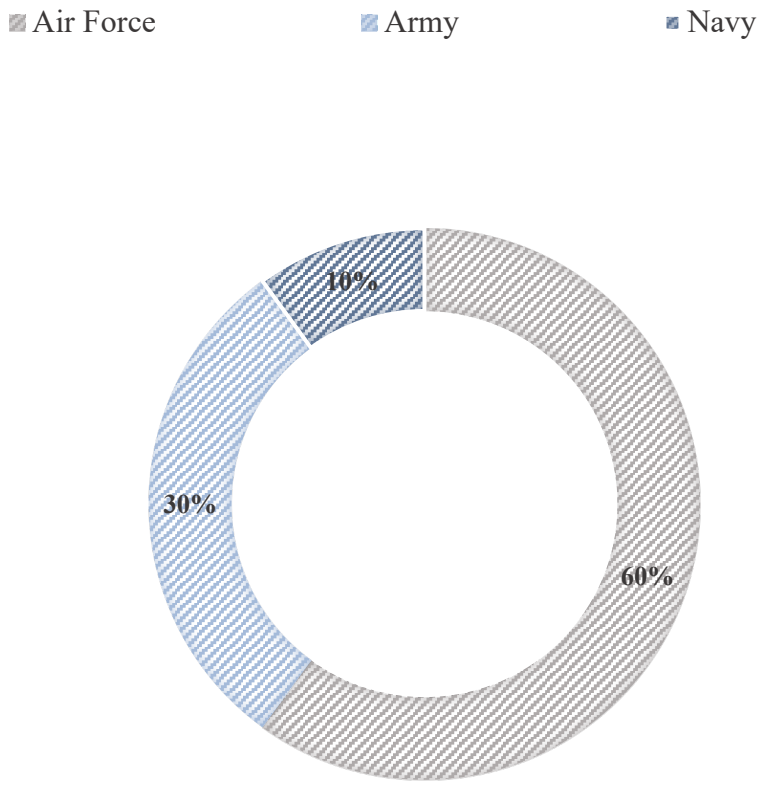
While many individuals construct their narratives of childhood and adolescence within the context of cultural representations that may not accurately correspond with real events, it is crucial to acknowledge that the multiple strands of nuanced information, and the subjective meanings within these oral histories, can be difficult to explore through other means (Smetackova et al., 2014). Further, there is inconclusive evidence that recollection of past events deteriorates substantially over time—particularly in relation to highly emotional domains (Bell & Bell, 2018). For these reasons, the benefits of self-report data from adults in this study regarding their recollections of the MCT as children and young people were seen to outweigh the limitations. A more detailed discussion of the decision to include all retrospective data, and to extend the inclusion criteria, can be found under the limitations subheading in Chapter 9. Below, Figures 3 and 4 provide percentage breakdowns of time since families' transitions and their relevant ADF organisations.

Figure 3. Time since families' transitions as percentage.



Three participants (30%) were from families who transitioned out of the ADF within the last 10 years, two (20%) were from families who made the transition 10–15 years ago, three (30%) were from families who transitioned 15–30 years ago, and two (20%) were from families who transitioned more than 30 years ago.

Figure 4. Parents' ADF organisations as percentage.



Six participants (60%) came from families who served in the Air Force**,** three (30%) from families who served in the Army**,** and one (10%) from a family who served in the Navy. Given the small sample size and over-representation of participants from Air Force families, findings from this study do not strongly represent the diversity of the Australian military community. This limitation is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 9.

Findings

Within the context of the civil-military divide, three core themes were identified: (i) difficulty relating — "I just didn't get it, and none of them got me", (ii) assumptions, stereotypes, and labelling — "it's all this stuff based off movies", and (iii) opportunities to

bridge the gap — "it would be really helpful for civvies to understand". These are presented below.

Difficulty relating — "I just didn't get it, and none of them got me"

Difficulty relating was the most frequently reported experience recounted by participants when asked about their transition from military to civilian life. Many participants observed distinct differences in civilian characteristics, environments, and expectations, which resulted in a lack of empathy and understanding for the experiences of children and young people from defence families:

> I don't think people really comprehend the differences… we're such a disciplined unit of people that I don't think others really understand what it's like unless you're in it or have experienced it. (Jennifer)

One participant suggested that this lack of understanding was not intentional, but resulted from intrinsic differences between civilian and military worlds:

> It's really quite strange… you grow up with a, not an 'us' vs 'them' mentality, but civvies are completely different, and they just don't get it. (Georgia)

Another participant noted that the lack of exposure to the military settings contributed to a lack of familiarity with defence life, creating a mental divide:

> I guess it's—for other people, it's sort of like out of sight, out of mind, like they're not exposed to it, so it doesn't cross their mind. (Jasmine)

One participant, who had experienced military life both in the Australia and the United States, perceived a difference between the level of support provided to military families in

Australia compared to those in the United States, remembering less of a divide between defence and civilian communities in the United States, and a higher level of civilian understanding of military needs, at least in terms of supports and service provision:

> There's not much research into the ADF and families. We also get little support in Australia, being part of the ADF and ADF families. In fact, there's almost no support versus what we got when we lived in the States for seven years. What the military gets in the United States is far beyond what we get in Australia. (Catherine)

Participants also spoke about their own lack of understanding of civilian life, and the challenges they experienced conceptualising ideas, values and behaviours that were foreign to their own:

> I couldn't relate to them. I just couldn't… I couldn't relate to their interests, or their personalities, or their struggles. I just didn't get it, and none of them got me. (Georgia)

Several participants identified additional factors, such as high mobility and multiple community or school transitions, as barriers to forming meaningful connections and identifying with the experiences of civilian peers:

> I remember being probably about 14–15, and friends of mine talking about how they'd always lived in the one house. I thought that was such a strange concept [laughter]. I was like, why would you want to live in the one house for your whole life? It was such a foreign concept to me. (Jennifer)

Most participants reported being aware of, and impacted by, a sense of separation from civilian counterparts, both during and after their parents' service years. During the MCT, this divide grew most pronounced:

> I started school and both schools were on defence land, so they were basically defence schools. So, we had that in common. But when I got out it was all a bit different. (Grant)

This was particularly the case for participants who spent a great deal of time in defence housing, or in communities which were largely made up of military families:

> We became very segregated almost because people didn't understand Army Brats, as they used to call us. (Holly)

Participants who lived in military housing as children and young people experienced the civil-military divide more acutely during the MCT:

> When their parents leave or when they enter the civilian world for the first time, because before that, I'd never done any normal civilian stuff… you'd drive through the base and your parents would pick you up in their army uniform. The activities… you'd talk about army stuff and what your parents do in the army. When we would paint, we would paint on the back of old tactical maps… it was kind of weird actually. (Georgia)

However, participants who attended civilian schools or lived off base as children and young people also found it difficult to form a connection with civilian peers:

> Even though we went to school with civvies… even though we went to a normal school, it was still difficult to form relationships because we just didn't know how to do it because we weren't all in the same boat. (Holly)

Several participants reported experiencing bullying from civilian children because they were "different" or viewed as "the odd one out":

> They (civilians) were the outside kids to what I was being brought up in. So, I was trying to relate to them, but I can't, so that's probably why I got bullied right through from kindergarten to Year 12. (Samuel)

Experiences of bullying made it more difficult for participants to have the capacity to cope with the challenges of the MCT.

Assumptions, stereotypes, and labelling — "it's all this stuff based off movies"

Many participants spoke of a lack of civilian knowledge and awareness about the military world, and about the diverse roles people can hold within the defence force:

> You'd say, my Dad is in the RAAF, and they'd just automatically assume he's a pilot. (Jennifer)

Some described distressing social interactions in which they were exposed to hurtful assumptions and stereotypes about military personnel and their families. For example, one participant recounted a time when she told someone that her mother was in the Army, and the person responded that her mother was "a killer". Another participant described a similar experience:

> I was talking to someone at a party… I mentioned my parents were in the defence force, and it was this, oh, they're murderers. It's hard to connect with people because you don't know what you're going to get from them. You don't know what they're going to think of your family. People make this assumption that all soldiers love following orders and are strict to a tee. (Georgia)

However, language used in some of the interviews also suggested that the divide is maintained by both civilian children, as well as young people from military families. This was apparent through descriptions of civilian peers as "less mature", "less obedient" and "carefree".

When confronted with critiques of military issues or decisions, many participants found it difficult to distance themselves from their military identity, experiencing pressure from civilians to defend the military and uphold the ideologies of the defence force, irrespective of its actions:

> People expect whenever there's a military issue, well, you've got to be defending the military, don't you? There's a presumption that because you have this tie to the army, you must love them and excuse everything they do, where it's really not the case. When you care about something, you usually call it out on the negative things because you want it to be better. (Georgia)

One participant noted that the film and the media "over-romanticise" ADF events, celebrations, or remembrance dates, leading to misunderstandings about "defence people":

> There's this assumption that obviously they're mentally deranged because they're ex-army, and they've seen things, and they can't work in teams. It's all this stuff

> based off movies. People make that assumption about defence people… but it's the complete opposite. (Georgia)

At times, assumptions and stereotypes about military families led to unhelpful labelling of children and young people from defence families and the provision of well-intended support that exacerbated feelings of separation from their civilian peers:

> If you enrolled in your school and they say what your parents do and stuff, you always get flagged and you're put into the support groups, like, oh, you're a defence kid… this lady would organise for us to go bowling and go laser-tag and stuff for us… my friends weren't in that, so I didn't really participate in it as much as I should have. I always thought, oh, some of those other kids, they're really weird [laughs]… I don't want to go in there. (Jasmine)

Opportunities to bridge the gap — "it would be really helpful for civvies to understand"

While all participants shared difficult or challenging experiences of the civil-military divide, many also recounted positive transition experiences and opportunities for bridging the gap. One participant spoke about the importance of sharing "fun" defence experiences with civilians and accurately educating them about military life and culture:

> The defence events that we went to were like Christmas parties, and fairs, and things like that, so they were really fun… and kind of cool, I suppose, for the friends I took with me, because they never would have otherwise gone to the base. (Alice)

Others noted the importance of "leaning into" and embracing the differences between military and civilian life to appreciate the diversity of experience and the opportunity to

form friendships that offer new learning experiences or perspectives on life. One participant described the civil-military divide as necessary to protect "regular people" from "the bad things in the world":

> I think a lot of army people would say it's a good thing there's a divide. There's a reason they made those sacrifices, so regular people don't have to experience bad things in the world. (Georgia)

This participant also highlighted the need to "educate people that the army isn't the same thing for everyone", suggesting that:

> It would be really nice to have some sort of open forum where civvies can ask open questions without the army breathing down your neck and saying, give this answer or you're in trouble… I think it would be really helpful for civvies to understand. (Georgia)

Most participants reported a sense of social comfort and solidarity with other children and young people from military families with whom they had shared experiences:

> It's funny… if I came across other kids whose parents or father had been in the military… I would feel more comfortable around those kids because of that experience they had as well. (Grant)

One participant explained how these shared experiences of military life and the MCT were particularly important social supports during their transition, when many others didn't understand:

> RAAF kids just understood… we were all kind of the same… they'd be a little bit more understanding around all the changes, whereas the non-military kids wouldn't really understand. (Jennifer)

In this way, defence solidarity appeared to help soften the impacts of the divide for some participants and reassure them that they were not alone during their transition. These experiences tended to demonstrate the way children and young people from military families were ultimately able to draw on their existing strengths, assets, and social resources to buffer against other negative impacts of the divide.

Discussion

Findings from this subset of data reveal new insights into the concept of a 'civil-military divide' in Australia, and its impacts on the psychosocial wellbeing of children and young people during the MCT. These include an obvious disconnect between the lives of civilian and military-connected children and young people reported by participants and the difficulty they have relating to one another or forming meaningful and lasting connections. They also include the narrow, and non-representative assumptions and stereotypes about defence life reinforced through the media, which lead to further discrepancies in civilian understandings about military family experience and vice versa. These findings suggest that there is an important need to foster increased understanding and social connection between military and civilian communities, particularly during periods like the MCT where the sociocultural elements of these two worlds collide.

Several participants reported considerable differences between their everyday activities, hobbies, interests, and environmental surroundings of the military setting, and those of "civvies" growing up. They also reported the way in which these differences

evoked an *us* versus *them* mentality upon transition. For participants in this study, these issues were largely attributed to the different sets of cultural values, ideologies, and experiences between their own lives, and the lives of their civilian peers, which was found to be consistent with the existing literature on the experiences of previously serving men and women (Cooper et al., 2017, 2018; Daraganova et al., 2018; Dobos, 2020; Muir, 2018). Further, most children and young people in the civilian setting do not directly experience military service in action; nor do they understand the defence way of life, or what it's like growing up as part of a military family. For many participants, these differences became particularly challenging during the MCT period, as it demanded them to quickly assimilate into a sociocultural space with rules, customs, and general interests with which they struggled to identify (Fossey et al., 2019; Coll et al., 2011). Findings therefore suggest that this is a period in which the civil-military divide may have a particularly profound impact on the experiences of children and young people from military families.

Participants in this study also described how they were subjected to bullying or hurtful stereotyping based on generalisations or assumptions made by civilians who didn't understand their experiences. Situations in which their parents were framed as violent, murderous, or supportive of military scandals were considered cruel and upsetting by participants and did not accurately reflect their experiences, their families' experiences, or the overall values of the military community. For many participants, such interactions resulted in poor or damaged relationships with their peers and a sense of hostility and distrust towards civilians. These findings are consistent with existing literature (e.g., Hooyer et al., 2020; Parrott et al., 2020; Pedlar et al., 2019) and demonstrate how children and, potentially other family members, share in certain cultural challenges experienced by

previously serving men and women during the MCT. However, some of the language used by participants to describe their civilian peers also demonstrated how stereotypes are reciprocated by military communities and therefore, may serve as an additional barrier to forming meaningful connections and bridging the divide.

Participants also described the impact of the media and the way in which it operates to reinforce traditional or outdated views of the military community, misrepresenting their true lived experiences and tainting public perceptions of contemporary military families. This included frustrations around the media over-romanticising war and the defence community based on major events like ANZAC or Remembrance Days, and at the opposite end of the spectrum, negative scandals which give all military personnel and their families a "bad rap". According to participants, these sorts of stories are to blame for the bullying and exclusion many of them received during their MCT. According to Szayna et al. (2007), these skewed and unrealistic ideas reinforced in mainstream culture also erode opportunities for the development of tailored supports which recognise the everyday experiences, strengths, and assets of military families during the MCT, as well as their contribution to society and their important place in the broader community.

Despite the intrinsic differences between defence and civilian communities, it is important to understand that military families, children, and young people form a critical part of our broader society and do share common ground with their civilian counterparts (Kranke et al., 2019). Findings from this study revealed encouraging ways in which children and young people from military spheres can reimagine positive alternatives to some of their MCT challenges and envision opportunities that can allow them to thrive in the civilian world. This was reflected by participants who acknowledged the importance of sharing certain aspects of their military life with civilian friends, as a way of bridging the

divide and breaking down social barriers or misunderstandings. These findings demonstrate how children and young people can draw on their creative strengths and adaptive assets during the MCT—qualities inherent among military communities which are well-documented in the literature (Capp et al., 2017; Easterbrooks, et al., 2013).

Findings also allude to the importance of seeking solidarity between children and young people from military and civilian families based on these strengths, assets, and adaptive qualities, as opposed to focussing on their innate differences and the challenges they are faced with. Drawing on existing military connections and those who had experienced similar circumstances, or who shared in children and young peoples' military knowledge and backgrounds were also found to be important sources of support for many participants when they had trouble relating to their civilian peers. These findings extend on the observations of Rogers-Baber (2017) around the importance of mobilising existing military supports as strong protective factors during major life events such as the MCT. However, these findings also appeared to be in direct contrast with other participants' observations that not all children and young people from military families are the same and that they would like others to understand the differences. Such contradictions reflect the overall complexity of needs among military communities and families during the MCT and demonstrate the importance of not viewing them as a homogenous group, although distinct from the civilian community (Kranke et al., 2019).

Ultimately, findings from this study suggest that the civil-military divide is a two-way street, where some military families lack knowledge about life outside the defence force, just as civilians tend not to understand aspects of military life. To build a more complete story about the civil-military divide and its impact on the experiences of children and young people during the MCT, there is a critical need for further qualitative research

which seeks the personal perspectives of children and young people from both military and civilian backgrounds. There is also a need to foster a more inclusive society into which children and young people can transition. This should include mechanisms by which to connect and educate one another and share in the exchange of knowledge between military and civilian communities to quash existing stereotypes and assumptions. Acknowledging children and young people's unique military and civilian experiences as their own but also providing them with opportunities to share in their experiences with others will help strengthen civil-military relations and begin to bridge the divide. Here, Bourdieu's theoretical framework seems uniquely positioned to assist the process. Based on these findings, it seems feasible to conceptualise and explain, at least in part, the civil-military divide as the result of interaction, and struggle, across military and civilian 'fields', where children and young people from military families possess their own pre-existing habitus, knowledge, resources, and capital which differ from, or conflict with, those of their civilian peers. These ideas, and how they influence children and young people's experiences of the MCT, are explored in more depth throughout the next chapter.

Conclusion

Findings presented in this chapter suggest there are several sociocultural differences between military and civilian life in Australia, which result in distinctions between ideas, actions, and perceptions between the two, and therefore serve to maintain the civil-military divide. During the MCT, this divide can lead to a range of psychosocial impacts on the experiences of children and young people from military families. As discussed, these findings indicate characteristics of separate cultural milieus or 'fields', congruent with the work of Bourdieu. The next chapter expands on this idea by exploring a subset of empirical findings from the research where Bourdieu's concepts of capital, field, and

habitus were drawn on to analyse and interpret the adjustment experiences of participants during the MCT.

Chapter 6 | Bourdieu applied: Exploring the transferability of capital and habitus during the military-civilian transition

Introduction

The next set of findings outlined in this chapter explores key theoretical insights supported by the empirical data, after applying Bourdieu's concepts—*habitus, field,* and *capital*—to analyse and interpret the experiences and adjustment of participants when their families transitioned from military to civilian life (i.e., different social 'worlds' or 'fields', as explored in Chapter 5). The chapter begins with a recap of Bourdieu's key theoretical concepts applied in the research, followed by key findings, and a discussion surrounding the overall role of Bourdieu's concepts in explaining the experiences of children and young people during the MCT.

Bourdieu applied: Habitus, field, and capital in the military-civilian transition

In his theory of social practice, Bourdieu described three interrelated concepts—*habitus, field,* and *capital*. He used these to explain how different cultural groups operate according to their own sets of rules and accepted norms, and how members of these groups become social actors directed by these cultural parameters (Cooper et al., 2017, 2018). To recap the theoretical framework presented in Chapter 3, individuals who are more familiar with the rules of a particular field, and who possess high levels of capital valued within that field, tend to possess a well-formed habitus with increased chances of success in that environment (Crossley, 2008; Ergler & Wood, 2018). Bourdieu referred to this as 'accomplishment' (Bourdieu, 2006). Conversely, habitus developed in one field can be out of place in another due to the potential for limited 'transposability' of certain forms of

capital into other fields, leading to a state of hysteresis—a mismatch between one's taken for granted world and the new 'rules of a game' (Bourdieu, 2006). From this perspective, the forms of capital with the highest value, irrespective of different fields, are those which are both well-formed and highly transposable. Application of Bourdieu's work in the current study aimed to explore and understand participants' own transition experiences as children and young people and how they mobilised their knowledge and resources as forms of capital when moving from military to civilian fields—separate cultural milieus with distinct 'rules of the game'.

Findings

Within this sub-set of findings, psychosocial issues related to capital, identity, and the habitus during the MCT were expressed by participants across four major themes, including: (i) cultural capital, (ii) social capital, (iii) symbolic and economic capital, and (iv) identity and the habitus. These themes are reported on below.

Cultural capital

One of the most important findings was the role that cultural resources—or various forms of cultural capital—play when growing up in or moving between settings which place different values on certain types of knowledge, skills, tastes, clothing, beliefs, behaviours or mannerisms and material belongings. This includes the ways certain cultural resources accrued by participants' during their parents' time in the ADF were either beneficial, or unhelpful when it came to their transition to the civilian world, and the ways this impacted on their MCT experience.

Several participants reported that during their transition out of the ADF, their knowledge and the language they grew up using as "Military Brats" was not understood, or

appreciated by others in the civilian world, which led to feelings of shame and inadequacy when among their peers, and difficulty connecting with others from non-military backgrounds.

