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Military Family Research: Challenges Facing Military Families

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Changing Face of the CAF

- Military families represent ethnic and structural diversity.
- Societal and economic trends had a significant effect on the military families
 - the switch from traditional complementary roles, wherein men assumed instrumental responsibilities and women ensured that expressive needs were met, to a role symmetrical model;
 - men's psychological involvement in the family is much greater than traditionally assumed;
 - increase in dual pay check/dual career families.
- Current trends indicate that military families in the future will become ever more like their civilian counterparts.

Military Lifestyle demands

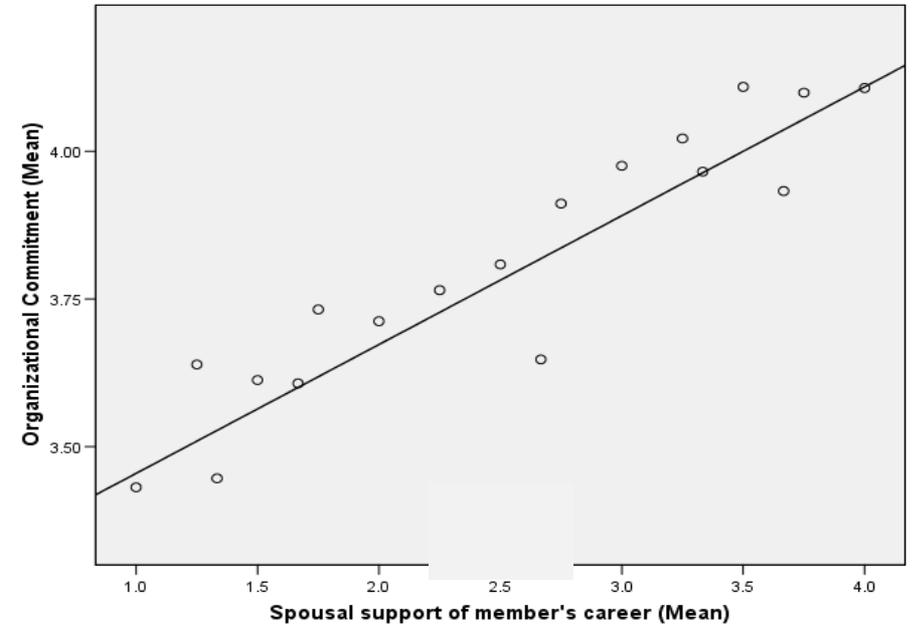
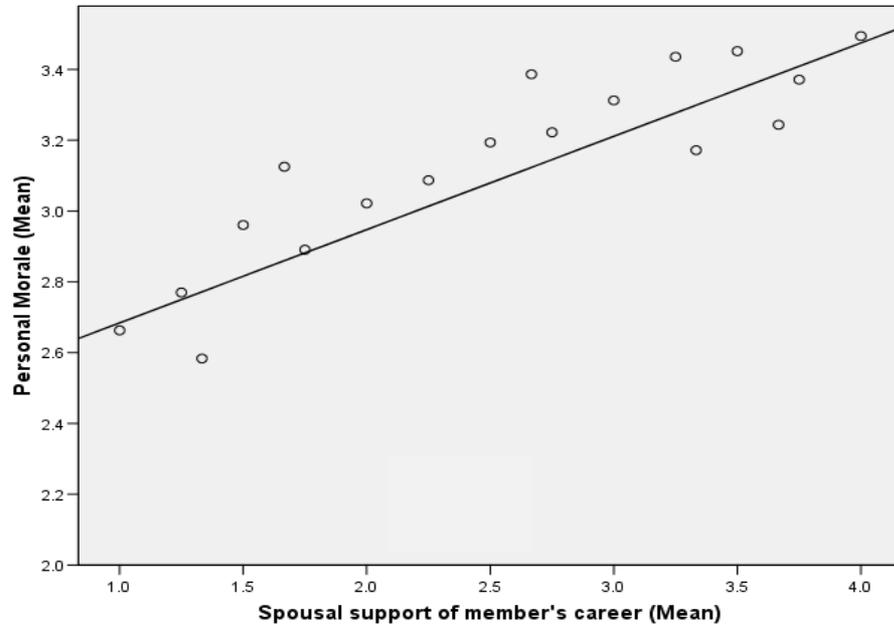
- Military life places on its members and their families unique and extremely intense demands including:
 - frequent separation and eventual reunions
 - relocations
 - long hours, changeable work schedules
 - isolation from civilian society
 - risks of injury or death
 - isolation from civilian society
 - overarching culture that is still heavily masculine