> I guess it's sort of like, just like the knowledge kind of thing is the big difference. Obviously, I have some kind of understanding of what the Air Force does, or what the Army does, or what the Navy does. I guess some people just don't really think of that. I'd be like oh, my Dad is in the Air Force. They'd be like, what do they even do, kind of thing. But I don't know, sometimes—I guess maybe the language that I would use… it would be like, oh, what are you talking about? (Jasmine)

In addition to knowledge and language differences, several participants also drew on their experiences of the MCT in relation to distinctions between military clothing, styles, tastes, and hobbies and those of other children and young people in the "civilian world" and the way they felt segregated as a direct by-product of different values assigned to their pre-existing capital. One participant explained:

> I get to school, and I've never played these sports. I've never done these things that other kids have… I'd never done any normal civilian stuff. You'd drive through the base to get to kindy, and your parents would pick you up in their Army uniform. The activities at kindy, you talk about Army stuff and what your parents do in the Army. I just remembered, when we would paint, we would paint on the back of old tactical maps… everything you do is Army. You play a sport? You play for the Army sport team… You have a hobby? Well, you do that with all your Army friends, and you might meet a civilian along the way but not likely, because you've already got your little group. (Georgia)

For many participants, these distinctions between different forms of valued capital led to several challenges such as difficulty fitting in with their new surroundings, feelings of isolation due to not being able to relate to different tastes valued by civilian communities, and uncertainty around what to wear and how to behave—leading to a sense of inadequacy in their new environment which could be quite deflating:

> You're completely taken away from your circle, so you're taken away from an environment where you're told what to do, you're told what time to be somewhere, you're told what time lunch is… So, when you've been known as a defence member for so long and then suddenly, you're not, and you get to choose what you want to wear and how you dress and how you act, that can change you and that sometimes can be really hard. (Clare)

These experiences demonstrate how tastes and choices are mediated by the habitus and highlight some of the challenges experienced by participants when they suddenly found their pre-existing tastes and choices being judged in an unfamiliar field. While many experienced long-term struggles navigating these new rules and translating their military capital into tangible forms recognised by the civilian community, others drew on their adaptive qualities such as focussing on the opportunities to explore new tastes or acquire new forms of capital that would help them succeed in the civilian space:

> It was after leaving the Army, that I realised I could have my own sense of style and I could have my own personality and I could have my own whatever. I could do that all on my own. I didn't need to conform… I think that was the start of my rebellion for my own personality. (Holly)

Several participants also described how these sorts of cultural experiences and resources helped foster "resilience" and independence, which subsequently translated into other positive opportunities during their transition:

> We just learnt to adapt with anything that would happen and I think that's what defence gives you… we ironed our own uniform, we made our own lunches, because that's what you did, because Mum was working and Dad was away, there's no one else that was going to do it, so you just learn to be quite resilient and quite independent, which I think are really good traits and something that you actually don't see with a lot of the generation coming through at the moment. (Clare)

While not all participants had experiences of high mobility during their parents' service years, due to different living arrangements on and off base, a handful had experienced nomadic lifestyles, with multiple moves to different areas of the country, and therefore several school transitions—a unique form of lifestyle and associated forms of knowledge and experiences that tend not to be as prominent among civilian youth. While some described how it was nice to be able to "finally set up roots" once their parents left the ADF, others spoke of the discontent they experienced after being accustomed to a nomadic lifestyle for so long.

> We moved every two years. I went through nine different schools because of the military, kind of thing. So, life was always, we were always on the move and… I suppose I was never used to being somewhere for a long time… I was also kind of never able to be on a sports team… so, even just that kind of stuff was—it was difficult… So, when I was finally able to move out, I was kind of excited about findings roots and having a career and—yes, kind of starting a life away from moving with the military and things like that. I mean, I slowly—I realised very

> quickly that that's not what I wanted. That I did kind of like living a nomadic life [laughs]. (Catherine)

Another cultural challenge expressed by a handful of participants included perceived differences in maturity between themselves and civilian children and young people from an early age, and therefore the difficulties they experienced when trying to relate or connect with them.

> You do get pushed to grow up a little bit quicker, at least in my circumstances… you are forced to mature a little bit... even when my parents left, they still had that Army mentality of, I've got to constantly work, work, work… their work hours didn't change. They didn't become suddenly really active in my life. I had trouble relating. As I said, I looked at other kids and I found—it sounds really weird and very uptight of me—I found their troubles very frivolous, silly, just because of what I'd been through. I found everyone really immature, I guess just because I had to grow up very quickly in certain ways… I had trouble relating, and I had trouble with just that difference in maturity... I just struggled to make those connections because everyone was just childish to me. (Georgia)

These sorts of challenges were also found to be the case for several participants in terms of the values and beliefs they developed over their years growing up in a military setting; many of which tended to be at odds with those of children and young people from non-military families. One participant explained:

> I think a lot of military people have a strong sense of ethics and justice, and when their idea of ethics and justice isn't met in the real world, which it often isn't, it's

> very hard to cope. I had a lot of issues with homophobia and ableism… I publicly stood up and said, hey, this isn't right, and I got suspended for it. (Georgia)

While all interviewees highlighted their experiences in relation to the distinction between cultural resources valued in military settings and those valued in civilian settings, several participants also made a point of emphasising the subcultural elements within the ADF itself:

> People don't realise there's culture differences between Navy, Air Force, and Army. There are cultural differences between the individual parts of the organisation too… like, my Dad was intelligence, then there's infantry, signals, logistics, etc. There are also culture differences depending on what base you're on… they're going to have their own slang and their own terms. (Georgia)

According to participants, these "within culture" cultures can greatly influence the resources, capital, and experiences of children and young people who grow up in different sectors of the ADF. Therefore, just as children and young people from military backgrounds differ in their tastes and choices to those of their civilian peers, differences between the tastes and choices of individuals from military backgrounds must also be considered. However, participants also stressed that although vast, these in-group differences were still not as pronounced as those between military and civilian experiences, as they still managed to find more "common ground" with individuals from other military backgrounds.

Social capital

In addition to the possession and mobilisation of cultural capitals, interviews also revealed the significance of social resources during the MCT. Participants drew on their experiences

of the different values, or perceived worth, placed on various relationships, networks, social skills and relational assets across military and civilian fields, and how these experiences therefore helped or hindered their transition.

For some participants, transition into civilian life illuminated the way certain military connections and social supports were advantageous for their social advancement in the defence community, but less so in the "real world", where the same relationships and networks were either absent, or not considered as valuable. One participant explained:

> You go from this tightly knit community where you're living in a tribe-based society where you have this constant support, to living in the real world where everyone is very loosely interconnected. There's no one watching your back but yourself. There's no one providing that intimate support all of the time. (Georgia)

Another participant spoke of a similar experience, where on base, she felt a sense of belonging given her father's social standing and by drawing on his existing networks—something that she couldn't do in the civilian world:

> It never felt like I'm going to the defence force base, and I have to act in a particular way. I could still be myself, because everyone works with Dad and knows him, so there's that connection. It never felt like it was a scary place. (Alice)

Interestingly, a couple of participants described their acknowledgement of the different social resources they would need leading up to their parents' ADF exit, and how they made the decision to "cut ties" with the military connections they believed would not be as helpful in the "real world". This included "steering clear" of military life even before transitioning into the civilian world because they knew the ADF wasn't going to be "holding our hand anymore".

However, many other participants saw a great deal of value in their pre-existing military ties and social relations with those who had shared backgrounds in defence, as these kinds of social supports helped buffer against some of the other challenges associated with the MCT and allowed them to maintain connection to their "defence family". For one participant, this meant that life after transition was able to stay relatively the same in a lot of positive ways:

> In terms of defence connectedness, that didn't really change much after my parents left. Even after they left, we were still seeing the same family friends. My Godmother is ex-Army and so is her husband… I grew up calling this couple Uncle and Aunt, even though we weren't related… I grew up with their kids, it was like I was an older sister. So, I guess it didn't really change that much. (Georgia)

For some, seeking out relationships with others who had shared military backgrounds also became a useful social resource to help make sense of life in the civilian world:

> I think it's good, because now that I have a couple of friends who are in the same situation to me, I've been able to go, oh, it's not just me. My friend and I, we're very similar. We're both very disciplined, very strict on ourselves, and workaholics etc. Whereas my other friends don't understand why I'm constantly working and pushing myself, and how I'm happy to have some downtime and a bit of fun, but then there's a point where I go, that's too much, stop it. (Georgia)

The value of having a mix of pre-existing military and non-military social relations leading up to, and during, the MCT was also found to be of importance when transitioning. Participants described how having these sorts of mixed military and non-military connections allowed for the mobility of social resources across what they referred to as

"both worlds" which was helpful during the adjustment to civilian life as it fostered the maintenance of meaningful networks, as well as providing an opportunity for social adjustment and advancement in the civilian world, demonstrating the interrelation between social and cultural forms of capital. One participant explained:

> If you've purely got a friendship circle that is defence, you don't have anyone that can share that with you. But when you've got a friendship circle that's a mixture of both, you see what people who aren't defence can do and how they act and dress and everything. That gives you a bit more of a norm. (Clare)

However, these sorts of mixed military and non-military connections were not always possible, particularly in instances where family moved around a lot and therefore weren't able to maintain relationships with civilians, or even drifted apart from their own civilian families, and therefore did not have these connections that may have been otherwise helpful resources during the MCT:

> My Dad didn't have that [civilian] family to rely on when he left, which I think might have made things worse… it's just that it's hard to keep in contact when you're constantly being posted and moving. (Jasmine)

For others though, experiences of high mobility and multiple geographical relocations allowed them to meet a whole range of people from different areas and diverse cultures:

> We had a lot of military friends because there were all the foreigners. We used to hang around with the British and the Danish and the other Australians and things. When you move to a new city and you're introduced to people, then you're just kind of like, okay, these are my people now and we hang out and we have a good

> time together… I can go in and make friends anywhere. I attribute that to the lifestyle that I've led. (Catherine)

According to these participants, such experiences enhanced their ability to connect with others from diverse backgrounds which enriched their quality of social capital. Because this was transferable to the civilian field, it became advantageous during the MCT and buffered against other challenges associated with forming meaningful connections.

Symbolic and economic capital

When discussing sociocultural capitals in the context of the MCT, participants also pointed out the resources that were distinctly related to class, honour, and prestige. In many instances, these concepts were also tied to economic and financial resources and advantage, or disadvantage. Therefore, this section reports on findings related to both symbolic and economic forms of capital and the ways in which certain values placed on individuals or families in the military are based on the types of resources, knowledge, social standings and ranks they hold. Often, these play an important role in shaping MCT experiences. For example, several participants spoke of how symbolic capital manifested through shifts in their social status across military and civilian worlds, including their general social experience and ease of access to certain places or resources when a parent's military rank decreased in recognition or value in the civilian community:

> Well, with defence kids, especially if your parent is an officer, you're expected to dress a certain way, because you go to different sorts of events and everything like that. People recognise who you are and who your parents are. My father was quite high up in defence when he left, so then that changes, and they don't recognise it.

> You get the flexibility of you're going somewhere, but you're not going there where your father's a senior officer. You're just going there with your Dad. (Clare)

Another participant explained how prior to leaving the ADF, her father's high rank in the Army proved advantageous in forming friendships, but this was not the case once his rank became irrelevant in the civilian world:

> It took us a while to form friendships [in the civilian world], because prior to that, forming friendships was very easy… My father, being a Regimental Sergeant Major, they were the ones that used to socialise and have everyone over. It was always considered to be an honour to have Dad and his family over for dinner. (Holly)

When it came to other fields—like seeking employment in the civilian setting—a higher rank proved to be more beneficial, buffering against potential familial and financial challenges that may have otherwise led to negative outcomes:

> Because of the ranking and the level of training that he had done, yeah, you'd tend to find those people, when they get out, there's absolutely no issues finding a job. (Clare)

However, this was not the case for most participants, many of whom described considerable employment challenges for their parents during the MCT, likely due to having a lower rank during their time in the defence force, and a higher degree of difficulty transferring military skills into the civilian workforce.

> Both my parents really struggled with that. Dad was in and out of work. We were very financially unstable for a while. They made decent money in the Army… we

> lived comfortably, but yeah, when they left the Army things were very tight for a while because they couldn't find suitable work. (Georgia)

Other common experiences among participants included challenges associated with the differing financial demands of military life versus non-military life and unfamiliar economic structures in civilian life:

> I think when my parents left, they did a short leaving course, which wasn't really helpful. It didn't actually teach you how to live in the real world. There was nothing about how to manage finances or, oh, by the way, in the late'80s we introduced this thing called Medicare. You've been in for the last 30 years so probably haven't heard of it but here's how it works… (Georgia)

Participants reported the difficulties their families faced because of their lack of economic resources or financial knowledge required for success in relation to these new and unfamiliar structures.

Identity and the habitus

When reflecting on their MCT, several participants reported on the challenges they faced associated with losing or trying to maintain their military identity—their way of life and "all they knew"—when transitioning into the civilian world. Interestingly, this was the case irrespective of how many years their parents served, and when their families left the ADF, hinting at the profoundness of being part of a military family. One participant explained:

> It's funny, now that you say that, I'm realising, wow, it is actually a really strong part of my identity… even after they left, I still felt it was a very strong part of my

> identity. I still consider myself an Army brat, because it did develop a lot of parts of my personality and what I value. (Georgia)

While many participants reported feeling this sense of identity loss, or great difficulty adjusting to civilian ways of life on a personal level, several also reported similar experiences in relation to their feelings towards their parents' struggles and loss of military identity. One participant described this experience of empathy:

> I really struggled with that's not my Dad, that's not what my Dad looks like kind of thing… he lost his identity as a person and I lost the identity that I held of my Dad that I had for such a long time as well, so yeah, just those sorts of things and different experiences obviously. This was my Dad—and people would say, what do your parents do? I'd say my Dad is in the RAAF and it was just what I knew. Then when he didn't do that anymore, it's kind of like well what do I say now? (Jennifer)

A few participants even described how military life was such an important part of their identity that it became very difficult to part with it and later sought to return, due to their ingrained cultural ways of military life being at the core of who they saw themselves as. One participant described this:

> When I think about it, and it was a while ago but it's probably the time I have the strongest memories of. When I think about it—yeah, my whole interest as a kid was the fact my parents were in the Army, and I wanted to do that. That was everything I was about. (Georgia)

Another added:

> I've got two brothers and they have both gone into similar careers, one's in the police force and the other's gone into the Army, so he's followed Dad into the military. They both had that same sort of regimented kind of thing and yeah, so that's very much presented itself in them as well. (Jennifer)

For other participants, the desire to return was coupled with the degree of difficulty they had assimilating into the different and often opposing ways of life in the civilian world, hinting at the lack of a well-formed habitus equipped to play the civilian 'game'. For this reason, they experienced extended periods of isolation in the civilian setting due to their military identity and accrued capital not being valued in the same way they were during their years in the defence community.

> I felt quite negative in those days… there was a whole bunch of loss going on in my life. We'd gone from having this identity where we were connected to the Army to this identity where we were just a totally separate entity I suppose. (Grant)

However, a couple of other participants expressed their "resentment" towards military life and feel they never truly belonged to the world of defence. One participant described the MCT as more of a "liberating" experience, despite experiencing some inevitable adjustment challenges. Only one participant, however, reported not feeling any sense of real military identity at all. She suggested the ADF isn't as distinguished from the civilian world as perhaps other countries' militaries are (e.g., the United States). She explained:

> Definitely not in Australia. I mean, just no—there is absolutely no—I mean, I don't think there's much of an identity for military in Australia. There's no accolades. I mean, for Remembrance Day, ANZAC Day of course. But they're singular days

> during the year. So, no, I don't think in Australia, there was no identity, and we didn't have other military friends that we go together with. (Catherine)

However, this participant's experiences of growing up as part of a military family were quite different from other interviewees, including a high degree of international mobility and therefore the opportunity to compare other defence cultures to that of the ADF. She also explained how her non-military parent "kept them away from it all a bit", which could also explain the lack of strong military identification.

Despite specific challenges, a few participants considered the MCT to be a time of real opportunity to discover new ways of life, branch out, expand their identities and explore the "new". When asked what advice they would give to children and young people who are currently facing the transition out of the ADF with their families, one participant said:

> I think maybe tell them to do what they want to do. Finally, now, their lives are no longer restricted by the military. They can kind of go now and do what they want to do and if they want to form roots somewhere, then they can… So yeah, just do what you want to do and now you don't have the ADF holding you back anymore, kind of thing [laughs]. (Catherine)

Another added their opinion on the importance of time in being able to experiment and learn new ways of civilian life when their parent left the defence force; to discover new parts of themselves and their identity:

> It was time to evolve, and it was time to learn. Dad wasn't in the Army anymore… he cut that ribbon and I could start to experiment a little bit. We still had curfews and other things but that all evaporated over time… I went through a phase of

> going to nightclubs and got caught a few times too, so I was just testing the waters as well, I think. (Holly)

For many participants, this identity work was incredibly important in defining who they were outside of the military and gave them an opportunity to grow and nurture a habitus that could go on to achieve success in both military and civilian fields.

Discussion

Although emerging literature suggests that many children and young people from military families adjust well to civilian life, it is believed that others experience unique challenges that can impede a healthy transition. These sorts of challenges include a loss of role, identity, or purpose; finding civilian life chaotic and without clear structure or direction; feeling isolated or different from their civilian peers; and struggling to develop new friendships or experiencing a lack of understanding from others in relation to their military background—particularly when the resources or capital they have acquired during their defence years turn out to be of less value, or irrelevant in, the civilian world (Cooper et al., 2017, 2018). While their work did not explicitly examine the experiences of children and young people, Cooper et al. (2017, 2018) hypothesised that difficulties experienced during the MCT could well be a result of variations in their sociocultural experiences, and therefore the unique habitus they have formed because of their military upbringing in comparison to their civilian counterparts. Findings from this study have therefore expanded on the work of Cooper et al. (2017, 2018) to showcase the relevance of Bourdieu's theoretical concepts in relation to the experiences of children and young people during the MCT.

Findings from the interviews reflected concepts of cultural and social capital in relation to the MCT with several participants discussing differences between accepted norms, values, and behaviours of the military and those in the civilian world. More specifically, they emphasised the way certain values placed on their defence-related knowledge, language, cultural experiences, clothing, tastes, and social networks shifted upon their transition to civilian life, in both positive and negative ways. For most participants, these shifts presented obvious challenges. Reports of feeling isolated due to their unique military terminology and slang, and difficulty relating to their peers in relation to opposing ethical and political values were common.

For most participants, military-specific knowledge and skills were reported as irrelevant or unrecognised forms of capital in the civilian context, which led to difficulties assimilating into certain civilian groups or fields where particular interests, tastes, and choices, such as language, clothing, and hobbies, were incongruent to their own. Participants described these differences as confusing and challenging, given their social and cultural capitals held value prior to their family's transition and were considered quite normal in the military setting. These findings support existing literature which has compared MCT experiences to those of immigrants, who can often feel like strangers in their own country due to a disconnect between accepted forms of social habitus across different cultural fields (Atuel & Castro, 2018; Daniels, 2017; Orazem et al., 2017; Sheikh, 2013; Smith & True, 2014; Tkachuck et al., 2021). They also suggest that young people can experience a state of hysteresis, characterised by a disconnect between their habitus and the new 'rules of the game' in civilian life, demonstrating the relevance of Bourdieu's relational concepts (e.g., Bourdieu, 1984, 1986, 1990, 2006) in understanding children and young people's experiences of the MCT.

As well as demonstrating the relevance of Bourdieu's concepts, findings on conflicting identities, tastes, and choices during transition are consistent with the broader literature on children and young people's cultural and subcultural experiences (e.g., Hall & Jefferson, 1975; Johansson, 2017; Threadgold, 2018). According to Threadgold (2018) 'fitting in' is an extremely important concept for a child or young person's sense of identity and involves attention to a range of tastes and capitals which shape an individual's social status within a particular group or setting. They determine the level of power an individual holds within the 'dominant' or 'parent' culture based on their transferability from previous cultures or subcultures (Hall & Jefferson, 1975; Johansson, 2017). Because military life is so different to civilian life, children and young people's ability to explore and cultivate new identities upon transition can be difficult and complex. However, while many participants reported long term challenges translating their military capital and habitus into civilian norms, others drew on their adaptive qualities such as focussing on the opportunities to explore new tastes or acquire new forms of capital that would help them succeed in the civilian space. This is also consistent with the broader literature, which has shown that while many individuals cling to their culture—or habitus—of origin with a reluctance to acculturate (e.g., Kennelly & Dillabough, Pollock & Van Reken, 2009), others express mobile and aspirational identities—or habituses—allowing them to adapt to, and progress in, diverse cultural fields (Allen & Hollingworth, 2013). The identification and support of the opportunities that can arise from an experience of hysteresis, as well as the risks and challenges associated with it, is therefore critical.

In addition to differences in valued forms of capital between military and civilian worlds, findings also confirmed the importance of acknowledging culture as being practised and performed by individuals in different and sometimes contradicting ways,

even within the same cultural sphere (Pedlar et al., 2019). For example, a few participants pointed out the in-group differences within the ADF—that is, the dissimilarities between valued forms of cultural capital across separate branches of the military (e.g., Army, Air Force and Navy). One participant explained how these in group differences meant that it was not only difficult to connect with civilian peers, but at times, other military-raised individuals as well, as they are far from a homogenous group. It is therefore important to consider that not all children and young people from military families experience the MCT in the same way due to the mobilisation of different forms of capitals accrued across different socio- and sub-cultural settings (Pedlar et al., 2019). This may also be dependent on whether children and young people grow up on or off base, with immediate or extended family members, highly mobile or geographically stable, and several other factors, which require further empirical investigation.

Despite certain challenges, there was also an element of opportunity which came with the reported shifts in legitimate forms of capital across military and civilian fields. This was particularly apparent in relation to experiences of high mobility. Research has found that, on average, children and young people from military families experience nine school transitions, and multiple moves in and out of different communities or cultures, unlike many of their civilian peers (Milburn & Lightfoot, 2013; Gilreath et al., 2013). While, for some, this kind of nomadic lifestyle may indicate a form of poorly transposable cultural capital which could lead to feeling out of place in civilian life, or difficulty "setting up roots", findings from this study indicated it may also result in the development of adaptive forms of cultural capital due to exposure to multiple different social settings across time, which can in turn, act as a buffer against one's hysteresis and its associated challenges during the MCT. These findings also extend on the work of Benner et al. (2017)

by demonstrating how prior experiences of transition can influence how well a child or young person ultimately adjusts during other major life events such as the MCT, and ultimately their acculturation into civilian life.

Even for participants who were not as highly mobile during their parents' service years, positive experiences, and opportunities due to certain discrepancies between legitimised forms of capital across military and civilian worlds were reported. Rebelling, or experimenting by taking the opportunity to 'stray' from military norms and trial different tastes and behaviours in civilian life was found to be helpful for some participants, allowing them to navigate the MCT in their own way. According to Massia (2015), such behaviours are common among children and young people, as they attempt to 'find their own feet' and seek a sense of maturity and independence from their parents. From a Bourdieusian perspective, these findings indicate that whilst some MCT challenges are inevitable due to a different feel for the game and indeed, a different game itself, they may also result in an overarching sense of independence or resilience as by-products of the opportunity to explore new possibilities and acquire additional forms of capital, ultimately shaping their habitus to be one that is adaptable across, or between, fields (Bourdieu, 1993; Cooper et al., 2017, 2018).

In addition to complexities surrounding social and cultural forms of capital, findings suggest that some children and young people may also experience a sense of struggle during their MCT due to the loss of a particular social status, or hierarchical standing that they and their family held during their parent's time in the armed forces. While these forms of symbolic capital often afforded particular social roles or advantages within fields associated with defence, they tended to be far less profitable forms of capital in the civilian world, leading to a greater degree of difficulty socially—particularly when it

came to forming friendships or accessing certain other resources. Further, the ADF's provision of all-encompassing healthcare, housing and income support during parents' active years meant that many families lacked practical knowledge and experiences to help them navigate civilian systems and associated costs during and following their MCT. For this reason, they struggled with many aspects of life due to the majority of their military skills and knowledge being non-transferrable to civilian employment and financial or medical structures, leaving children and young people feeling as though their family's defence-related knowledge and skills were futile, or suffering financially—an issue extensively demonstrated across the existing literature (e.g., Ashcroft, 2016; Hollingshead, 1946; Pedlar et al., 2019; Robinson et al., 2017; Smith and True, 2014).

Also supportive of the literature (e.g., Lyne & Packham, 2014), were findings indicating a sense of social isolation when forced to adjust to life outside the military which often brought with it some degree of identity loss, or crises. According to Cruwys et al. (2014), social identities allow children and young people to see their "interests, attitudes, and behaviours as aligned with those of other members of the groups to which they belong, but as different from those of groups to which they do not belong" (p. 128). In this way, most participants experienced difficulties forming or maintaining relationships with their civilian peers during the MCT, due to opposing worldviews and social identities most likely influenced by differences in individual habituses formed over time (Hall, 2008; Wertsch, 1991). For example, children and young people from military families become aware of themselves at a young age and begin to form their personal and social identities based on the military ways of life (Kroger, 2007; Sneed et al., 2006; Stets & Burke, 2000). Like other subcultures, they obtain memberships and roles in specific groups, adopting the values and behaviours from the cultures of those groups (Johansson, 2017). The result is

that these social identities differ greatly to those of their civilian peers, leading to a disconnect between key enablers of social connection and sense of belonging. For this reason, identities are constantly evolving—particularly during life transitions from one culture to another like the MCT—and can serve both protective and adaptive functions, or present risks and challenges (Cruwys et al., 2014; Griffin & Stein, 2015; Haslam, et al., 2016).

Ultimately, some participants felt as though they struggled to form any kind of civilian identity, while others indicated they lost part of their military identity or felt stuck somewhere in between the military and civilian worlds. This supports Bourdieusian thought in that the incorporation of experiences in new or unfamiliar environments—or fields—is always shaped by the existing habitus, which may in this case, lead to conflicting identities (e.g., Cooper et al., 2017, 2018), or the magnetic 'push-pull' effect of fields described in the literature (Bigo, 2011; Grenfell & James, 2004). This could explain why several participants spoke of the importance of maintaining military connections during their MCT, and the value of both military and civilian social supports as useful forms of capital in their transition. This also supports earlier preliminary research which has shown that the ability to adjust to changes in social networks and resources when moving from military to civilian life is key to transition success (e.g., Atuel & Castro, 2018; Lancaster et al., 2018; Thompson et al., 2017), as is the development of feasible strategies for navigating the 'rules' of civilian fields (Cooper et al., 2017, 2018).

Conclusion

Findings presented in this chapter extend on previous applications of Bourdieu's theoretical framework in the context of the MCT. They explore the experiences of children and young people from military families and the role that habitus, field, and capital, play

during their transition. Findings reveal that understanding the mobilisation of military-accrued capital into civilian settings, and better supporting the habitus of children and young people could enhance the possibility of successful social, cultural, financial, and mental health outcomes during the MCT. Applying Bourdieu's framework can assist in understanding these processes by acknowledging competing resources, structures, and dispositions across military and civilian fields. The next chapter presents findings related to impacts on military family dynamics and the mental health of families, children, and young people during the MCT. Unlike Chapters 5 and 6, the next two findings' chapters (7 and 8) are presented in paper-style format as original manuscripts which have been published in peer-reviewed journals (more details on this are provided in the introduction of each individual chapter).

Chapter 7 | Military family dynamics in transition

Introduction

This chapter reports on the third subset of findings from the research, which explores impacts of the MCT on military family dynamics and the mental health of families, children, and young people. Unlike Chapters 5 and 6, this chapter is presented in the form of an original article which has been published in *Child & Family Social Work*—an international, peer-reviewed journal. To contextualise this subset of data, the researcher drew on the theoretical extensions of Bourdieu's concepts into psychological and emotional domains of capital and habitus (previously described in Chapter 3). In doing so, the paper explores the intra-familial and psychological aspects of the MCT. The published work presented in this chapter begins by outlining the abstract and keywords of the article. This is followed by a review of the relevant literature, a description of the methods used, and a presentation of key findings. The paper then leads into a detailed discussion of the findings presented, with reference to several implications for the social work discipline. Finally, it concludes with an overview of the key limitations of the study and a formal conclusion.

Original article published in *Child & Family Social Work*

Wells, H., Heinsch, M., Brosnan, C., & Kay-Lambkin, F. (2022). Military family dynamics in transition: The experiences of young people when their families leave the Australian Defence Force. *Child & Family Social Work, 27*(3), 454–464. https://doi.org/10.1111/cfs.12898

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Military family dynamics in transition: The experiences of young people when their families leave the Australian Defence Force

Abstract

Many families experience a smooth transition from military to civilian life. However, some can face intense challenges and significant disruption to family functioning, including mental health and substance use issues, domestic and family violence, marriage dissatisfaction or family breakdown, and even suicide. While some research has examined these transition experiences of ex-serving men and women, few studies have focussed on their children. Understanding the challenges and opportunities the military-civilian transition poses for young people is crucial if we are to develop effective interventions to meet their needs in the future. This paper reports on findings from a qualitative study that retrospectively explored the experiences of young people from ex-serving Australian Defence Force families when their parents left the military. Using thematic analyses, three key themes relating to military family dynamics were identified: (i) increased mental health stress, (ii) shifts in family relationships and dynamics, and (iii) domestic violence and maltreatment. These themes are discussed alongside the existing literature, revealing

the challenges experienced by young people during the military-civilian transition, but also their innate strengths and resources in coping with this major life event. Implications for the social work profession, and for developing effective transition supports for young people from ex-serving families are considered.

Keywords

Military-civilian transition, Australian Defence Force, veteran families, young people, mental health, domestic violence.

Introduction

Each year around 5000 military personnel and their families leave the Australian Defence Force [ADF], navigating what is known as the military-civilian transition [MCT] (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2017). The MCT refers to the period of permanent reintegration into civilian life from the defence force and encapsulates the process of change that a service person and their family necessarily undertake when their military career comes to an end (Cooper et al., 2017, 2018). Described as a complex process that can span several months or even years (e.g., Castro et al., 2015), the MCT often involves a number of sudden social, economic, and cultural changes for veterans and their families (Berle & Steel, 2015; Blackburn, 2016, 2017; Daraganova et al., 2018; Kintzle et al., 2016; MacLean et al., 2014; Muir, 2018; Robinson et al., 2017). Several authors have suggested that these changes have the potential to result in significant psychosocial difficulties or exacerbate existing stressors experienced by some military families (Blackburn, 2016, 2017; Cooper et al., 2017, 2018; Daraganova et al., 2018; Gewirtz et al., 2011; Hazle et al., 2012; Muir, 2018; Robinson et al., 2017; Rubin et al., 2013; Smith & True, 2014; Williamson et al., 2018).

Research has shown that military families experience higher rates of family stress and mental health diagnoses compared with their civilian counterparts, including PTSD (e.g., Duckworth, 2009; Newell, 2012), marital dissatisfaction (e.g., MacLean et al., 2014), aggression or violence (e.g., Galovski & Lyons, 2004; Gibbs et al., 2007), difficulties with communication and intimacy (e.g., Barnes & Figley, 2005), family breakdown (e.g., Laser & Stephens, 2011), vicarious trauma (e.g., Rayce et al., 2019; Reupert et al., 2013; Solomon et al., 1992), major depression (e.g., Brinker et al., 2007; Hutchinson & Banks-Williams, 2006), alcohol and other drug use (e.g., Jacobsen et al., 2001), and suicide (e.g., Oquendo et al., 2005). Adding to this, during the MCT, the sudden return of a family member into the household can require significant lifestyle adjustments and affect many essential aspects of family relationships and functioning (Barnes & Figley, 2005; Doyle & Peterson, 2005; Resnik et al., 2012). Difficulty finding civilian employment or transferring military skills into a new and unfamiliar workforce may be especially challenging for veterans, resulting in additional stress for an already fragile family system (Newell, 2012; Resnick & Rosenheck, 2008). It is therefore hardly surprising that some families can be pushed to breaking point during this major life event.

For young people, high levels of family stress and dysfunction can increase the risk of mental strain or emotional problems at home and in school (e.g., Herzog, 2009; Rayce et al., 2019), leading to behavioural issues, nightmares, learning difficulties, anxiety and depression, risk-taking and poor social relations (Galovski & Lyons, 2004; Newell, 2012). A recent Australian Family Wellbeing Study (2018) found that military family members may experience distinct psychological and emotional challenges when integrating into civilian life, including increased stress associated with sudden shifts in environmental surroundings and a loss of important social connections (Daraganova et al., 2018; Hazle et

al., 2012; Muir, 2018). Findings from this study showed that these changes can disrupt young people's social ties, academic careers, and daily routines, potentially resulting in self-regulatory issues or exacerbating pre-existing mental health conditions (Daraganova et al., 2018; Hazle et al., 2012; Muir, 2018). However, this study focussed primarily on the experiences of service personnel and intimate partners, and did not include young people as participants, relying instead on the perspectives of their parents. Additional research examining young people's self-reported experiences of the MCT is therefore essential. This will allow researchers to gather more nuanced understandings of young people's own perspectives and afford young people the opportunity to have a voice in research that directly concerns them.

While the transition from military life may pose significant challenges for young people, it is also vital that we consider their innate strengths and resources in coping with, responding to, and even thriving, during the MCT (Easterbrooks et al., 2013; Hall, 2008; Milburn & Lightfoot, 2013; Park, 2011; Wright et al., 2013). Research suggests that military-raised individuals exhibit a wide range of strengths and assets that allow them to overcome unique challenges and adversity (Easterbrooks et al., 2013; Milburn & Lightfoot, 2013; Wright et al., 2013). Compared with their civilian peers, young people from defence backgrounds are considered to have greater respect for authority and have been shown to be more tolerant, resourceful, adaptable, responsible, and welcoming of challenges (Easterbrooks et al., 2013; Hall, 2008; Milburn & Lightfoot, 2013; Wright et al., 2013). They also tend to have a greater affinity for different people or places and exhibit more self-control in stressful situations (Hall, 2008; Park, 2011). Despite these important insights, young people's strengths and adaptive qualities have only been

examined in relation to current serving families or parental deployment, and remain underexplored in the MCT context, with significant implications for service provision.

In Australia, social work is among the leading disciplines involved in service delivery for the wellbeing of current and ex-serving military communities (AASW, 2016). Given social work's focus on holistic care and its ability to consider the complexities of human experience from a multilevel perspective (AASW, 2016), the profession is well positioned to meet the needs of young people from military families. Unfortunately, there is currently insufficient evidence to adequately inform social work practice with this population, particularly in relation to the MCT. If we are to develop effective and tailored interventions for young people who need support during this period, research that includes their own voices and perspectives is crucial (Atuel & Castro, 2018; Blackburn, 2016, 2017; Gewirtz et al., 2011; Orazem et al., 2017; Park, 2011; Smith & True, 2014). In responding to this need, this paper reports on the findings of a qualitative study that explored the retrospective observations, perspectives, and experiences of young people, who are now adults, when their parents transitioned out of the ADF. Findings are discussed alongside previous literature to highlight the central issues, and the needs and strengths of young people, which are essential for developing effective transition supports and strategies into the future.

Method

Study design

This paper reports on a subset of qualitative interview data taken from a larger study, which was guided by two primary research questions: (1) how do young people perceive their families' transition from military to civilian life, and what similarities and differences

do they observe between these contexts both within, and outside, the family unit? and (2) what cultural resources, forms of capital, or practical strategies do these young people draw on when navigating civilian life? Only data and findings relating to question one form the focus of this paper.

Sampling and recruitment

Ethics clearance for this study was granted in July 2020 by the University of Newcastle's Human Research Ethics Committee. A national recruitment campaign was employed, which involved the dissemination of information via mailing lists and websites of ex-service organisations as well as a series of unpaid social media advertisements. Participants 13 years and over who were aged between 5 and 25 at the time their parents left the ADF were invited to participate in a one-on-one interview about their experiences during their families' transition to civilian life. This age bracket was included due to: (i) challenges recruiting the original age bracket (5–17 at time of transition), and (ii) the definition of young people as up to 24 years of age being a widely accepted statistical convention in most youth studies (e.g., World Health Organisation, 2011). For this reason, participants were not required to have been living with their parents at the time of transition. Despite exhaustive efforts, only 10 participants were recruited nationally. Nonetheless, in-depth interviews enabled the collection of rich data for analysis. All 10 participants remained in the study for its duration and gave consent at three different timepoints: (i) via written consent prior to their interview, (ii) via verbal consent at the beginning of their interview, and (iii) via a member-checking procedure following audio transcription of their interviews.

Data collection

Data were collected using telephone or Zoom between July 2020 and September 2020. In-depth, narrative style interviews were used to facilitate deep exploration of participants' experiences and perspectives (Reissman, 2008). Interviews ranged from 1–2 hours and began with a central question: "What was it like for you when your parent left the defence force?" This was followed by prompt questions to elicit more information where needed. Member-checking occurred in two ways: (i) via discussion and reflection throughout the interview to ensure the researcher had accurately understood participants' voices and experiences, and/or (ii) by allowing participants the opportunity to access and edit, or withdraw, their interview transcripts.

Data analysis

Interviews were transcribed verbatim using a professional transcription service and coded thematically using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-stage approach. The crosscutting of codes was combined with narrative analyses to examine individual participants' MCT trajectory, as well as the similarities and differences between experiences. The researcher employed a rigorous reflexive process of reading, re-reading, and re-writing over the course of the study, which allowed for the analysis of both pre-established and newly emerging codes. Credibility and confirmability of these codes were increased through extended engagement with the researcher's supervisory team to ensure agreement on emerging themes. A table was generated to sort individual codes into overarching themes which included relevant data extracts (quotes). All codes identified in the data were collapsed into four primary sub-sets: (i) the civil-military divide, (ii) capital, identity, and the habitus, (iii) military family dynamics, and (iv) transition supports. This paper reports on the theme of mental health and military family dynamics.

Findings

Table 1 shows the demographics of all study participants.

Table 1. Participant demographics.

Participant pseudonyms	Gender	Age at time of interview	Age bracket at time of transition	Time since family's transition	Parent's ADF organisation
Jasmine	F	20–25	15–20	1–6 years	Air Force
Samuel	M	30–35	10–15	17–22 years	Air Force
Grant	M	50–55	5–10	43–48 years	Navy
Jennifer	F	30–35	20–25	10–15 years	Air Force
Alice	F	25–30	20–25	2–7 years	Air Force
Catherine	F	25–30	20–25	5–10 years	Air Force
Georgia	F	15–20	5–10	8–13 years	Army
Clare	F	30–35	10–15	18–23 years	Army
Holly	F	50–55	15–20	33–38 years	Army
Lucy	F	35–40	20–25	15–20 years	Air Force

Of the 10 participants interviewed, two were men and eight were women living in Australia; all were aged between 5 and 25 years when their parents left the ADF and between 18 and 55 years at the time of their interview. Three participants came from 'Army' families (national military branch concerned with land-based armed service), six came from 'Air Force' families (national military branch concerned with aerial defence operations), and one came from a 'Navy' family (national military branch concerned with defence operations at sea). All identifying information was removed and participants chose pseudonyms to protect their anonymity.

Within the broader theme of military family dynamics, three sub-themes were identified: (i) increased mental health stress, (ii) shifts in family relationships and dynamics, and (iii) domestic violence and maltreatment. These themes are described below.

Increased mental health stress

When discussing their experience of the MCT, most participants identified mental health as a key concern for their parents and for themselves. Discussion centred around the psychological impacts of military service for their parents and the flow-on effects these impacts had on participants' experiences of the MCT.

Many participants described the difficulty of witnessing their parents' deteriorating mental state during and after military service, which often led to considerable emotional distress for participants themselves:

> He [father] definitely struggles a lot with PTSD and stuff like that… he struggles a lot mentally… you can see it's affecting me, and my family… and has challenged all his relationships... it's been so hard to watch him struggle. (Jasmine)

In a moving statement, one participant suggested that being part of a military family comes with inherent risks to mental wellbeing due to the very nature of the military, and military culture:

> My Mum once said to me, yeah, well the Army needs to make sure you're not mentally broken, because they're going to be the ones to break you. (Georgia)

Of interest was the observation by the same participant, that her father's mental health issues resulted not only from his military service, but from the loss of support he experienced after leaving the Army:

> My Dad has depression, anxiety, and PTSD… for him, his PTSD, he believes—and I believe as well—was from leaving the Army, losing that support. (Georgia)

An important finding was that almost all participants, and in some cases their siblings, had a mental health condition, such as depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, and secondary PTSD:

> So, it is an interesting situation that I've got three other siblings as well and they all have mental health issues as well. (Samuel)

In fact, some participants reported that their mental health issues were so severe, both during and after their parents' service years, that they struggled for years afterwards, with impacts on their adult relationships, employment prospects and other major life events in the "civilian world":

> The mentality and behaviours from the Air Force basically grew myself up into a wreck and that's where it comes from… my mental health and everything comes from that… I haven't been able to get back to working because of the issues that I've got… and the environment I was brought up in. (Samuel)

Many participants noted that their mental health condition remained undiagnosed for years following the MCT, as they did not share their experience with anyone:

> In years to come it turned out that I had bipolar, but when I look back, I'd had it at a young age, but just never expressed myself to anybody. (Grant)

Participants described how Army personnel and their families were "taught" to suppress their emotions as seeking help was of "no use":

> It was like a big cork in a bottle, I suppose. The Army taught you to put that cork in and to not get emotional about things because there was no use as no one was going to care. (Holly)

This kind of messaging was endemic of a "culture" of stigma surrounding mental illness, which created barriers to help-seeking for participants both before and during the MCT:

> So, I think that had a major impact on them leaving the Army, because they had all these issues that they couldn't get help for in the Army, so when they leave the Army, they don't get help for it either because there's that stigmatised culture. (Georgia)

Some participants also described feeling resentment towards their parents' mental health issues during the MCT. Once the "niceties" wore off, having their parents around more created new challenges like needing to care for them at a time when participants were still teenagers themselves:

> My Mum was undiagnosed mentally ill, and she could be really awful at times with her anxiety and my Dad was just a very angry man who was holding onto a lot of personal loss… he spent three years in and out of mental health hospitals when I was a teenager. But I think for me the long-lasting impact was a very strained relationship with my parents… I really resented my parents because I had to look after them. (Georgia)

Importantly, several participants described the strengths and adaptive qualities they developed during the MCT, such as advocacy skills, and the confidence to speak openly about their own mental health challenges:

> I was a support worker for three months, and I'm very open with my mental health now… I think it has made me more accepting of being an Air Force brat and coming into civilian life myself. (Samuel)

Shifts in family relationships and dynamics

Reports of significant shifts in family roles, relationships, and dynamics during the MCT were common amongst participants. Many described the difficulty of watching their family structure and dynamics change, and the impact of strained parental relationships on their confidence and sense of self-worth:

> It was something that they had to manage in their marriage and their relationship, that dynamic shifting… I really struggled with seeing that shift and that really deflating self-esteem. (Jennifer)

Almost all participants experienced some form of family breakdown, divorce or separation leading up to, or during, the MCT, which impacted and "unravelled" their sense of stability:

> My parents, at the time, were getting separated, and they still are separated. It was a difficult time as a family… that was the end of my parents' marriage after that. That [the MCT] was kind of the breakdown, which was difficult to watch because I could see them unravelling and Dad's spiral. (Catherine)

Some participants noted that their parents' ongoing relationship struggles prompted their family to leave the Army, but ultimately worsened during the MCT:

> My Dad left the Army but that wasn't really his choice. He didn't want to leave. That was his whole life. He was a very work-centric man, but my Mum basically said you leave, or I leave you… my Mum was not particularly happy, and he begrudgingly left… it was very difficult… that was also when things got worse because naturally, when you're home more, you're going to be fighting more. Dad had left the Army to make Mum happy and she still wasn't happy. (Georgia)

One participant expressed a belief that her parents' relationship difficulties were "tied directly to the Army", as people are often "pushed into a marriage very quickly" to avoid being stationed away from one another, making them more vulnerable to relationship breakdown during the MCT:

> There's a lot of marriage breakdowns that come from being involved in the military. Usually, it's with a civilian partner, but people do forget that people in the Army marry each other. My parents were pushed into a marriage very quickly because it's either you get married, or you'll be stationed away from each other… my parents leaving the Army also coincided with their divorce, which itself caused a lot of relationship changes. I ended up spending a lot more time with my grandparents… there was a custody battle. (Georgia)

Several participants also observed that young people's experiences during the MCT were highly dependent on their existing family structure and the relationship between ADF parents and their children:

> I think the biggest thing is recognising that whoever's the one serving will have a huge effect on how they find their transition. That will have a subsequent effect on young people… whether it's just Mum that served or whether it's Dad, or whether it's both. Also recognising, is it a single family? Because that again can have a huge effect on it… what it's then like when Mum leaves, and then when Mum's home all the time. (Clare)

One participant described her experience of parental divorce as a potential protective factor against the impacts of the MCT, as her father remained in the military and did not attempt to reintegrate into the family. However, she also noted the permanent sense of separation she experienced because of this, not only from the military, but from her father:

> I haven't lived with my Dad for a long while. That's just from my parents' divorce… he moved to Sydney when I was living in Newcastle, and then recently, he discharged. So, I've always had that distance and was kind of on the outside of it. (Jasmine)

Participant accounts of the MCT reflected the complex shifts in family roles, relationships and dynamics young people experience when their parents leave the military, leading to an overall sense of loss of "the way things were". One participant summed up this multilayered experience:

> It was quite negative in those days. My Dad got out of the Army in Victoria, we moved back to Sydney, then my Mum and Dad split up. There was a whole bunch of loss going on in my life at the time… it all seemed really crazy because when they split up, we separated from my Dad, and he wasn't to know where we were…. With the change of getting out of the military and my family falling apart, it was

> just all bizarre… There's this idea, I guess, of transitioning out of the ADF but it's everything else that goes on as well and around that. (Grant)

Despite a prevalence of negative experiences and challenges reported by participants in this study, many also reflected on the "positives" and "opportunities" that eventuated when their parents returned home. Participants described the loving and memorable moments they experienced with their families during the MCT, and the beneficial effects these experiences had on their family dynamics, providing greater "structure" and "security", and leaving them feeling "less worried" about their parent.

Domestic violence and maltreatment

Most participants reported experiencing domestic and family violence as a young person, often perpetrated by their ex-serving parent. Whilst these experiences occurred at different points in their lives, several participants observed a noticeable increase in physical, verbal, and emotional forms of abuse during the MCT:

> It was really full on. There was a lot of domestic violence at home while my Dad was still in the defence force but when he got out it escalated a fair bit… That was the main thing. I was in awe of other people and how they got on and didn't scream at each other and didn't fight. I was really aware of it. (Grant)

> My Dad was a very, very violent man. He was very overbearing. We had standby room inspections and he was very demonstrative in punishment, but not in love. He became a very difficult man to live with… and he was around a lot more. Everything was a battle. So, we were always on edge—well, me in particular… It was really difficult for us. (Holly)

Participants noted that the increase in violence during the MCT was especially upsetting and confusing, as they found themselves simultaneously reliant on their parents, and afraid of them. One participant described the painful irony of violence perpetrated by the very person who also "looked after" him in many other ways:

> For me when he [father] got out of the Army… I was lost as a kid about all the DV that was going on in the house, but it was a double blow because they looked after us… I was a bit lost with what was going to happen to us… I still remember there was just a different dynamic in the house when he came home… it was almost instantly that there was a lot of angst in the house. (Grant)

This "reliance" on parents was not just in relation to basic needs, but for guidance about how to behave in the civilian world—a life some of the children had never known.

Unsurprisingly, participants who experienced violence in the family home reported significant psychological impacts on their health and wellbeing during the MCT, creating further challenges for them during their transition to civilian life:

> It took me a long time to realise that I had PTSD as well from the shit that I'd seen. I felt different to my civilian mates because my Dad would still come around and do some urban terrorism on our house. He found out where we lived so I felt totally different to my mates, even my cousins. (Samuel)

Participants' accounts of domestic and family violence often referred to parental alcohol dependence and alcohol-fuelled violence:

> The DV was pretty heavy… It was connected to drinking as well… As soon as the alcohol came out, there were going to be some gremlins… I was always aware that

> there was an end game for what was going on with the alcohol… When he [father] was drinking, he had a lot of demons. (Grant)

The mistreatment described by participants was not always physical in nature. Many participants also described experiencing verbal and emotional forms of abuse:

> My father never wanted girls. So, we were very much—almost like an inconvenience… Sometimes, Dad didn't even come and tell us that dinner was on… he'd purposely make Mum serve dinner early and then chastise us for being late and having cold dinners. (Holly)

Others noted that limited parenting skills combined with lengthy absences from the family resulted in a lack of understanding by their parents about how to look after them in the "real world":

> My Dad didn't know how to look after me…. At the time it was traumatic…. It was my first day of Year 3… he sent me to school with a tin of spaghetti and I got in trouble because you can't bring a tin of spaghetti, that's sharp, you could hurt someone… I had trouble connecting, because everyone else had these very active and present parents in their lives, who were loving and didn't threaten them. You know? I love my parents very dearly, but there are parts of their parenting where I go, you shouldn't have done that, that's a bit dodgy. They wonder why I developed a mental illness—that's going to give a kid an anxiety disorder. (Georgia)

While many participants described strong feelings of resentment about their experiences of family violence, parental substance misuse, and mental illness during the MCT, many also acknowledged their family's unique "strengths" and "resilience", and "the good times" they experienced as members of a "military family". One participant described the military

family as having “a bond like no other”, demonstrating that, for many young people, the continuing influence of military culture can serve as an important protective factor during the MCT.

Discussion

This study aimed to explore young people’s observations, perspectives, and experiences when their parents transitioned out of the ADF. Findings confirm that the MCT is a time of great change for military families, and that the readjustment to civilian life can bring about significant psychosocial challenges. Participants in this study described a wide range of impacts arising from the MCT, including increased mental health stress, shifts in familial relationships, roles and responsibilities, issues with family violence and substance use, and disruptions to their sense of purpose and identity, corroborating many of the challenges outlined in the existing literature and shedding light on the complex experiences young people must navigate leading up to, during, and following the MCT.

All except one participant in this study reported experiencing some form of psychological or emotional distress during the MCT. For many participants, these experiences were directly linked with, and exacerbated by, their parents’ mental health challenges, including PTSD. This finding extends upon existing research demonstrating the vicarious trauma often experienced by family members of military personnel (e.g., Al-Turkait & Ohaeri, 2008; Daraganova et al., 2018; Dinshtein et al., 2011; McCormack & Sly, 2013; Muir, 2018; Suozzi & Motta, 2004). Consistent with previous research (e.g., Chandra et al., 2010; Chartrand et al., 2008; Lester & Flake, 2013; Mmari et al., 2009), findings from this study also suggest that the mental health impacts experienced by young people from military families may lead to significant impairment in other areas of their life, with several participants describing ongoing problems with family functioning,

education, relationships, and employment well into adulthood. The long-term impacts described by participants in this study demonstrate just how profound the mental health consequences of the MCT may be for young people, revealing the critical importance of providing appropriate support in a timely manner.

Findings from this study also highlight the significant impacts of the MCT on family roles, relationships, and dynamics. Several participants described the difficulty of navigating a whole new "family order" when their parents left the military, requiring them to take on the role of "carer" for their parents at a time when they were still children themselves. Participants spoke about the sense of loss they experienced when leaving behind the familiar structure and environment of military life. While the family unit should be an important source of continuity and a shield from this type of broader change, it too, appeared to grow more unstable and unpredictable during the MCT. Many participants described experiences of family conflict and breakdown, divorce, and instances of domestic violence or maltreatment, which made the transition to civilian life extremely challenging. These findings extend upon Australia's recent Family Wellbeing Study (Daraganova et al., 2018; Muir, 2018), which demonstrated that the MCT requires families to adjust to new civilian family patterns, including changed roles, re-established intimacies, shifts in family dynamics or parenting obligations and relationship conflicts. They also suggest that some aspects of young people's transition experiences may be distinct from those of adult family members, meaning that they may require tailored support during the MCT.

Interestingly, most participants attributed their mental health difficulties and family challenges to the distinct nature of military "culture" and "identity"—topics which are attracting increasing discussion in the literature (Atuel & Castro, 2018; Bergman et al.,

2014; Blackburn, 2016, 2017; Grimell, 2015, 2017; Keeling et al., 2020; Orazem et al., 2017; Rahbek-Clemmensen et al., 2012; Robinson et al., 2017; Rubin et al., 2013; Smith & True, 2014; Thompson et al., 2017). Participants identified common military traits within their family, such as "masculinity", and "regimented", "strict" or "controlling" behaviours, which they felt contributed to family conflict, marriage breakdown and violence. Many described an "Army culture" that aims to "mentally break you" and discourage help-seeking behaviours, promoting stigma around mental healthcare and engagement with "outsiders". These findings support Hazle et al.'s (2012) suggestion that, while the unique language, symbols, norms and systems of military culture promote unity and resilience, they can also leave service members and their families less equipped to cope in a civilian environment. Findings from the present study offer much-needed empirical insights into the long-term impacts of military culture on family functioning, cohesion, and help-seeking. Understanding these impacts is crucial if future social work interventions are to effectively engage and support young people from military families during the MCT.

While participants highlighted some of the challenges they experienced during the MCT, many also described rewarding experiences. One participant recounted her experience of self-discovery during the MCT; noticing adaptive behaviours and personal qualities she was previously unaware of. Another noted that he learned how to reframe certain MCT challenges as learning experiences, enabling him to help and support others in the future. Other strengths reported by participants included the ability to work well in teams, a strong sense of loyalty, a capacity for social and community engagement, and an overarching sense of pride about being part of a military family. These self-reported strengths and adaptive outcomes are consistent with findings from the existing literature (e.g., Easterbrooks et al., 2013; Hall, 2008; Hazle et al., 2012; Milburn & Lightfoot, 2013;

Park, 2011; Weinick et al., 2012; Wright et al., 2013). Beyond this, they offer critical insights into the personal strengths and resources young people draw on to respond to the challenges of the MCT. For social workers who are supporting families with a military background, findings from this study highlight the value of a strengths-approach (e.g., Graybeal, 2001; Saleebey, 1996) for assessing and mobilising the internal and external resources and supports that protect military families and young people during the stress and change of the MCT.

Summary of implications for social work

The findings from this study have several implications for the social work profession, and for developing effective transition supports for young people from ex-serving families. Firstly, the high incidence of mental health issues and family problems reported by participants demonstrates the need for strong psychosocial support for young people when their families leave the defence force. Social workers employed across both defence and civilian settings should advocate for early interventions that target the mental wellbeing of young people prior to the MCT, not just once problems arise. In developing these interventions, findings from this study suggest that social workers should identify the distinct needs of young people from ex-serving military families, rather than responding to them as a homogenous group. Drawing on their expertise in psychosocial assessment and strengths-based practice (AASW, 2013), social workers are well-positioned to help ex-serving defence communities and young people identify and build on their unique adaptive qualities during the MCT.

Secondly, participants in this study highlighted the cultural disconnect between defence and civilian worlds, which made it difficult for them to engage with, or feel understood by, civilian professionals. As key professionals involved in the provision of

support to current and ex-serving military communities (AASW, 2016), social workers should actively seek out opportunities for continued education and professional development targeted towards improving military cultural competence. Social work is fundamentally concerned with challenging dominant discourses and considering alternative narratives (AASW, 2013). As such, social workers are well-equipped to lead the way in re-imagining paradigms of military family experience and building stronger connections across defence and civilian communities to improve the experiences of young people when their families leave the defence force.

Thirdly, there remains an alarming shortage of empirical research guiding our understanding of young people's lived experiences and support needs during the MCT. Social work's expertise in the use of qualitative methodologies and the application of critical theories has the potential to offer rich and nuanced perspectives that can both improve the quality of available MCT services and supports and empower young people from ex-serving military families by elevating their voices on issues that concern them.

Limitations

Significant recruitment challenges experienced during this research resulted in a very small and non-representative sample. Therefore, findings cannot account for the diversity in military family composition, nor do they expansively reflect in-group differences between young people with different ADF backgrounds (e.g., Air Force, Army, Navy, etc.). Despite this limitation, continuities across participants' experiences, taking place over several decades, were striking. This is suggestive of intransigent issues across all branches of the military, especially given all participants spontaneously reported several issues without being prompted. The retrospective collection of data from older participants may also diminish the quality of the findings due to memory lapse or changes over time. For

example, experiences recounted from up to 48 years ago may hold less relevance for contemporary military families. Further research to support these findings, and to compare the experiences of young people from military families at different timepoints, is therefore essential. It should also be acknowledged that these findings are specific to the Australian context and therefore require confirmation at an international level.

Conclusion

The difficulties experienced by some children and young people from military families leading up to and during the MCT can be significant but are not always visible. Much of the existing research tends to focus on the highs and lows of military life, such as deployment, family reunions, death, or injury in combat, and veteran suicide. While these are important areas of inquiry, the everyday challenges and opportunities that children and young people face when their parents leave the defence force are often overlooked. Findings from this research show that a proportion of children and young people from military families experience significant difficulties associated with mental health conditions, substance use disorders, problems in psychological and emotional regulation, disruption to family dynamics and relationships and domestic and family violence when their families transition out of the military. Despite these challenges, the strengths and resources of children and young people from military families should not be underestimated, as many adjust well and continue to thrive long into adulthood. To understand and support children and young people who experience less favourable outcomes, it is vital that social workers, and other public health professionals who work closely to support veteran families, empower children and young people to share their distinct experiences of the MCT, and help them to identify and draw on their innate strengths and resources to cope with this significant life event.

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Conclusion

Findings presented in this chapter reveal that the MCT is a major life event for many military families which can have a profound impact on the mental health and psychological

wellbeing of all family members, as well as relationships both within and outside the family unit. By examining some of the challenges associated with these changes, as well as the innate strengths, resources, and adaptive qualities of military families, children, and young people, it outlines the key implications for social work and other public health disciplines, and begins to explore strategies for responding to, and further investigating, these experiences. In the next chapter, additional findings extend on these experiences and examine, in more specific detail, the support needs of children and young people during the MCT.

Chapter 8 | Children and young people's support needs during the military-civilian transition

Introduction

This chapter reports on the fourth subset of findings from the research and explores the support needs of children and young people during the MCT. Like Chapter 7, this chapter is presented in the form of an original article which has been published in *Australian Social Work*—a national, peer-reviewed journal. To contextualise the subset of data reported on in this paper, the researcher drew on Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological systems theory. This theory proved highly effective for interpreting findings related to the MCT support needs of children and young people due to its multidimensional and systemic focus, as well as its capacity to account for important agentic factors. The paper presented in this chapter begins with the abstract, implications and keywords. This is followed by a review of the relevant literature, a description of Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological systems theory (re-labelled Table 4 for thesis directory) and an outline of the methods used. The paper then presents the key findings and a detailed discussion, with reference to the various levels of ecological systems theory (re-labelled Figure 5 for thesis directory). Finally, it concludes with an overview of the key limitations of the study and a formal conclusion.

Original article published in *Australian Social Work*

Wells, H., Heinsch, M., Brosnan, C., & Kay-Lambkin, F. (2022). Young people's support needs during the military-civilian transition: "I would have been a very different

person if there was more support available". *Australian Social Work*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/ 10.1080/0312407X.2022.2077121

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"I would have been a very different person if there was more support available": Young people's support needs during the military-civilian transition

Abstract

When families transition out of the Australian Defence Force, they can experience a range of challenges that pose risks to their mental health and wellbeing. These may be further complicated by a lack of access to services, and low uptake of existing support. While some research has investigated the experiences of previously serving men and women, the support needs of their children have received little empirical attention. This article reports on a qualitative study that explored the experiences of young people, who are now adults, when their parents left the Australian Defence Force. Themes developed included gaps in

defence and civilian support; inadequate school support; military stigma and receptiveness to support; and ideas for improving strategies and support. Findings were analysed using a thematic approach, then a socio-ecological lens was applied, highlighting the multilevel support needs as well as the significant service gaps experienced by young people during the military-civilian transition.

Implications

- Understanding young people's experiences when their parents leave the Australian Defence Force can help social workers and other disciplines appropriately address their support needs through research and practice.
- Engagement and service provision efforts should consider the multilevel systems that protect young people from experiencing critical or long-term impacts. They should recognise the role of young people's agency, acknowledging that experiences during the military-civilian transition are not homogenous.

Keywords

Military-civilian transition, MCT, Australian Defence Force, military families, young people, support needs.

Introduction

Each year, approximately 5,500 of the 100,000 personnel employed by the Australian Defence Force [ADF] begin the complex transition to civilian life, known as the military-civilian transition [MCT] (Department of Defence, 2019). While many military families make a smooth transition out of the ADF, some experience psychosocial stressors, which pose risks to their mental health and wellbeing (Daraganova et al., 2018; Muir, 2018).

These can include service-related PTSD (Newell, 2012), secondary trauma (Rayce et al., 2019), parenting issues (Rogers, 2017; Siebler, 2009; Siebler & Goddard, 2014), aggression or violence (Gibbs et al., 2007), difficulties with communication and intimacy (McFarlane, 2009), family breakdown (Laser & Stephens, 2011), depression (Brinker et al., 2007), alcohol and drug use (Jacobsen et al., 2001), and suicide (Oquendo et al., 2005). These issues may be further complicated by a lack of viable support options during the MCT, and a tendency by existing services to neglect the strengths and protective factors of military families (Rogers-Baber, 2017).

While defence organisations provide significant support to military families during active service, less attention has been paid to supporting families during the MCT (Atuel & Castro, 2018; Blackburn, 2016, 2017; Robinson et al., 2017), which can have profound impacts on their post-serving experiences (Castro et al., 2015; Shields et al., 2016; Thompson & Lockhart, 2015). In Australia, and internationally, some MCT services are beginning to emerge, however, evidence of their effectiveness remains limited (Fossey et al., 2019; Maguire et al., 2022). Additionally, many of these focus on currently or previously serving members, and only involve families as an extension of the support being provided to the veteran (Fossey et al., 2019; Maguire et al., 2022). Rather than applying strengths- and resilience-based approaches (Ahern et al., 2015; Danish & Antonides, 2013; Rogers-Baber, 2017), these services also tend to be problem-focussed, emphasising family pathology, and concentrating on issues such as PTSD or suicide (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2017). By framing military families as a 'social problem', organisations may unintentionally reduce service use and engagement by military families.

Research suggests that military families are already reluctant to access services and support (Daraganova et al., 2018; Muir, 2018). Many have a strong preference for handling problems independently due to mental health and help-seeking stigma (Muir, 2018; Siebler, 2009). Military culture itself tends to value and promote qualities such as strength, competence, autonomy, and confidentiality (Baber, 2016; Siebler, 2009). Consequently, military families have raised concerns that service engagement may impact their reputation in the defence community (Muir, 2018; Ross & DeVoe, 2014). Many have also questioned the knowledge and understanding of civilian professionals in relation to their distinct challenges and support needs, resulting in a distrust of services (Elbogen et al., 2013; Lane & Wallace, 2020; Sharp et al., 2015; Vogt, 2011).

There is a particular shortage of research on the support needs of children from military families (McFarlane, 2009; Siebler, 2009). Only a handful of Australian and international studies have included data on young people, and existing studies have largely focussed on secondary accounts by adult family members (McGuire et al., 2012; Siebler, 2009) rather than on the perspectives of young people themselves (Rogers, 2017). Research examining young people's experiences of the MCT is therefore crucial. In this article, we report the findings of a qualitative study that explored the experiences and support needs of young people, who are now adults, when their families left the ADF. We draw on ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977) to highlight the multilayered impacts on young people when their families leave the defence force, and the implications for social work practice.