- The combat role of the Canadian Armed Forces in Afghanistan
- The most significant stressor is the separation of military family members due to operational deployments

Importance of Studying Military Families

- Spousal support (i.e. relationship satisfaction, confidence in spousal relationship, perceived social support, and spousal support of member's military career) are predictive of
 - CAF members' individual well-being (i.e., increased general psychological well-being and low depressive symptoms)
 - Positive organizational outcomes (i.e. lower intention to leave the CAF, increased levels of morale, organizational commitment and willingness to deploy)

Spousal support



CAF members' perceptions of their spouses as supportive of their career was associated with organizational outcomes (personal morale and organizational commitment)

Importance of Studying Military Families

- Spousal support is important for organizational effectiveness
- How can we ensure spousal support?
- What about spousal well-being?

2013 Spousal QOL Survey: Methods

- The survey was sent to a stratified random sample of 9,359 CAF spouses, but the survey could not be delivered to 1,062 home addresses, resulting in a final eligible survey sample of 8,297.
- A total of 1,895 CAF spouses responded, yielding an adjusted response rate of 22.8%.
- The analyses included 1,822 CAF spouses (with the survey weights being properly calculated and adjusted; estimated $N = 39,104$).

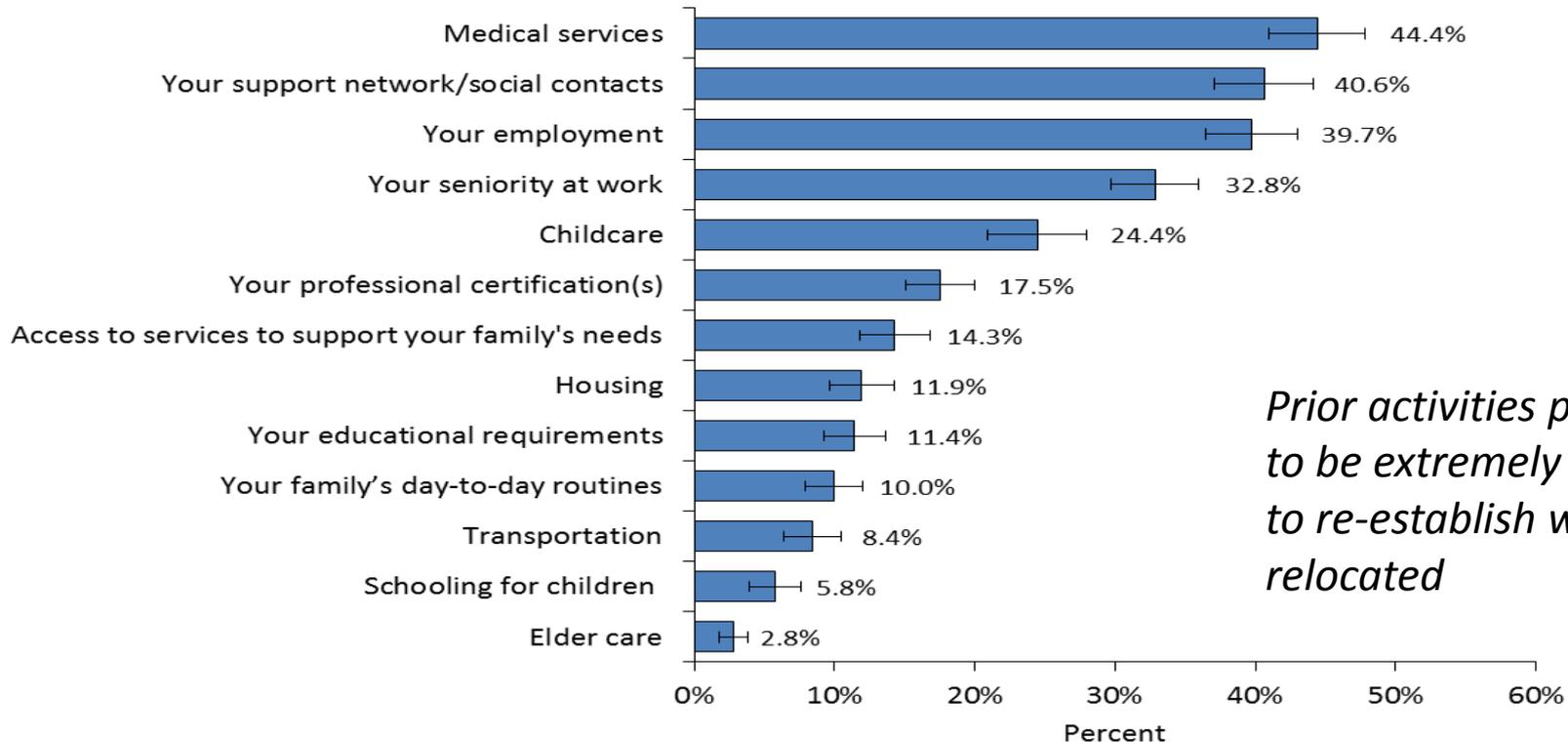
Results: Reported Issues for CAF Families