Ecological systems theory

Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological systems theory suggests that an individual's development, behaviours, and experiences are nested in, interconnected with, and

influenced by, their environment. This theory facilitates insight into the various socio-cultural and political systems that surround and influence an individual and the way in which individuals subsequently influence their own environment. According to Bronfenbrenner (1977), individuals interact with their environment at five interconnected levels, which he referred to as the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem (see Table 4).

Table 4. Levels of Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological systems theory.

Level	Description
Microsystem	The immediate or everyday environment, such as the family unit or school.
Mesosystem	The connections, relationships and networks which operate within and across systems.
Exosystem	The indirect environments such as systems of government, economics, and education.
Macrosystem	The overarching values, beliefs, laws, and customs of broader cultures or societies.
Chronosystem	The passage of time over which interactions within and across systems occur.

While it is important to acknowledge the multiple systems that influence people and shape their experiences, also critical is recognising people's own agency within their environment. Early critiques of ecological theory highlighted its tendency to overemphasise systemic factors. Bronfenbrenner subsequently revised the theory to include the term 'bio-ecological' (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994); a concept that facilitated recognition of the impact of individual-level-alongside-systemic factors on a person's experiences and development.

Method

Study design

This article reports on a subset of data from a larger study. An exploratory research design was employed to answer two primary research questions, namely: (i) how do young people perceive their transition from military to civilian life, and what similarities and differences do they observe between these contexts both within, and outside, the family unit? and (ii) what cultural resources, forms of capital, or practical strategies do young people draw on when navigating civilian life?

Sampling and recruitment

Ethics clearance for this research was granted by the University of Newcastle's Human Research Ethics Committee. Individuals aged 5–25 at the time their parents left the ADF were invited to participate in the study, with a sampling target of approximately 20 participants. According to the World Health Organisation (2011), those between the ages of 10 and 24 are defined as 'young people' in most youth studies. However, ongoing challenges in recruiting this hard-to-reach population during the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated a revision of the inclusion criteria to individuals aged 5–25 at the time of discharge. A national recruitment strategy was employed, involving unpaid social media advertisements on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, as well as the social media pages and websites of Australian non-government agencies supporting veteran populations and their families. Despite extensive efforts, only 10 participants were recruited.

Data collection

Data were collected over a three-month period using in-depth, narrative-style telephone and Zoom interviews. A narrative approach was used to foreground the stories and perspectives of young people (Wells, 2011), enabling them to determine how they wished to be seen (Ochs & Capps, 1996). Consent was sought: (i) in written form prior to the interview, (ii) verbally at the beginning of the interview, and (iii) via member checking following the interview. Interviews ranged from 60 to 120 minutes and began with the question: 'What were your experiences/what was it like for you when your parent left the defence force?' followed by prompt questions as needed.

Data analysis

Interview recordings were transcribed verbatim using a professional transcription service and imported into NVivo for thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Initially, the researcher examined and coded the data. She then drew on the rigorous reflexive principles outlined by Braun and Clarke (2019, 2021) to read, re-read, and re-code each transcript, interpreting and creating relevant themes against each question. Next, connections and comparisons were made across each topic, followed by the entire dataset. All codes were discussed and analysed with the supervisory team, and a set of themes agreed upon. This highly reflexive approach was maintained throughout the study, acknowledging the civilian background of the researcher and her supervisory team. Thematic analyses revealed that the theme of 'transition support' was complex and interwoven with a multitude of findings relating to young people's needs and experiences when navigating the MCT. A decision was therefore made to focus on, and tease apart, transition support as a potential protective factor for previously serving military families. Other findings from this study have been reported elsewhere (Wells et al., 2022).

Findings

Table 2 presents the demographic profile of participants. Eight were women and two were men, all living in Australia at the time their families transitioned. All participants were aged between 18 and 55 years at the time of their interview. Three participants were from 'Army' families (land-based armed service), six from 'Air Force' families (aerial defence operations), and one from a 'Navy' family (defence operations at sea). All identifying information was removed and participants chose pseudonyms to preserve their anonymity.

Table 2. Participant demographics.

Participant pseudonyms	Gender	Age at time of interview	Age bracket at time of transition	Time since family's transition	Parent's ADF organisation
Jasmine	F	20–25	15–20	1–6 years	Air Force
Samuel	M	30–35	10–15	17–22 years	Air Force
Grant	M	50–55	5–10	43–48 years	Navy
Jennifer	F	30–35	20–25	10–15 years	Air Force
Alice	F	25–30	20–25	2–7 years	Air Force
Catherine	F	25–30	20–25	5–10 years	Air Force
Georgia	F	15–20	5–10	8–13 years	Army
Clare	F	30–35	10–15	18–23 years	Army
Holly	F	50–55	15–20	33–38 years	Army
Lucy	F	35–40	20–25	15–20 years	Air Force

Within the broader subset of transition support, four themes were identified: (i) gaps in defence and civilian support — "losing everything you've ever known", (ii) inadequate school support — "teachers just didn't get it", (iii) military stigma and receptiveness to

support — “the biggest thing that needs to change”, and (iv) ideas for improving strategies and support — “there’s no one-size-fits-all”. While themes reflect the experiences and responses of all participants, only the most relevant and powerful data extracts (quotes) are included in this article.

Gaps in defence and civilian support — “losing everything you’ve ever known”

Participants described the lack of support their families received from the ADF leading up to, and during, the MCT. While several participants praised the everyday support they experienced while their parents were active service members, many reported how this “suddenly disappeared” upon leaving the ADF. One participant believed this decline in support was even more abrupt when exiting “on your own terms”, describing the disconnect between the level of support ADF policies “promise” and what families actually receive:

> When leaving, the Army has policies in place they’re not following themselves. They don’t consider the impacts on children. (Georgia)

Participants also highlighted an overall lack of civilian services and government initiatives to support them in transition:

> That’s something I think definitely needs an area of support for veteran families, is that if they’re going to leave the military, then helping them get into something else afterwards, because they just get lost in the system... I guess I’d love to say there is support out there, but that would almost be a lie. (Jennifer)

Participants identified a small number of important ex-service organisations that support veteran families, but noted that many services have a strong deficit-focus; prioritising the

death or serious injury of a parent or severe mental illness over the more general support needs young people have when they leave the "only world [they] knew":

> That's why the RSL was originally developed… same with Legacy. They're really good for children who have lost their parents, but they don't think about children whose parents are still alive… the PTSD focus is also sometimes too much on medication, or the idea of active service as the trigger, and less so on losing a sense of community or losing everything you've ever known. (Georgia)

Participants who transitioned several years ago reported a noticeable lack of support, describing how access to services at the time would have been life-changing for them:

> I think I would have been a very different person, maybe a healthier person, if there was more support available when I was younger. (Clare)

Participants who transitioned more recently reported similar challenges, noting that existing services are not well advertised, nor easy to access, and tend to lack "direct support for children":

> I know there's programs like Open Arms and whatnot who provide services… but everyone always forgets about the wife or husband or the kids at home. If those services exist, then they're not well advertised, or aren't very well available. (Georgia)

Inadequate school support — "teachers just didn't get it"

Only one participant in this study reported that the school environment facilitated help-seeking outside the family via a trusted adult to confide in:

> I did luckily have a couple of teachers in high school who I could talk to. Sometimes it's hard to talk to your parents because you don't want to feel bad. (Georgia)

Another described a school-based support group for children from military families she had attended, but found the segregation from civilian children and assumptions of homogeneity among young from military families to be unhelpful:

> So, all through school, you'd get flagged as a defence kid and put into the support group. It wasn't bad, but it wasn't good. We had this lady who would organise for us to go bowling and stuff. My friends weren't in it, so I didn't really participate as much as I should have. I always thought, oh, some of those other kids, they're really weird [laughs], I don't want to go in there. (Jasmine)

Remaining participants described a general absence of school support during the MCT, which they often attributed to a lack of knowledge about their families' experiences:

> I had so many issues that affected my schooling and teachers just didn't get it… I really think every school should have a counsellor… having someone to talk to and help me understand… I've heard some schools have a defence liaison who looks after defence kids… I could have used that, I needed that... God I would have benefitted from that. (Georgia)

Reporting on the experiences of her own children, one participant observed a gradual increase in school support over time, but acknowledged that there is "still a long way to go":

> I understand they now have more programs in schools for defence kids and there's more education starting about what it means when someone's parent is in defence… but there still needs to be more transition supports for kids in civilian schools. (Clare)

Military stigma and receptiveness to support — "the biggest thing that needs to change"

Participants described a reluctance to access help by military families. Stigma relating to help-seeking was one of the most significant barriers to accessing support, and was described by participants as a core element of military culture:

> It had a major impact on leaving, because there were all these issues and when we left the Army, we felt like we couldn't get help because of that really stigmatised culture. (Georgia)

Many participants observed that access to information or encouragement to use available support "would have been beneficial":

> It would be good if I knew about stuff, then I could determine the type of things that were available if I needed them. But I didn't really have knowledge about that kind of thing. (Jasmine)

Others described the challenge of having to seek help alone, when parents or other family members were not receptive to support:

> It can be especially hard for young people… having to do research on where help is available. Sometimes it's not fair, but you have to do the hard yards yourself. Help isn't always offered to you on a silver platter. (Georgia)

Many young people reported a sense of helplessness as they witnessed the reluctance of their previously serving parent to seek support, and the consequent deterioration of their parents' relationship:

> My father's inability to want to get help and the lack of support from the military to do so put a lot of strain on my parents' relationship, which was really difficult for me to watch. (Catherine)

Others noted that the stigma relating to mental health and help-seeking "needs to change" and "be talked about more" to increase young people's receptiveness to available support:

> Knowing it's okay to go and seek that support, if you need to, I think that's probably the biggest thing that needs to change. There definitely needs to be changes in further education to defence families. (Clare)

Ideas for improving strategies and support — "there's no one-size-fits-all"

When asked about ideal support for military families and young people in transition, participants highlighted a need for support that spans "both defence and civilian contexts" to foster sustained connection with the military community:

> I believe that there should be a committee involved with exiting and everything like that… just to link all those people up and to say yes, we are exiting the Air Force, but you've still got that connection within all the rigmarole of the Air Force. (Samuel)

Some participants also highlighted the need for services that support cultural adjustment between military and civilian "worlds" in addition to offering psychological support:

> I think something along the lines of civilian interaction to say what's going to happen… maybe counselling or a bit of guidance like this is where you can go... they've been regimented for three, five, twenty, thirty years… you really need to put in there a support group or something like that. (Grant)

Participants also emphasised a need for improved civilian services during the MCT that sit outside "defence culture":

> It's something that needs to be talked about more. Like, they've got Mates4Mates and all that sort of stuff, but that's different, because it's still embodying that defence culture. I think sometimes you've got to be able to go somewhere external and figure out what you are without it. (Clare)

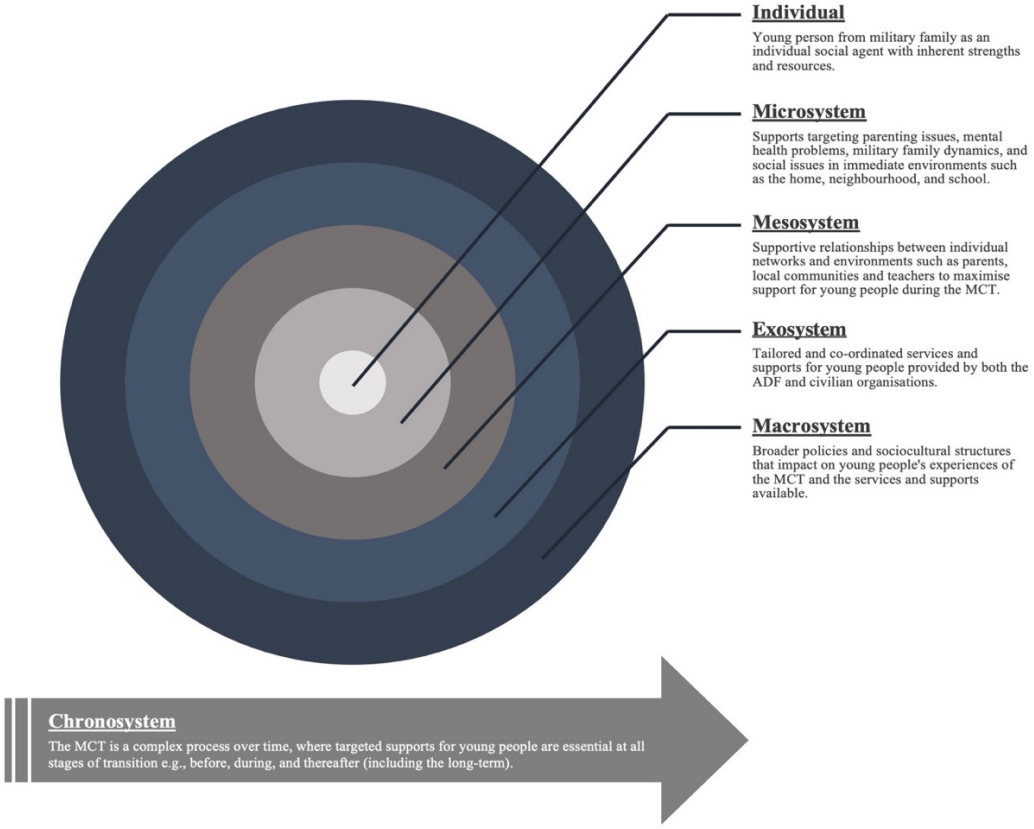
Overall, participants were critical of a one-size-fits-all approach, highlighting the need for a "gradual" or staged approach to transition that addresses the unique needs of each family:

> It's really hard because every family's a little bit different… there's no one-size-fits-all. I think it's purely a case by case… but it should also be more of a gradual transition into the civilian world, rather than sudden. (Holly)

Discussion

Findings from this study reveal an overall lack of appropriate and tailored support for young people from previously serving military families, and a reluctance to access existing services due to mental health and service-use stigma. Figure 5 maps the multisystemic support needs of young people during the MCT alongside Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological systems theory, discussed in detail below.

Figure 5. Multisystemic support needs of children and young people during the military-civilian transition according to Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological systems theory.



All participants described a significant lack of support for young people at the micro and exosystemic levels before and during the MCT. Some noted that this left them feeling "forgotten" or "out on their own" once they left the "inner circle" of the military community. The loss of exosystemic support previously provided by the defence system was found to be particularly distressing for those who were already experiencing mental health or family problems, or those who had little prior exposure to civilian communities. Participants explained that the "disappearance" of their existing ADF support and connections augmented the divide between military and civilian "worlds", leaving them feeling ill-equipped and let down by the very institution that had nurtured them for many years. These findings extend the work of Rogers-Baber (2017), which showed that

disconnection with the defence community, as an important protective factor for military families, can have detrimental impacts during the MCT. Given the link between social capital and improved health outcomes for young people (Foster et al., 2017; Morgan et al., 2021), it is crucial that young people are given opportunities to retain their military identity and existing social connections when families are discharged.

Equally important is that young people continue to be supported after the MCT. This study found that, for many young people, the MCT is an extended and prolonged 'process' punctuated by a number of significant 'timepoints' that can continue for years following transition, with no clear endpoint. This finding reveals the temporal nature of the MCT and the importance of recognising it as a crucial chronosystemic impact at a time when young people are experiencing significant psychosocial, developmental changes and shifting sociocultural circumstances (Rogers-Baber, 2017). In response to these changes, some participants were able to draw on their mesosystemic resources during the MCT, such as relationships between family, friends, school staff, and military networks, as well as their personal "maturity" and "resilience". These findings are consistent with research on young people's adjustment during parental deployment (Baber, 2016; McFarlane, 2009; Rogers, 2017; Rogers-Baber, 2017; Siebler & Goddard, 2014), highlighting the importance of strengths- and resilience-based approaches to supporting young people during critical transitions in their parents' military careers.

Many participants reported substantial difficulties navigating information, resources, and support in civilian settings. Some noted that existing services focussed on supporting previously serving personnel but did not engage with their children. Others described a sense of helplessness when it came to seeking support, as they believed their family would not approve of engagement with civilian professionals who "wouldn't

understand". These findings are consistent with existing evidence of military stoicism and distrust in relation to mental health support amongst previously serving adults (Bryan & Morrow, 2011; Hazle et al., 2012; Siebler, 2009; Vogt, 2011; Weinick et al., 2012). For young people, the influence of these parental attitudes represents a powerful microsystemic barrier to help-seeking, placing them at a perilous disadvantage and exacerbating their vulnerability during this significant life transition. These findings highlight the need to promote help-seeking by young people outside, as well as within, their family unit.

Since school environments are crucial avenues of external help-seeking and support (Benbenishty et al., 2016; Lester et al., 2010), the lack of school support identified by many participants was particularly concerning. Only two participants described supportive relationships with school staff, or access to programs designed to foster their inclusion and connection with peers. For one participant, having a strong relationship with teachers facilitated help-seeking, providing an informal opportunity to confide in someone outside her family. Other participants described school-based support programs as tokenistic and at times, counterproductive to their support needs, leading to further segregation from their civilian peers. Participants attributed these experiences to insufficient civilian knowledge and understanding of military life, a concern that is well documented amongst previously serving adults (Bryan & Morrow, 2011; Hazle et al., 2012; Lane & Wallace, 2020; Siebler, 2009; Vogt, 2011; Weinick et al., 2012).

In recent years, important developments in school support and programs for young people from military families have taken place, such as Defence School Transition Aides. However, these forms of support have largely focussed on the needs of young people from currently serving families, or those experiencing parental deployment, and are only available in selected schools (Macdonald, 2017). Thus, there remains a significant gap in

services and support for young people from previously serving military families. To expand support and resources for young people at the mesosystemic level, social workers could implement peer-driven support programs tailored to the needs of individuals, as well as ongoing professional development initiatives for clinicians and educators to expand their "military cultural competence" (Lane & Wallace, 2020).

Of interest was that participants who transitioned more recently reported similar difficulties accessing support to those who transitioned decades ago. These findings highlight the scale of the service gap experienced by young people from military families. While there have been many important chronosystemic developments in MCT knowledge, policies, and service provision (Daraganova et al., 2018; Macdonald, 2017; Muir, 2018), many services and interventions still encompass a "one-size-fits-all" approach. Further, findings from this study show that even participants who transitioned more recently highlighted the need for more tailored and appropriate support, suggesting much more change is needed. Achieving this ultimately requires advocacy at the macro and exosystemic levels to target the wider social systems and policies that influence the provision of post-service care (Rogers-Baber, 2017). It is also essential that young people's agency is thoughtfully considered to avoid taking a homogenous approach to support. At the very least, they should be involved in both research and practice efforts that aim to address the issues they experience. Acknowledging them as the experts in their own lives, and as influential actors in their environment, will help foster meaningful outcomes that address individual differences and needs.

Limitations

Recruitment challenges with this population resulted in a small, non-representative sample for this study. Since several participants chose not to disclose their ethnicity, this

information could not be reported. Consequently, findings do not reflect the extent of military family diversity, nor do they account for differences between young people from diverse cultural backgrounds. Nonetheless, findings indicate several intransigent issues and experiences across all participants in the study. It is also possible that the retrospective collection of data from participants who transitioned many years ago may diminish the quality of findings due to memory lapse or changes in the experiences of military families over time. Future research is therefore essential to expand on these findings.

Conclusion

A proportion of young people from military families are not adequately supported when their parents leave the ADF. Findings from this study highlighted the need for a staged approach to the MCT that recognises the unique sociocultural factors that influence young people's transition experiences and draws on their inherent strengths and resources. Crucially, social workers and other professionals working with previously serving communities must acknowledge young people from military families as influential actors in their environment and actively engage them in developing interventions that address their individual support needs and preferences.

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Conclusion

Findings from the paper presented in this chapter demonstrate that children and young people from military families can have a range of distinct support needs at multiple systems levels leading up to, during, and for the long-term following their MCT experience. They also reveal that there is both a shortage of formal support structures for children and young people during the MCT, as well as several gaps in existing ADF and civilian services, and a reluctance among military communities to engage in, or encourage, help-seeking. By drawing on Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological systems theory, the paper outlines some of the key MCT support needs at each level of an individual's lived environment, raising implications for social work and other public health disciplines in responding to these needs. The following chapter is the final chapter of the thesis. It presents a summary of the major findings from the study and proposes a foundational framework for future research and practice concerning children and young people from military families and their experiences of the MCT.

Chapter 9 | Conclusions and recommendations

Only in imaginary experience, which neutralises the sense of social realities, does the social world take the form of a universe of possibles equally possible for any possible subject. (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 64)

Introduction

This is the final chapter of the thesis, which presents the key conclusions and recommendations of the study. It begins by revisiting and summarising the major findings from Chapters 5–8, along with an overview of the key research and practice recommendations. Through this summary, the chapter concludes that the MCT is an important, yet highly underexplored and inadequately supported life event for Australian military families, which is often experienced as a multidimensional process over time with both positive and negative outcomes for the mental health and sociocultural wellbeing of children and young people. It also explores the difficulties encountered when attempting to engage military communities, children, and young people in the study, as well as in research more generally.

By presenting a foundational framework for future research and practice, this chapter ultimately offers a number of recommendations about the importance of integrated and holistic approaches to researching, and responding to the experiences of, children and young people during the MCT, including recognition of the following key aspects: (i) the multiple levels and timepoints of a child or young person's lived environment, (ii) children and young people's strengths as well as challenges, (iii) the mobilisation of various forms of capital during the MCT and impacts on the habitus, and (iv) the centrality of individual children and young people as the experts in their own lives. Finally, the chapter, and the

thesis, concludes with a discussion of the key theoretical contributions, strengths, and limitations of the study, as well as emerging research on the MCT.

Summary of major findings and conclusions

As presented and discussed across Chapters 5–8, this study produced four key subsets of findings, with each containing three to four major themes. Table 5 presents a summary of these major findings and collates recommendations from the findings chapters for future research and implications for practice. This includes social work and other public health disciplines who often work with military families, children, and young people in both defence and civilian settings.

Table 5. Summary of major findings, recommendations for future research, and implications for practice.

	Subsets of findings and key themes			
	Fields apart: Navigating the civil-military divide • *Difficulty relating* • *Assumptions, stereotypes, and labelling* • *Opportunities to bridge the gap*	**Bourdieu applied: Exploring the transferability of capital and habitus during the MCT** • *Cultural capital* • *Social capital* • *Symbolic and economic capital* • *Identity and the habitus*	**Military family dynamics in transition** • *Increased mental health stress* • *Shifts in family relationships and dynamics* • *Domestic violence and maltreatment*	**Children and young people's support needs during the MCT** • *Gaps in defence and civilian support* • *Inadequate school support* • *Military stigma and receptiveness to support* • *Ideas for improving strategies and support*
Overview of major findings	There are a number of sociocultural differences between military and civilian 'fields' which result in distinctions between the ideas, actions, and perceptions of children and young people from military life compared to their civilian peers. These can result in difficulty relating to, or forming connections with one another, and are often compounded by narrow, or non-representative assumptions and stereotypes made about military families due to poor civilian understandings about defence life and vice versa.	During the MCT, certain values placed on children and young people's defence knowledge, language, cultural experiences, clothing, tastes, social networks, and symbolic status can shift. These shifts and the need to navigate new forms of capital in the civilian world present both obvious challenges as well as several opportunities for children and young people. It is common for elements of capital, identity and the habitus that are formed and accrued during a child or young person's military upbringing to be considered incongruent to those of the civilian world, and therefore irrelevant for success in civilian fields, despite their value in the defence setting, resulting in difficulty assimilating.	During the MCT, a proportion of children and young people from military families experience psychosocial difficulties associated with mental health, parental substance use, psychological and emotional regulation, disruption to family dynamics and relationships and domestic and family violence. However, the strengths and resources of children and young people from military families should not be overlooked as many adjust well and continue to thrive.	There is a proportion of children and young people from military families who are not adequately supported leading up to, during and following their families' MCT. Not only is there an overall lack of appropriate and tailored supports and services for individual children and young people—both in the defence and civilian contexts—but there is also a reluctance among military families and communities to access existing services due to mental health and service-use stigma.
Recommendations for future research and implications for practice	To build a more complete story about the civil-military divide and its impact on the experiences of children and young people during the MCT, there is a need for further qualitative research which seeks the perspectives of children and young people from both military and civilian backgrounds about the cultural differences between the two. Tailored supports which recognise the everyday experiences, strengths, and assets of military families during the MCT, their contribution to society and their important role in the broader community are needed. Supports should include mechanisms to connect and educate one another and share in the exchange of knowledge between children and young people from military and civilian backgrounds to quash existing stereotypes and address polarising media representations.	Future research should examine the mobilisation of different forms of capitals accrued across different socio- and sub-cultural settings within the ADF, including children and young people who grow in various branches, as well as those from culturally and linguistically diverse families within the ADF. Social workers and other public health practitioners working with children and young people during the MCT—both in defence and civilian settings—should consider the role of military habitus and capital in children and young people's experiences of transition and support the mobilisation of military-accrued capital into civilian norms to enhance the possibility of successful social, cultural, financial, and mental health outcomes. Future research should also examine concepts such as habitus, field, and capital on a larger scale and with a more robust sample. More systematic investigations of the extent to which habitus influences the MCT experience of children and young people are required.	Practitioners employed in defence and civilian settings should advocate for early psychosocial interventions that target children and young people's wellbeing prior to the MCT, not just once problems arise. By drawing on their expertise in psychosocial assessment and strengths-based practice, social workers are well-positioned to help military communities, children, and young people identify and build on their adaptive qualities. Increased qualitative methodologies and use of critical theories can offer rich and nuanced perspectives to improve understandings and empower children and young people by elevating their voices on military family issues that concern them.	Researchers and practitioners should take a staged approach to understanding and supporting the MCT of children and young people that recognises the multisystemic influences at all levels of their lived environment and at multiple timepoints of the MCT. Practitioners should acknowledge children and young people as influential actors in their environment and actively engage them in developing interventions that address their individual support needs and preferences, eliminating a homogenous approach. Teachers and practitioners should implement tailored, peer-driven support programs in schools and engage in ongoing professional development initiatives to expand their military cultural competence.

Recruiting and engaging children and young people from military families

In addition to the major theoretical and thematic findings summarised in Table 5, this study revealed another critically important finding—the difficulty of recruiting and engaging military families, children, and young people in research. During recruitment, the researcher experienced considerable issues engaging the target population and meeting the desired sample size. While to some degree, this study was limited by its timeframe and budget, and therefore its recruitment campaign (i.e., reliance on free advertising), there appeared to be several other factors at play in terms of the low recruitment and engagement levels. This section explores some of these potential factors with reference to experiences and findings from this study, as well as some of the existing literature on hard-to-reach populations and barriers to the participation of military families in other research studies and practice. It also outlines considerations for improving the engagement of children and young people in military research moving forward.

First and foremost, difficulty recruiting participants from previously serving ADF families for this study did not appear to be an isolated issue. Through several discussions with other doctoral candidates and academics undertaking defence-related research, as well as a scoping search of the small but relevant body of literature in this area, it became clear that recruiting and engaging military populations was a consistent barrier to fulfilling research agendas (Cook & Doorenbos, 2017). It was also the primary reason for some studies having ceased prior to data collection and analyses (Cook & Doorenbos, 2017). Such challenges spanned both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, as well as both face-to-face and online modes of data collection. However, research and literature examining the participation of military families and barriers to their engagement is minimal. While some authors (e.g., Cook & Doorenbos, 2017; Davis et al., 2017; Littman

et al., 2018) have begun to explore recruitment challenges, and engagement issues among current-serving military personnel in the United States, no empirical studies, systematic reviews, or discussion papers focussing on recruitment and engagement issues with children and young people from either currently or previously serving Australian military families could be found, meaning that the reasons surrounding their lack of research engagement are even less clear. However, it is possible that factors influencing their interest or involvement in research studies could stem from those which also determine the likelihood of their parents' engagement.

It was only five years ago that the first known study documenting military families' perspectives on research participation was conducted (Davis et al., 2017). This research used focus groups to gauge the perspectives of U.S. service members and their partners on how to improve recruitment prospects, ongoing engagement and participation, and the retention of military families in research studies (Davis et al., 2017). Findings revealed that even if military families are interested in participating in research, they are more likely to participate if the current or previously serving member of the family is interested themselves. It is possible that the decision to only target children and young people in the present study may have resulted in fewer participants than had whole families or parents been invited to participate as well. However, because the aim of the research was to emphasise children and young people's voices during the MCT, it seemed counterintuitive to risk their perspectives being discounted or overshadowed by those of their parents or other family members.

Additionally, research by Davis et al. (2017) found that military families prefer recruitment advertisements that stood out and were eye-catching and meaningful without being too complicated. They are also more likely to participate if there is a clear benefit of

the research for current and future military families and their peers outlined in the recruitment materials (Davis et al., 2017). This was reflected by participants of the current research, all of whom expressed feelings of gratification knowing their participation could help make a difference for other children and young people in the future. Advertisements emphasising anonymity and confidentiality were also favoured (Davis et al., 2017). This was consistent with the current research, where many participants expressed concerns, or had questions about how the research would be used, where their information would go, and how certain family members might disapprove of their involvement or be displeased if they knew they were participating, due to mental health and help-seeking stigmas among military communities. While this could also explain low recruitment levels, there remains a gap in our knowledge about how best to engage children and young people from military families in both research and practice.

The current study offers important insights into some of the barriers to recruitment, participation, and engagement of children and young people from military families specifically. During the recruitment phase, the researcher engaged in several conversations with individuals from a range of government and non-government organisations that work with military families, including several ex-service organisations, counselling services, and the DVA, along with a range of other defence-connected individuals who were not participants of the research. Most conversations emphasised the "tightly knit" and "closed-off" nature of currently and previously serving ADF communities, as well as a tendency to conceal their experiences from those outside the defence sphere. In the more general research context, groups that prove challenging to recruit, or involve in service use, have been described as 'hard-to-reach' populations (Ellard-Gray et al., 2015; Shaghaghi et al., 2011). In many cases, this is due to their minority status, physical or geographical location,

or other social, cultural, and economic situations (Shaghaghi et al., 2011). Findings from this research suggest that civilian researchers and practitioners or services outside the defence sphere can face a range of additional challenges in engaging and building rapport with currently or previously serving ADF populations due to a lack of specialist knowledge about military life and culture, i.e., being an "outsider".

Perhaps the most critical source of information regarding prospective explanations for children and young people's low engagement with the research and service use came from the perspectives of participants themselves, many of whom reported that they and others they know have often felt reluctant to participate in research about their military family experiences due to a level of distrust in researchers generally, the motivation behind the research, and how it will be used. This was irrespective of whether the research was government-funded, ADF-connected, or entirely independent. Some participants expressed their concerns over their perspectives being changed or falsely reported to fit with hidden aims of the research and subsequently sway future policy making or secure funding for a specific government agenda which they oppose. While all participants in this study were transparently informed of the research aims and processes, and every measure was taken to ensure the accurate interpretation and reporting of their perspectives, this was a common concern across participants and may represent an important barrier to the engagement of children and young people, as well as other military family members in research studies. However, these issues require further investigation with a larger sample.

It is also possible that impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic served as potentially compounding factors for the recruitment and engagement of participants in this research. The recruitment period for this research coincided with peak restrictions and public health orders including an extended period of mandated lockdowns, working-from-home orders,

and border closures across Australia, along with a considerable increase in reported levels of stress and anxiety among Australian families and the general population (Salari et al., 2020). Emerging literature has demonstrated the negative impacts of these restrictions on recruitment numbers for research studies generally (e.g., Mirza, 2021), so it would seem feasible to assume these aspects could have also played some role in the recruitment challenges experienced with this research. However, the fact remains that military populations appear to have been a hard-to-reach population prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, thereby demonstrating the importance of acknowledging other important factors when designing studies and planning recruitment. Table 6 summarises a list of important considerations for engaging children and young people from military families in future research.

Table 6. Key considerations for improving the engagement of military families, children, and young people in future research.

	Considerations for improving research engagement
Research design	• Include all members of the military family in the research study to increase likelihood of interest and motivation but ensure that the different perspectives of each family member are going to be collected and heard/valued equally.
Recruitment	• Use eye-catching and relevant recruitment material, which is meaningful, non-tokenistic and clearly outlines the benefits of the research for currently and/or previously serving families and their peers, as well as the collective defence community. • Using military language in recruitment material may invoke an immediate sense of connection to the study and improve the likelihood of engagement. It could also demonstrate a level of military cultural competence among the researchers. However, transparency about who is running the research (i.e., civilian research team, ex-service organisation, ADF, or Government body etc.) and its purpose is critically important. • Building strong connections and good rapport with individuals with a military background, or various defence and ex-service organisations is essential for improving the dissemination and reach of recruitment materials. If military families, children, and young people know you have the trust of individuals and organisations they trust, their likelihood of participation may be greatly increased.
Data collection	• Where possible, undertake data collection with individual family members so perspectives (and particularly the contributions of children and young people) are free from the influence of parents and other family members. • Carefully consider the use of various methods and what information is needed to answer specific research questions. If this information can be gained through shorter, online means such as web-based surveys, open-ended questionnaires, or written narratives, these may be more appealing for some families, children, and young people, as found in the literature. However, where qualitative data are sought, ensure the questions are straightforward and clear.
Analysis, interpretation, and dissemination of findings	• Being transparent at the outset of the research about the nature of the research, what it will involve and what types of questions will be asked is key. For military families, children, and young people, ensuring their voices and contributions will be accurately reported as well as informing them of how findings will be shared and to whom is critical. There was a big emphasis in the literature, as well as in this study, on the desire to know that their answers would not be changed or softened and that their participation would help make a difference. • Involving participants in the data analysis, interpretation and reporting of findings stages of future research may increase the level of control military families, children, and young people feel they have over the research that concerns them and therefore improve the likelihood of engagement.
General	• Future research on military families should include more studies that specifically explore issues related to research participation and engagement among currently and previously serving communities, particularly in the Australian context, and in relation to children and young people. To gain the most insight, both barriers and enablers of research engagement and participation should be investigated, not simply one or the other.

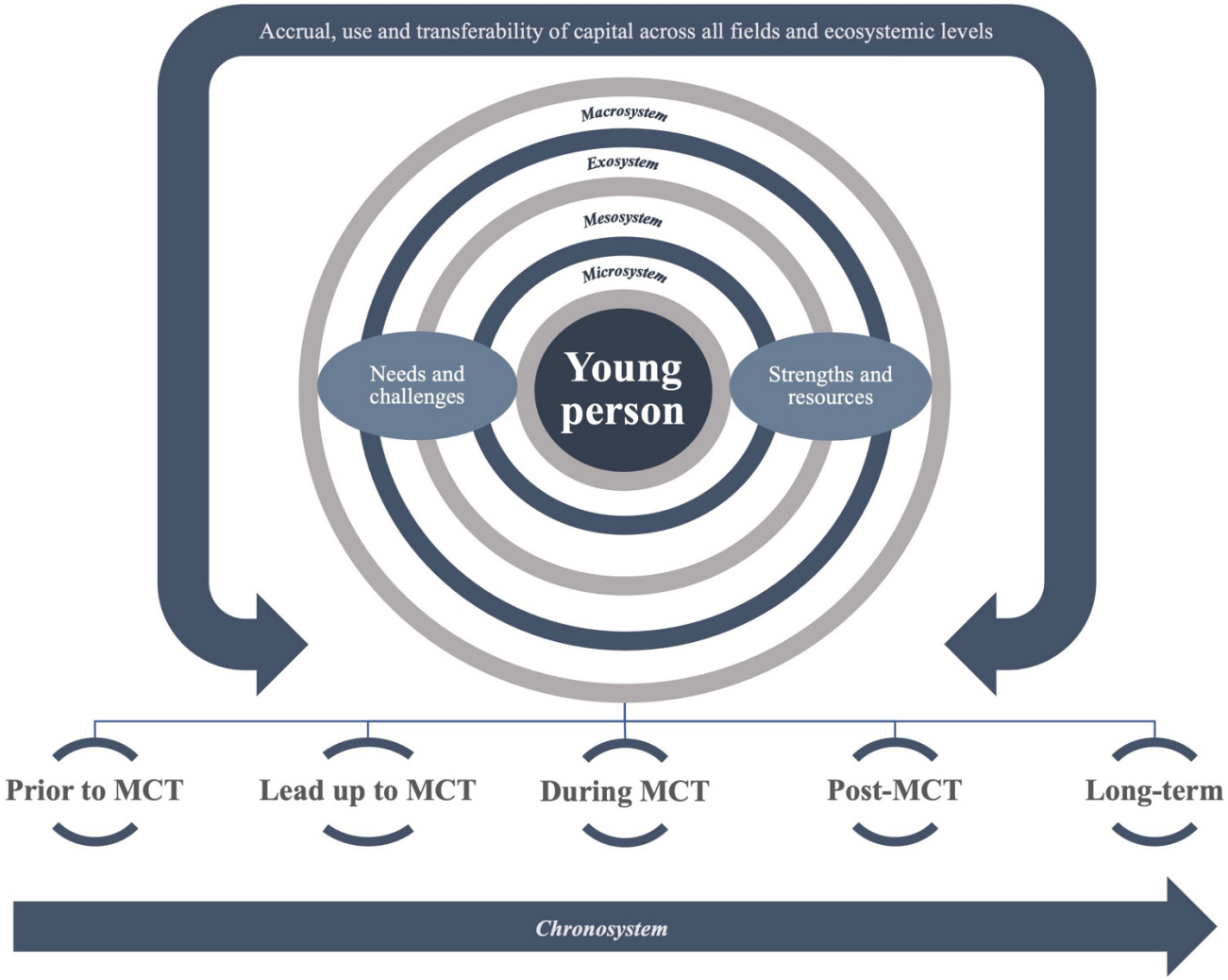
Ultimately, the thorough planning of research designs and consideration of useful and effective approaches for facilitating the recruitment and engagement of children and young people from military families in research, as well as ensuring effective strategies for minimising retention are critical. However, it is clear there are still more deep-seated barriers in terms of building trust and rapport with military populations, as well as encouraging them to share their stories and experiences both in research and in practice. Anecdotal research has shown that when veterans and their families seek support from services in a civilian context, they often subject practitioners to a 'litmus test' to gauge their level of knowledge and understanding of defence culture (Atuel & Castro, 2018). Failing to earn this trust in the early stages of initial contact can lead to an erosion in the therapeutic alliance (Atuel & Castro, 2018). These issues, combined with the discouragement of opening up emotionally and seeking help, were also reported to be the most likely barriers to research participation and service engagement for military populations reported by participants of this study. Therefore, many of the barriers to service use and engagement of military families, children, and young people like those explored in Chapter 8 are also likely to impact on research engagement. Ultimately, the application of new research findings, interventions or emerging policies and practice frameworks risk futility unless we strive to improve the interest and engagement of military families, children, and young people in research and service interventions in the first place.

A foundational framework for future research and practice: Implications for social work and other public health disciplines

Until now, no conceptual model or basic guidelines have been produced for understanding and responding to children and young peoples' experiences of the MCT. This is likely

because of the underexplored nature of this phenomena, and a lack of empirical research findings to guide our understanding. Merging the key findings from this research, Figure 6 presents a foundational framework, demonstrating the multiple levels, structures, and relations relevant to children and young people from military families. This model provides a nuanced conceptualisation of the MCT process across various contexts and timepoints which can be used by a range of public health disciplines to inform future research and practice with children and young people from an integrated and holistic perspective. This framework consists of four key aspects that should be considered when examining, understanding, and responding to the MCT, including: (i) multiple levels and timepoints of a child or young person's lived environment, (ii) children and young people's strengths as well as challenges, (iii) the mobilisation of various forms of capital during the MCT and impacts on the habitus, and (iv) the centrality of individual children and young people as the experts in their own lives. These elements of the model are discussed below.

Figure 6. Foundational framework for future research and practice.



Multiple levels and timepoints of a child or young person's lived environment

As shown in Figure 6, researchers and practitioners should consider the MCT experiences of individual children and young people from military families both within and beyond the family unit, as well as across the multiple systems levels of their lived environment. This includes all levels of Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological systems theory such as the individual level, *microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem* and *chronosystem*. Events, experiences, relationships, interactions, and other factors that occur at each of these levels should be considered in terms of those related to both military and civilian life and should be examined in terms of their distinct impact on, or relevance to, the MCT of the child or young person. According to Fossey et al.'s (2019) Military Family Systems Model [MFSM] the "concentric relationships and interactions between family, external, and societal environments effect, impact, and influence each other over time" (p. 193), just as Bronfenbrenner (1977) sets out various levels demonstrating the relationship between an individual and the more distant environments and actors in their life. Therefore, Figure 6 builds on the work of Fossey et al. (2019) by incorporating analogous aspects from Bronfenbrenner's original model, and the MFSM. In this sense, the military family can be seen as the *'microsystem'*, the military as the *'exosystem'* and society as the *'macrosystem'*.

At the *microsystemic* level, experiences and supports related to parenting, mental health and wellbeing, military family dynamics and other social phenomena in immediate environments such as the home, neighbourhood, and school should be considered. At the *mesosystemic* level, researchers and practitioners should seek to investigate and understand the relationships between individual networks and environments such as parents, local communities, and teachers as well as the local systems or structures in which these

relationships and interactions take place. At the *exosystemic* level, it is important to acknowledge and explore the experiences and supports within the ADF and/or civilian life, as well as the ways in which these collective organisations and communities are either enriching or impeding the MCT of children and young people. When looking at *macrosystemic* factors, it is critical that the broader policies and sociocultural structures, including dominant societal discourses such as experiences of military stigma, assumptions, and stereotypes, are examined in relation to children and young people's experiences of the MCT.