- The top five frequently reported issues for CAF families were spousal employment, primary health care, relocation, financial stability, and childcare

Items	Estimated % (Total N = 39,104)	Unweighted N
Spousal employment	42.7%	762
Primary health care	36.9%	696
Relocation	32.2%	636
Financial stability	30.4%	497
Childcare	19.4%	344

Results: Relocation Difficulties

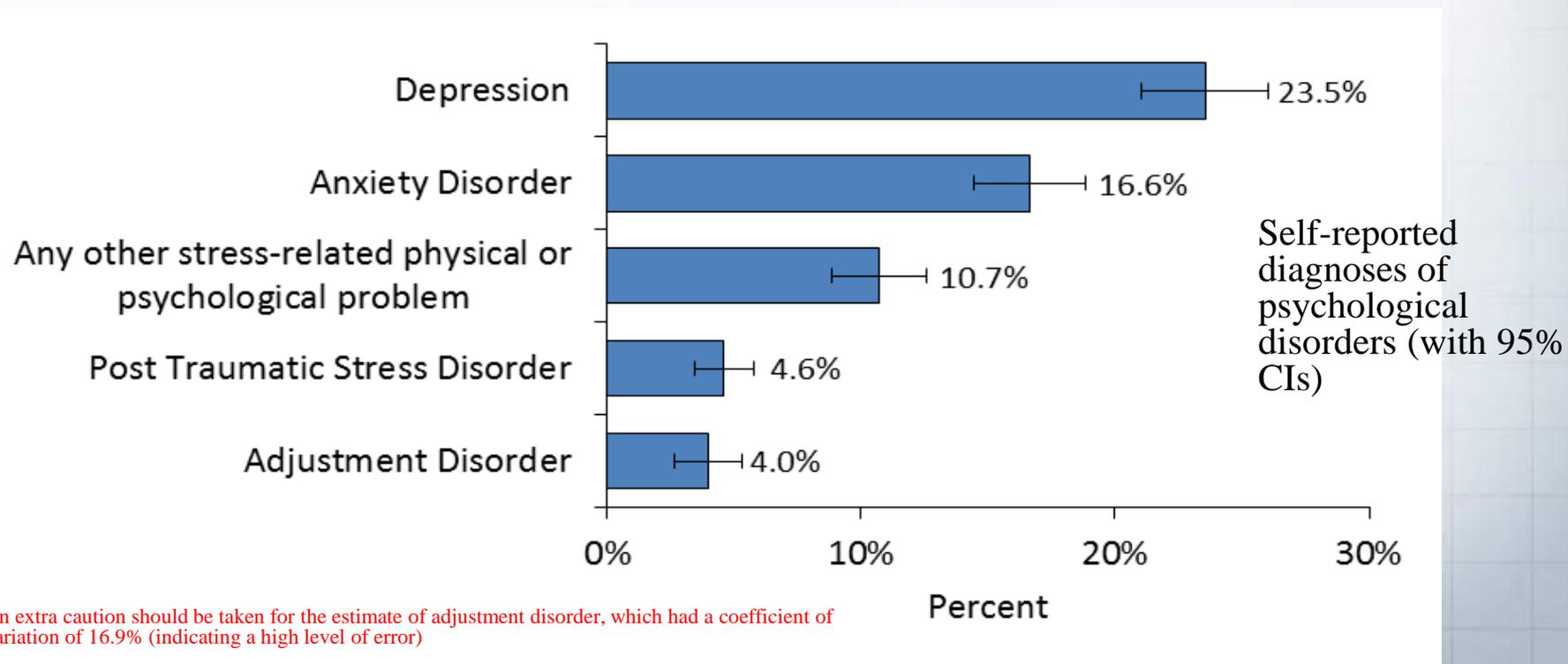
- Medical services were the most frequently reported service (44.4%) that CAF spouses found to be “extremely difficult” to re-establish upon relocation, followed by their support network, their employment, their seniority at work, and childcare.