When implementing the proposed foundational framework, special consideration should also be given to the *chronosystemic* elements of the MCT. Indeed, researchers and practitioners should take a holistic approach to understanding and responding to the MCT of children and young people in a way that acknowledges the temporal nature of their journey and experiences, and the various timepoints that the MCT involves. It should be seen not as a singular event, but as spanning five key stages as demonstrated in Figure 6. These include: (i) experiences of military life prior to the MCT which may subsequently impact on transition, (ii) the time at which a family makes the decision to leave and the period leading up to their exit, (iii) the time of active transition, during which families are newly navigating the MCT, (iv) the post-MCT period, when families no longer identify with active transition and have established civilian lives, and (v) life into the long-term period following transition (i.e., several months to years). Social work researchers and practitioners, as well as other public health disciplines employed across both defence and civilian settings should advocate for early interventions that target the mental wellbeing of children and young people prior to the MCT, not just once problems arise. They should

also ensure effective supports are both well-evidenced and made available to children and young people at all stages of the MCT, including into the long-term.

To best understand, explain, and respond to a child or young person's MCT, it is important to understand the whole picture, which is why it is critical that researchers and practitioners examine factors at all levels, and across time. Fortunately, social work and other public health disciplines have a long-established role in supporting military families, children, and young people in a variety of settings including public health services, private practice, schools, veteran services, and many other organisations, and are therefore uniquely placed to consider these multiple systems levels and the influence they have on children and young people's lives (Atuel & Castro, 2018; Demers, 2011; Hall, 2011; Hazle et al., 2012; Knox & Price, 1999; Leslie & Koblinsky, 2017; Luby, 2012; Martin et al., 2016; Newell, 2012; Pease et al., 2016; Rubin, 2012; Savitsky et al., 2009; Strong & Weiss, 2017). More specifically, social work's expertise in assessing the biopsychosocial elements of individuals' lives is already designed to consider the multi-level influences on children and young people's experiences, meaning the discipline is primed for implementing this key aspect of the proposed framework.

Children and young people's strengths as well as challenges

Another key aspect of the proposed framework is acknowledging the strengths, opportunities, and resources of children and young people in addition to the important consideration of key issues, challenges, and barriers during the MCT. In Figure 6, consideration of these is shown as spanning all levels of the individual's lived environment (i.e., the *micro, meso, exo, macro,* and *chronosystems*), suggesting that researchers and practitioners should seek out, understand, and respond to the strengths and challenges of children and young people in a range of settings, contexts, and of course, timepoints, such

as those discussed in the previous section. While it is critical that we gain insight into some of the struggles of the MCT so that these can be adequately supported, directing too much of a focus on these risks pathologising children and young people's experiences, and emphasising a deficits-approach. The strengths and adaptive qualities of children and young people from military families are highlighted in the literature and have also been explored in the current study. Therefore, it is essential that we focus on these just as much as their needs and challenges so that services and supports can strike the right balance between addressing important needs and celebrating children and young people's own resources as important protective factors for a successful transition into civilian life.

Drawing on its expertise in strengths-based practice and facilitating the empowerment of individuals through their own personal assets and resources (AASW, 2013), social work is, once again, well-positioned to explore the way in which children and young people from military families identify and build on their unique adaptive qualities during the MCT, in addition to taking a multilevel and psychosocial approach to identifying their key issues, challenges and support needs (Graybeal, 2001; Saleebey, 2012) In doing so, researchers and practitioners should assess and mobilise the internal and external resources and supports that protect military families, children, and young people during the stress and change of the MCT. This includes drawing on internal defence assets of children and young people such as their military identity and sense of belonging associated with strength, service, sacrifice, connectedness, and pride, as well as coping mechanisms and their capacity for diverse social and community engagement (Easterbrooks et. al., 2013; Benbenishty et al., 2016; Hall, 2008; Hazle et al., 2012; Milburn & Lightfoot, 2013; Park, 2011; Weinick et al., 2012; Wright et al., 2013). However, researchers and practitioners should also be mindful of the extent to which these

values, qualities, and traits might also alienate children and young people from their civilian peers, so that tailored, meaningful and effective supports can be put in place. In addition to these individual strengths and adaptive qualities, children and young people's mesosystemic resources and assets during the MCT, such as relationships between family, friends, school staff, and military networks, should also be considered and mobilised when implementing this aspect of the foundational framework, as well as any other new and emerging strengths and challenges identified through future research and practice efforts.

The mobilisation of various forms of capital during the MCT and impacts on the habitus

The third key aspect of the proposed framework, demonstrated by an all-encompassing arrow, is the importance of recognising, understanding, and supporting the mobility of pre-established and new forms of capital by children and young people across the multiple fields, contexts and timepoints of the MCT. In doing so, researchers and practitioners should examine the influence of this mobilisation of capital on the habitus and identity of children and young people, and how processes concerned with the accrual, use, and transferability of capital ultimately impacts on their experiences during the MCT.

According to the literature, while the unique language, symbols, norms, and systems of military culture promote unity and resilience, they can also leave service members and their families less equipped to cope in a civilian environment. Following the MCT, children and young people from defence families have less opportunity to interact with military culture. The common expectation is that they will simply interact with, and integrate into, the dominant civilian community (Massia, 2015). However, this perspective ultimately neglects the complexities of cultural transition from a healthy acculturation perspective, and risks devaluing the MCT experiences of children young people. It ignores

their right to maintain important aspects of their military cultural identity—or habitus—and to have these understood and respected within the civilian field.

It is important for research and practice concerning children and young people from military families to develop effective ways of supporting and valuing their rich cultural ties, whilst also empowering them to find meaning and significance in their new civilian lives (Massia, 2015). In this way, understanding how capital and habitus shift and operate both within and outside the family unit by drawing on not just the structural factors at play, but also the agentic and intrafamilial elements (e.g., Cottingham, 2016; Reay, 2015), could provide researchers and practitioners with new and important insights into children and young people's experiences. Understanding these impacts is crucial if future social workers and other public health researchers and practitioners are to effectively engage and support children and young people from a cultural perspective during the MCT.

In exploring the mobilisation of capital and understanding the habitus of children and young people from military families, researchers and practitioners should also acknowledge their behaviours and experiences as products of the belief systems, values, and ethics that underpin their military culture (Reger et al., 2008). In doing so, they should be aware of their own preconceived values, beliefs, cultural backgrounds, and ethical biases to understand and appreciate, without judgement, the sociocultural practices, capital, and worldviews of children and young people from military families (Hall, 2008). Here, the idea of military cultural competence need become an important aspect of the interdisciplinary skillset so that this 'ideal' can be translated into an everyday and intrinsic part of their research and practice (Atuel & Castro, 2018; Demers, 2011; Hall, 2011; Hazle et al., 2012; Knox & Price, 1999; Leslie & Koblinsky, 2017; Luby, 2012; Martin et al.,

2016; Newell, 2012; Pease et al., 2016; Rubin, 2012; Savitsky et al., 2009; Strong & Weiss, 2017).

The centrality of individual children and young people as the experts in their own lives

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, the proposed framework shown in Figure 6 emphasises the importance of maintaining a focus on the child or young person at the centre of their MCT experiences, and as the expert in their own life and transition. At all stages of future research and practice efforts, researchers and practitioners should strive to give voice to, and empower children and young people from military families, and involve them where possible. This should include providing opportunities for children and young people to contribute to the design and analysis phases of research processes that concern them as well as allocating them an active role in the development of interventions that target their support needs. It is also essential that children and young people's agency is thoughtfully considered to avoid taking a homogenous, or one-size-fits-all approach to their support needs.

Acknowledging children and young people as the experts in their own lives, and as influential actors in their lived environment is essential for achieving improved outcomes and building towards an adequate support climate that has the capacity to address individual differences and needs, depending on the distinct experiences and backgrounds of each individual child or young person. Social workers and other public health professionals working in research and practice should advocate for the diversity among children and young people during the MCT, in addition to recognising their shared experiences and the aspects they have in common with other military-raised individuals. Ultimately, nothing should be seen as more paramount than the consideration of individual children and young people at the heart of their MCT experience. Further, blanket

approaches which risk poor engagement, tokenistic or ineffective services, and at worst, further adverse outcomes, should be highly avoided.

Breaking down cultural barriers and fostering improved connections

In addition to the four key aspects of the foundational framework outlined above, there is also an important role to be played by researchers, practitioners, and policy makers in seeking solidarity between children and young people from military and civilian communities on a 'big picture' level. Findings from this study suggest that there is a considerable cultural disconnect between military and civilian communities, which result in a level of difficulty for currently and previously serving personnel and their families engaging with, and feeling understood by, civilian professionals. Social workers and other public health disciplines involved in research and practice with military communities should actively seek out opportunities to enhance their military cultural competence and advocate for alternative military family narratives, as well as the dismantling of dominant discourses which serve to maintain barriers in the formation of meaningful connections between children and young people from military and civilian families.

Ultimately, it is hoped that the foundational framework presented in this chapter, along with these implications, will provide researchers and practitioners with a basic guide for examining, understanding, and responding to some of the distinct aspects of children and young people's experiences during the MCT. It is also hoped that they will assist in the conceptualisation and development of more tailored supports for children and young people during the MCT and, in the research context, the development and design of future qualitative investigations that provide greater insight into their experiences. By building on this study and drawing on aspects of the foundational framework, future research has the capacity to offer more rich and nuanced perspectives on the MCT and will ultimately help

improve the quality of available MCT services and supports whilst also empowering children and young people from military families into the future.

Theoretical contributions of the research

Along with the proposed foundational framework and recommendations for future research and practice, findings from this study also offer new and important theoretical insights into the MCT. By applying Bourdieusian concepts, habitus, field, and capital, to inductively analyse and interpret the data, findings were able to be contextualised and explained according to elements of Bourdieu's theory of social practice. In Chapter 6, for example, these concepts assisted in understanding the transferability of military-accrued capital into civilian settings and shifts in the habitus and identity of children and young people by acknowledging competing resources, structures, and dispositions across military and civilian fields. These findings suggest that applying Bourdieu's framework can lead to an improved understanding of children and young people's support needs during the MCT, and henceforth strategies and supports that can enhance their wellbeing.

This study also offers new theoretical insights through its response to some of the key limitations of Bourdieu's original concepts. In doing so, it applied the theoretical extensions proposed by Cottingham (2016) and Reay (2015) to contextualise findings beyond the 'structural' and account for the emotional, psychological, and intra-familial dimensions of children and young people's experiences during the MCT. In Chapter 7, for example, these concepts were applied to examine impacts of the MCT on military family dynamics and the mental health of families, children, and young people. Not only did they help unpack and explain some of the impacts of the MCT on the psychological wellbeing and relationships both within and outside the family unit, but they also helped situate the innate strengths, resources, and adaptive qualities of children and young people from

military families in the broader MCT context, given their strong focus on individual agency.

Until now, Bourdieusian concepts have only been considered in the context of veterans' experiences of the MCT (Cooper et al., 2017, 2018). This PhD study is the first of its kind to examine children and young people's MCT experiences through a Bourdieusian lens. It also appears to be the first to incorporate psychological and emotional extensions of Bourdieu's theoretical concepts—including Cottingham (2016) and Reay's (2015) intra-familial and agentic-centred dimensions of capital and habitus. Findings ultimately demonstrate the complementarity of these theoretical contributions, and their combined ability to consider and explain the behaviours and experiences of children and young people during the MCT both within, and beyond, the family unit. They also provide a strong basis for future MCT research and applications of Bourdieusian concepts in research with children and young people beyond the scale of this PhD research.

As well as confirming the value and applicability of Bourdieusian concepts, this study also demonstrates the relevance and transferability of other youth subcultural research and literature to the lives of children and young people from military families during the MCT. As discussed in Chapter 6, several parallels can be drawn between children and young people navigating everyday sociocultural groups or class structures, and those faced with the transition from military to civilian 'fields.' Examples include struggling to fit in or relate to others, navigating the 'tastes' of a new group setting and the different levels of status within that group (Threadgold, 2018), the degree to which previous cross-cultural experiences impact on future transitions between groups (Allen & Hollingworth, 2013), feelings related to culture shock or marginality when moving to a foreign community (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009), and the impacts of subcultures, or

‘cultures within cultures’ on identity and behaviours (Johansson, 2017). Ultimately, this study offers important insights that contribute to the broader literature on youth culture and children and young people in sociocultural transition, situating its theoretical contributions in both research and practice, and in the scholarly field.

Strengths and limitations of the study

The first key strength of this study is its focus on the experiences of children and young people—a target population largely neglected in much of the existing military family research. Not only did it focus on children and young people’s experiences, but it also directly included participants who were children and young people at the time of their MCT, as opposed to seeking the perspectives of their parents or other adult family members, which is also a major limitation of many prior studies. Another strength of this study is its use of a rigorous and well-informed qualitative methodology, underpinned by strong theoretical approaches. This, combined with the use of in-depth interviews, not only provided rich and nuanced insights into children and young people’s experiences of the MCT, but it also gave voice to participants, empowering them as the experts in their own lives, and in their MCT journey. Additionally, findings from the study have been peer-reviewed and published by two academic journals—one Australian (*Australian Social Work*), and one international (*Child & Family Social Work*) – enabling rapid uptake of recommendations by researchers, practitioners, and policymakers.

This study ultimately expands both the Australian and international knowledge base in defence family research. It provides important insights into the highly underexplored phenomenon of the MCT, as well as children and young people’s experiences of this specifically, offering a foundational framework to guide future research and practice. However, like any study, it is not without its limitations, including: (i) a

small, non-representative sample and methodological limitations, (ii) the challenges of being a civilian researcher in the defence space, and (iii) the retrospective collection of data and memory recall. These limitations are discussed below.

Small, non-representative sample and methodological limitations

Significant recruitment challenges experienced during this study resulted in a very small and non-representative sample (n=10). However, due to the length of each interview, and the rich nature of the data collected from these 10 participants, deep insights were still able to be drawn from the findings. In addition to limitations concerning the recruitment and engagement of participants in the research (explored in more detail earlier in this chapter), several participants also chose not to disclose their ethnicity, meaning that potentially important information on the cultural and linguistic diversity of participants could not be reported on in the findings. Therefore, this study cannot account for the multiplicity of military family composition, nor does it expansively reflect in-group differences between children and young people from different ADF backgrounds, such as the Army, Air Force, and Navy, as well as different cultural backgrounds which may be important factors in influencing or determining the experiences of children and young people during the MCT.

Methodologically speaking, qualitative studies require the researcher to interpret often extremely complex social phenomena from the multiple perspectives of participants without clouding their inferences with preconceptions or personal biases. Despite great care taken by the researcher to ensure a rigorous process of reflexivity, it is important to acknowledge the impossibility of all findings remaining completely uninfluenced by the researcher. It is also possible that the heavily contextualised nature of the researcher's interpretations may result in lower levels of replicability or generalisability. Nonetheless, these qualitative processes formed an important part of the cocreation of knowledge

between the researcher and the researched in this study, and every measure was taken to ensure biases were minimised. Finally, it should be acknowledged that these findings are specific to the Australian context. Therefore, confirmations on a larger scale and in international contexts are needed.

The challenges of being a civilian researcher in the defence space

In this instance, the researcher also had no pre-existing ties to the ADF nor any currently or previously serving community connections prior to those formed during the research process. Naturally, this made forming connections with, and accessing certain military populations, more challenging, which may have further contributed to the recruitment challenges experienced. It was therefore important to engage in rigorous consultations with as many military-connected individuals as possible, including several Australian ex-service organisations, to help foster increased rapport building with children and young people from the military community. This helped to ensure sensitive and reflexive, yet productive engagement with participants, and to ensure quality and accuracy during the interpretation and reporting of data, given the researcher was reporting on experiences vastly dissimilar to their own.

One well-documented feature of military and defence culture in the international literature is mental health and help-seeking stigma, as well as poor engagement with civilian services due to difficulties connecting with and relating to civilians (e.g., Hall, 2011). Even when support is sought, or considered, literature has shown that military families often consider civilian social workers to be less capable than those with military backgrounds and training, or those operating within defence-connected services (Leslie & Koblinsky, 2017; Luby, 2012; Martin et al., 2016; Pease et al., 2016; Strong & Weiss, 2017). On the one hand, it is possible that knowing they were being interviewed by a

civilian researcher could have resulted in fewer experiences shared, or a sense of cautiousness among participants when sharing their stories. On the other hand, being a civilian researcher also came with certain strengths, for some participants reported how sharing their stories and experiences with someone "outside" defence was "liberating". For these participants, opening up with a removed and independent person like the civilian researcher meant that there was no fear of judgement, or their families and other defence connections finding out.

Retrospective collection of data and memory recall

Finally, the retrospective collection of data from older participants may also diminish the quality and accuracy of the findings due to memory lapse or changes in historical contexts over time. For example, experiences recounted from up to 48 years ago may hold less relevance for contemporary military families and structures. This is because the nature of Australia's defence force and military operations have changed substantially over the last 30–40 years, as well as the demographic profiles of currently and previously serving families. Therefore, this study is not the most robust representation of children and young people in the contemporary Australian context. It is also possible that the memories recounted by participants who were especially young at the time (i.e., 5–10 years old) could be flawed due to variations in the age and rate at which children and young people develop a reliable cognitive memory.

Several researchers, although sceptical about the efficacy of retrospective studies when alternatives are possible, have found that most peoples' recall of past events remains relatively accurate across time (Baddeley, 1990; Bell & Bell, 2018; Brewin et al., 1993; Rivers, 2001; Ross & Conway, 1986; Rubin et al., 1986), particularly in the highly emotional domains (Bell & Bell, 2018). Rubin et al. (1986) for instance, demonstrated that

recollections of events in the second and third decades of life are likely to be more accurate than those occurring at any other timepoint, except for the most recent events in a person's life. According to Rivers (2001), this is due to the increased number of 'temporal landmarks' or 'memorable firsts' that occur between the ages of 11 and 30. Overall, a large meta-analytical reassessment of research using retrospective data methods found no concrete evidence indicating that autobiographical memories are subject to significant contamination or revision (Brewin et al., 1993). However, such results should be taken with caution.

According to Bell & Bell (2018), "when prospective data are not available, retrospective data can be collected and substituted in analyses" (p. 12), particularly where there are significant recruitment challenges and data—in any form—is hard to attain. This was the case in the current PhD research where restrictions on budget, timeline, and other essential resources meant the researcher was required to rely on adult recollections of the MCT in order to understand, and make sense of, their experiences as children and young people (Bell & Bell, 2018). For these reasons, as well as the importance of giving epistemic weight to participants' voices (e.g., Fricker, 2007), the researcher considered it important to include data from all participants, provided the limitations were carefully considered and implications for the findings and future research opportunities, considered.

Despite the issues explored, and changes in contexts across time, findings ultimately revealed striking similarities between the experiences and support needs of those who transitioned many years ago, and those more recently. This was the case across multiple different domains such as the transferability of capital, mental health outcomes, family and relationship dynamics, and transition support needs. However, further research to support these findings and to compare the experiences of children and young people

from military families across contexts and at different timepoints is essential moving forward. Indeed, future studies should take more rigorous approaches that involve one or more of the following: (i) a longitudinal design as the 'gold standard' of research, (ii) additional measures of memory validity that incorporate both qualitative and quantitative strategies, and (iii) multiple methods of data collection, given the validity of retrospective answers has been shown to increase if these are cumulated (Smetackova et al., 2014).

Forthcoming research by the Australian Government

At the time this doctoral thesis was submitted, a research study had been announced by the Australian Institute of Family Studies [AIFS]. This study will be seeking to "understand family experiences of military life, how these experiences shape continued service in the ADF, and how families' transition from service can be improved" (AIFS, 2022). Due for completion in 2022–2023, it will focus on the families of currently serving members as well as members who have left the ADF in the last five years, and either who have children under 18 or who are expecting or planning children (AIFS, 2022). According to the project outline, it will explore how families navigate military and family life, how they make decisions about continued service, and what supports they find useful at different stages of life, including their transition out of the ADF (AIFS, 2022).

The proposed study, sponsored by the Departments of Defence and Veterans' Affairs, demonstrates striking similarities with the aims and research questions of the current study, and if successful, will be an important step forward in developing additional understandings at a government level about the MCT experience for Australian military families with children. However, like many of the existing studies on military families both in Australia and internationally, this research will only include the perspectives of current and former ADF members and their partners and will not involve children or young people

themselves, meaning that once again, any data exploring the experiences of children and young people at various stages of the military life cycle and transition will not be self-reported. Nevertheless, the inception of this new government-run research validates the relevance of the current research in terms of the importance of investigating the MCT and shows promise for more MCT research with the potential for including children and young people as participants in the future.

It is possible that findings from the current study may provide some additional insights that new and emerging studies like this can draw on in their review of the existing literature, and subsequently extend on through their own research processes and methodologies. More specifically, it is anticipated that they will be useful sources of preliminary information for the inception of additional government and non-government research related to military families' experiences of the MCT, with a particular focus on young people who are the children of currently and previously serving military personnel. Clearly, the MCT is a quickly emerging area of importance in defence family research and requires research at all levels to help foster improved collective understanding and supports—an agenda to which the current research contributes significance.

Conclusion

This study contributes to the fields of social work, public health, family studies, military research, and behavioural science. As the first known qualitative exploration of children and young people's experiences of the MCT in Australia, it provides rich and nuanced insights into the experiences of children and young people when their families transition out of the ADF. It adds to the area of military family research both in Australia, and internationally, which has more recently begun to focus on the MCT experiences of previously serving personnel, and to some extent partners, yet has rarely explored children

and young people's experiences of this transition. Most importantly, this research gives voice to the adult children of previously serving ADF members who experienced the MCT as young people and raises important interdisciplinary awareness of the various experiences, strengths, and challenges that children and young people face during this complex and multi-layered journey, as well as how it may affect them through the life-course. The researcher will also continue to raise awareness through the ongoing dissemination of findings as forthcoming conference presentations and journal articles.

As an in-depth study focussed on a specific region, this research also provides a strong foundation on which to base longer-term research and practice concerning children and young people whose families are approaching, or currently navigating the MCT. It raises important research and practice implications and offers a foundational framework for social work and other public health disciplines accompanied by a series of recommendations for conceptualising, understanding, and responding to the support needs of children and young people during the MCT. These recommendations include acknowledging the key cultural differences between military and civilian life and challenging existing stereotypes and assumptions about military families, children, and young people, as well as bridging more meaningful connections between military and civilian communities.

It is essential to acknowledge that military families, children, and young people form an important community within our broader society, sharing many experiences in addition to their differences. There is a need for ongoing efforts to keep military families, children, and young people in the public spotlight and strengthen supports that respond to their distinct needs and ensure their wellbeing at all stages of the MCT. Diversifying the image of children and young people from military families and dissolving homogenous

understandings of their experiences, as well as improving strategies to increase their participation and engagement in research and service use will be critical steps forward in achieving this.

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Appendices

Appendix A. Recruitment advertisement.

Appendix B. Media release.

July 27, 2020

Young people and the military-civilian transition: Defence family research study at the University of Newcastle

My name is Hannah Wells, and I am a Social Worker and PhD Candidate at the University of Newcastle. As part of my research into the Australian veteran community, I am undertaking a study which explores the experiences of young people when their parents leave the Australian Defence Force.

Until now, young people's experiences of a parent's transition out of the ADF have been underexplored. However, we know that this can be a time of great change and adjustment for veterans and their families. As we know, ADF families are tight knit and share the unique experience of belonging to the defence community, so when members transition out of this community, so too do their children. It is therefore important that we gain an understanding of these young people's experiences so that we can develop new ways of supporting them into the future.

By inviting participants to share their own story about what life was like when their parents left the defence force, I hope to learn about some of the strengths and resources, knowledge, and strategies that young people draw on when navigating this experience.

Hearing young people's own stories about this change in their lives will ultimately help extend our understanding and create new knowledge that is useful for young people from defence families and those supporting them.

If you would like to share your experience and expertise as part of this study and contribute to an important area of defence research, please get in touch with me via the contact details below.

Hannah Wells | PhD Candidate (Public Health and Behavioural Science)

School of Medicine and Public Health

College of Health, Medicine and Wellbeing

The University of Newcastle

Callaghan, NSW 2308 Australia

Appendix C. List of media outlets and organisations that publicised the research.

ABC Newcastle

- Breakfast radio interview.

Australian Veterans' Children Assistance Trust [AVCAT]

- Dissemination of research advertisement across social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram), mailing lists/word of mouth, and media release: https://avcat.org.au/defence-family-research-study-at-the-university-of-newcastle/.

Young Veterans

- Dissemination of research advertisement across social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram) and mailing lists/word of mouth.

Soldier On

- Dissemination of research advertisement across social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram) and mailing lists/word of mouth.

Partners of Veterans Association [PVA]

- Dissemination of research advertisement across social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram) and mailing lists/word of mouth.

Appendix D. Participant information statement.

Participant Information Statement for the Research Project:

Exploring the experiences of young people in military-civilian transition:

A matter of culture?

You're invited to participate in the research project identified above, which is being conducted by Hannah Wells as part of her PhD in Public Health and Behavioural Science at the University of Newcastle. The supervisors of this PhD are Dr Milena Heinsch, Professor Frances Kay-Lambkin (School of Medicine and Public Health) and Associate Professor Caragh Brosnan (School of Humanities and Social Science).

Why is the research being done?

The purpose of this research is to explore the experiences of young people when their parents or carers leave the Australian Defence Force. Hearing young people's own stories about this change in their lives, the potential challenges they experience, and the strengths and resources they draw on, as well as their families' perspectives of their experiences, will help us develop better ways of understanding and supporting them in the future.

Who can participate in the research?

You are invited to participate in this study if you are:

- Aged 13 years or over
- Are from a family where at least one of your parents has left the ADF, and
- Are currently living in Australia or were at the time your parents left the ADF.

What would you be asked to do?

You will be invited to participate in an individual interview. This will include a casual discussion with the researcher, Hannah, about your experiences when your parent(s) transitioned out of the ADF. The interview will take place using 'Zoom' or via telephone (whichever you prefer) and will run for about 60 minutes and will be audio-recorded. Interview questions will ask about your experiences of leaving the ADF with your family, what this change was like and how you adjusted. The interview will be informal, and you will be given plenty of time to tell your story, and to ask any questions of your own.

What choice do you have?

Participation in this study is entirely optional. Deciding not to partake is completely fine and will not disadvantage you in any way. We recommend that you carefully discuss this research with your other family members, including the previously serving ADF member and seek further information or support from the researcher if needed. If you decide to participate in an interview, you may exit the discussion at any time without providing a reason, and you can choose which questions you respond to. You will have an opportunity to read your transcript and make changes to it or withdraw your interview response completely for up to two weeks following completion.

How much time will it take?

The interview will run for about 60 minutes.

What are the risks and benefits of participating?

This research may be of benefit by encouraging you to share your own experiences and expertise, to help us better understand how we can create knowledge that is useful for current and ex-serving defence families. The risks associated with participating in this study are low. The questions you will be asked are very broad, and you can choose how much or how little you would like to share with us. You can also choose not to answer a question and will not be asked to provide a reason for your decision. In the unlikely event that you become uncomfortable or upset at any stage during the research, you can stop participating at any time. You will also be provided with information about support you can access for you and/or your family.

iPad prize draw

If you choose to participate in this study, you will go into the draw to win an iPad. There is one iPad to be won, and the winner will be decided following the completion of all interviews. Random selection will take place via a hat-drawing process containing all participant names. To ensure complete fairness and non-bias selection, an independent person not part of the research team will be asked to draw the winner. Participant names on paper will be destroyed immediately following the draw, and the prize recipient will then be privately contacted via phone or email to be informed of their selection. The iPad will then be posted to the winner and an email will be sent to all other participants informing them that the draw has taken place.

How will your privacy be protected?

Information collected at all stages of the research will only be accessible by members of the research team and will be stored for a minimum of five years in line with the

University of Newcastle's safe data storage requirements, using the password protected data storage solution, 'OneDrive'. All information shared will be anonymised, and any names or identifying information will be replaced with pseudonyms. Hard copies of research data will be scanned and saved on ownCloud before being destroyed. Audio recordings will also be stored on the ownCloud secure server. At the appropriate time, all data will be securely destroyed in line with the University of Newcastle's research policy provisions. If any of your responses indicate that you or other people in your family are at risk of harm, a notification will be made to the relevant statutory authority.

How will the information collected be used?

Information collected will be reported in a PhD thesis submitted for Hannah Wells' research degree. Information may also be used for other purposes, such as in academic journal articles or conference papers. You will not be identified in any reporting of findings from this project. Non-identifiable information may be shared with other parties to encourage scientific scrutiny, contribute to other research and public knowledge, or as required by law. Following your interview, transcripts will be available to be reviewed and/or edited upon your request. You will also have the option to request a summary of the research results. All interview transcripts/recordings, and research results (if requested), will be provided to you via email. To request these, you will be asked to tick a box at the end of the consent form that will be provided to you if you choose to participate.

What do you need to do to participate?

You should read this information statement carefully, or have someone read it to you, and be sure you understand the details of the study before agreeing to participate. We strongly encourage younger people to discuss this study with their parents and other immediate family members before continuing, as participation in the above activities requires

parental/carer consent for those under 18. If there is anything you do not understand, please contact Hannah Wells or Dr Milena Heinsch (details below). If you would like to participate in an interview, please sign the accompanying consent form (including parent/guardian consent for those under 18) and return to the researcher via email (see contact details below). This form should be returned within three weeks from the time you receive it. The researcher will then be in touch with you to schedule a suitable time for your interview. All correspondence and feedback provided to you throughout the research process will occur over the telephone or online, via email, depending on your preference.

Further information

If you would like further information, please contact the researcher, Hannah Wells, or the Primary Supervisor of the research project, Dr Milena Heinsch (details below).

Hannah Wells | PhD Candidate (Public Health and Behavioural Science)

The University of Newcastle

Phone: 0431 430 779

Email: hannah.wells@newcastle.edu.au

Dr Milena Heinsch | Senior Research Fellow

The University of Newcastle

Phone: 0409 730 856

Email: milena.heinsch@newcastle.edu.au

Thank you for considering this invitation.

Dr Milena Heinsch | Senior Research Fellow

Complaints about this research

This project has been approved by the University's Human Research Ethics Committee, Approval No. H-2019-0175. Should you have concerns about your rights as a participant in this research, or you have a complaint about the manner in which the research is conducted, it may be given to the researcher, or, if an independent person is preferred, to:

Human Research Ethics Officer

Research Services NIER Precinct

The University of Newcastle

University Drive Callaghan NSW 2308

Telephone: (02) 4921 6333

Email: human-ethics@newcastle.edu.au

Appendix E. Participant consent form.

Participant Consent Form for the Research Project:

Exploring the experiences of young people in military-civilian transition:

A matter of culture?

This research project is being conducted by Hannah Wells as part of her PhD in Public Health and Behavioural Science at the University of Newcastle. The supervisors of this PhD are Dr Milena Heinsch, Professor Frances Kay-Lambkin (School of Medicine and Public Health) and Associate Professor Caragh Brosnan (School of Humanities and Social Science).

Please indicate the following:

I agree to participate in the above research project and give my consent freely to participate in a one-on-one interview with the researcher, Hannah. ☐

I understand that the project will be conducted as described in the Participant Information Statement, a copy of which I have read, understood, and retained. ☐

I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary, and I may withdraw from the interview at any time, without having to provide a reason. ☐

I understand that my personal information will remain confidential to the researchers except as required by law. ☐

I understand that I will have the opportunity to edit or delete my interview transcript/recording for up two weeks after I receive a copy via email. ☐

I have had the opportunity to have any questions answered to my satisfaction. ☐

If participant under 18, I understand that my parent/carer is also required to sign this form and provide their consent for me to participate in an interview. ☐

Please also indicate the following:

I wish to receive a copy of my interview transcript for review/editing purposes. ☐

I wish to receive a summary of the research results for this study following analysis (anticipated June 2021). ☐

Consent of participant:

Print name: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Consent of parent/carer (for participants under 18 only):

Print name: _____

Signature: _____Date: _____

Appendix F. Copy of interview schedule.

Introductions

To help build an appropriate level of rapport, the researcher will introduce themselves to the participant and approach the conversation informally prior to any questions. During this time, the researcher will give the participant a brief overview of the study and will reiterate information regarding consent, confidentiality, and withdrawal from the study. Participants will then be asked to provide verbal consent which will be recorded to continue with the interview.

Background question

1. Could you tell me a bit about why you decided to participate in this study?

Central question(s)

2. Could you tell me what it was like for you when your parents left the defence force?

- What was your experience of leaving?
- Are there any events or experiences that stand out for you?
- If both your parents have left the defence force, were they any differences between when your first parent left, and then when both had left?

Prompting questions

Cultural experiences

3. Can you describe how, if at all, the things you do or the places you go have changed since your family left the defence force?

- Have there been any new influences on things like your clothing, the way you see yourself, or your behaviours?
- What about your hobbies and interests, or the places you like to hang out – have these changed at all, or have they stayed the same?
- Have your social media connections or the things you engage with online shifted in anyway?

Social experiences

4. Can you describe how, if at all, your relationships or connections with others have changed since your family left the defence force?

- Are there any differences at home, or in your relationships within the family?
- What about your friendships, or other relationships at school or work?
- Are there any significant differences between your defence relationships or connections and your non-defence ones?

Other experiences

5. Have housing or living arrangements changed for you since your parent left the defence force? If so, what has this been like for you?
6. Has your schooling, or community involvement changed since your parent left the defence force? If so, what has this been like for you?
7. Have there been any other significant changes for you because of your parent or carer's new job or their own new experiences and connections since leaving the defence force?

Closing question(s)

8. What does life look like for you now?

- What has been most challenging overall?
- What has been most helpful overall?
- Do you feel like you 'fit in' with your current surroundings better than, worse than, or the same as before?

9. What personal qualities, knowledge or skills do you have that you think helped during this change?

10. What do you feel would have been most helpful for you at the time?

11. What advice would you give to other young people in a similar situation, or whose parents are about to leave the defence force?

12. Is there anything else relating to your experience that you feel is important and would like to add, or discuss?

Concluding information

Following the interview, the researcher will reiterate information about what will happen next in terms of interview transcription and when they can expect to receive a copy of their interview transcript, if this is something they have requested. Participants will also be reminded to contact the researcher again at any time should they have further questions about the study or their participation. If participants have requested a copy of the results of this research, this will be provided via email following analysis of the findings. Finally, the researcher will check-in with participants and advise them that a follow-up email will be sent in two days which will provide a list of referral services if they require professional support or counselling.

Appendix G. Summary report for participants.

Summary report of findings from the research project:

Navigating the military-civilian transition: The experiences of young people when their parents leave the Australian Defence Force

To the participants of this study,

I would like to sincerely thank you again for participating in this research project and for allowing me to interview you about your experiences when your parents left the Australian Defence Force.

On your original consent form, and during your interview, you indicated that you would like to receive a summary report of the findings following data collection and analysis. This report has now been compiled and is attached for your viewing.

Thank you, once again, for sharing your very valuable story and experiences with me.

Hannah Wells | PhD Candidate (Public Health and Behavioural Science)

School of Medicine and Public Health

Study findings

This study interviewed individuals whose parents left the Australian Defence Force [ADF] when they were young people. Participants represented a range of genders, ages, and geographical locations in Australia. Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed, then reviewed by the researcher to identify themes that were common or recurring across interviews. Four key themes were identified, including: (i) cultural distinctions between military and civilian life, (ii) military resources in transition, (iii) mental health and family dynamics, and (iv) supports for young people during the military-civilian transition. These themes are outlined below.

Cultural distinctions between military and civilian life

Many participants observed distinct differences between military and civilian life, including characteristics, environments, and expectations. At times, these differences resulted in difficulties relating to the experiences of their civilian peers, and in some instances, feeling left out or ostracised for being 'different', which made it more difficult to cope with other challenges at the time their families were transitioning out of the ADF. Other participants described being subjected to assumptions and stereotypes about military personnel and their families based on inaccurate or over-romanticised depictions of their experiences in the media, and believed these experiences were the result of a lack of understanding about defence settings and military life among the general population. Some participants also spoke about their own lack of understanding about civilian life, and the challenges they experienced making sense of ideas, values, and behaviours that were

foreign to their own when growing up. While these experiences were common both during and following their parents' service years, they appeared to be most pronounced during the military-civilian transition. However, several participants also recounted positive transition experiences and opportunities that came from being 'different' to their civilian peers, such as sharing their positive defence experiences, stories, and events with civilian family and friends and taking the time to educate others about military life and culture, such as the values, beliefs, and norms of military families both on and off base, the joys, and the novelties. Others noted the importance of embracing the differences between their attitudes, behaviours, tastes, hobbies, and interests as a way of obtaining new learning experiences or perspectives, in addition to drawing on their existing defence connections as important protective factors and social networks when their families left the ADF.

Military resources in transition

One of the most important findings was the role that certain social and cultural resources can play during the military-civilian transition. This refers to the ways in which certain traits, behaviours, material resources, and relationships developed by young people during their family's military years can serve as either strengths or barriers when families leave the ADF. Some participants reported that during transition, their knowledge, world views, and the language they grew up using were not well understood by their civilian peers, which, for these participants, led to feelings of confusion, difficulty connecting with others and at times, loneliness, or a lack of belonging—however, this was not the case for all participants, as some experienced a much smoother transition. In addition to knowledge and language differences, some participants also reported distinctions between their clothing, styles, hobbies, and interests and those of their civilian peers, describing feelings of separation, or as though they did not 'fit in' in the civilian world. These sorts of

challenges were also found to be the case for a few participants in terms of the values and beliefs they developed over their years growing up in a defence setting—some of which could be at odds with others from non-military backgrounds. However, in many situations, participants were also able to draw on their innate strengths and resilience to acknowledge the positives, including the opportunity to experiment with life outside defence, and explore new tastes, resources, and relationships that would help them thrive when their parents left the ADF. Participants also drew on their experiences of transition in relation to their social capital. This included drawing on their pre-existing military connections as an additional support during the military-civilian transition, which allowed them to maintain a sense of connection to their 'defence family'. Overall, several participants described the fear of losing their military identity when transitioning, hinting at the profoundness of what it means to be part of a military family. A few participants even described how military life was such an important part of their identity that it became difficult to part with it long-term, and even chose to return to the ADF via their own career paths as adults.

Mental health and family dynamics

Many participants identified mental health as a key concern for their parents and for themselves during the military-civilian transition and in post-service life. This included the psychological impacts of military service on their parents and the flow-on effects these impacts had on participants' own experiences. Some participants described the difficulty they experienced witnessing their parents' deteriorating mental state during and after military service, which often led to emotional distress for the whole family. A couple of participants believed that in addition to their parents' direct service experiences, these issues were also the result of a loss of support and sense of community when leaving the ADF. A large proportion of participants interviewed reported mental health diagnoses such

as depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, and secondary PTSD either among their parents, or themselves, which impacted on both their experiences at the time, and on their adult lives and relationships. They also noted how their parents', or their own, mental health condition went undiagnosed for a period, as they were encouraged to be strong and independent. Participants described these experiences as endemic of a stoic culture within military communities, where mental health issues could be considered a weakness. Some participants also described co-occurring issues such as relationship problems, shifts in family roles and dynamics, parental separation or divorce, alcohol and substance use, violence, and aggression in the home when growing up, and when their parents left the defence force. However, this was not the case for all participants, and several also described the strengths and adaptive qualities they developed during this time, such as advocacy skills, and the confidence to speak openly about their own mental health and family challenges. Participants also described the loving and memorable moments they experienced with their families during the military-civilian transition—which for many, outweighed any negative experiences—and the beneficial effects these experiences had on their family, providing greater structure and security when their parents left the defence force. Many indeed described the military family as a bond like no other, demonstrating that, for many young people, the continuing influence of military culture can serve as an important protective factor.

Supports for young people during the military-civilian transition

While several participants praised the everyday support they received from defence while their parents were active service members, many reported how there is far less available when families leave the ADF. Participants also highlighted an overall lack of civilian services and government initiatives to support them in transition. While they identified a

small number of important ex-service organisations that support veteran families, many noted how these services tend to have a strong deficit-focus, prioritising the death or serious injury of a parent or severe mental illness over the more general support needs of families and young people. Interestingly, these experiences were similar for both participants who transitioned several years ago and for those who transitioned more recently. Many noted that existing services are not well advertised, nor easy to access, and tend to lack supports directly for young people. Participants also described a general absence of school support during the military-civilian transition, which again, many attributed to a lack of knowledge about their families' experiences. While reports demonstrated a gradual increase in school support over time, several participants suggested there is still a long way to go, and a lot more to be done. Overall, stigma relating to help-seeking was found to be one of the biggest barriers to accessing support. Many participants observed that access to information or encouragement to use available support would have been beneficial for them at the time, while others described the challenge of having to seek help alone when parents or other family members were not as receptive to support. When asked about ideal support, participants pointed to the need for structures that span both defence and civilian contexts to foster sustained connection with their military communities but also encourage adjustment to civilian life as their families transition out. Overall, participants were critical of a one-size-fits-all approach, highlighting the need for a more nuanced approach to transition that addresses the specific needs of individuals and their families and focuses on their innate strengths.

Significance of the research

This study contributes to the fields of defence research, social work, family studies, behavioural science, and a range of other public health disciplines involved in supporting

currently and previously serving military communities. To the researcher's knowledge, it is one of the first studies on the experiences of young people when their families leave the defence force, both in Australia and internationally. It identifies new insights on the distinct ways in which young people experience the military-civilian transition including some of the challenges they face during this time, but also their strengths and personal attributes that help facilitate adjustment to civilian life, and hence a smoother transition out of the ADF with their families. Through its findings, this study proposes strategies for improving services and supports for young people when their families leave the ADF.

Most importantly, this research gave voice to the participants involved by collecting their rich, detailed and highly valuable perspectives, and acknowledging them as the experts in their own lives. The study represents an important contribution in the road towards improved support and wellbeing outcomes for young people from military families and highlights the need for an enhanced understanding of military life among public health professionals, teachers, and the broader civilian society in Australia. It demonstrates the importance of developing supports that consider and address the individual needs of young people when their families leave the defence force, rather than taking a one-size-fits-all approach.

Finally, this study offers a strong foundation on which to base future investigations of young people and the military-civilian transition in both the Australian and international context. To date, two original research articles arising from this study have been published in peer-reviewed, academic journals. These offer recommendations for future research and practice in the field of social work, with the potential for translation across other disciplines involved in clinical practice and research with defence communities.

If you have any questions about this report, or would like to contact me to discuss these findings further, please contact:

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