Prior activities perceived to be extremely difficult to re-establish when relocated

Mental Health of CAF Spouses

- Approximately one quarter of spouses reported that they had been diagnosed with depression at some point during their military partners' career in the CAF



Spousal/Partner Employment and Income Project (SPEI)

- What is the employment status and income of CAF spouses compared to similar groups?
- When comparing female spouses of CAF members with female spouses of Police, Federal Public Servants and Other Civilians, spouses of CAF are
 - more mobile
 - less likely to be employed
 - more likely to have a lower income

The Impact of Deployment

- Deployment/ duty related separation is a major stressor for military families
 - Defined on a spectrum including training exercises/missions, peacekeeping rotations, overseas tours of duty, and combat
 - Military separations is a defining part of military life, experienced by most military personnel and their families



Deployment and Family Experiences

Pre-deployment phase:

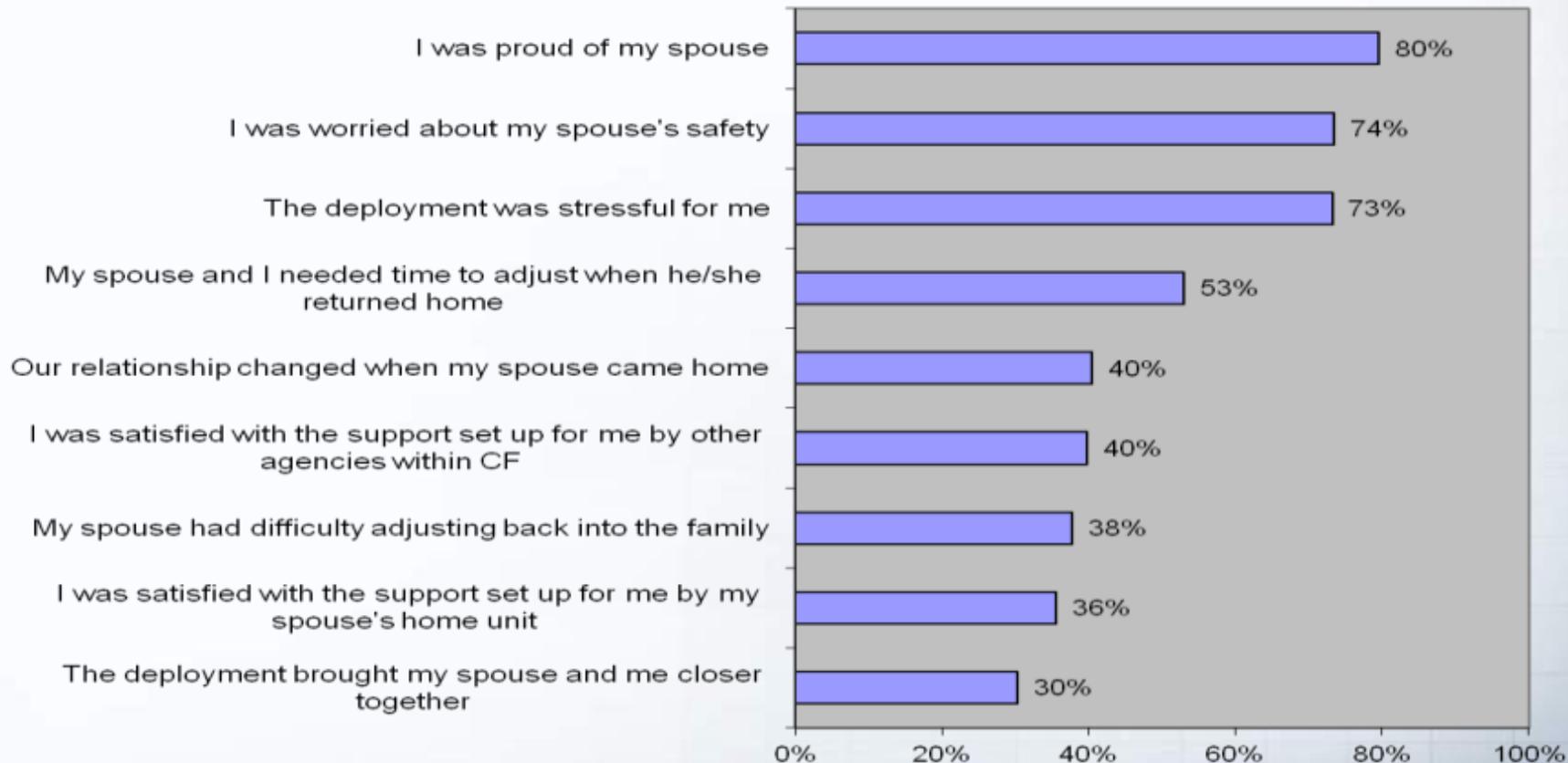
Deployment phase:

Post-deployment phase:

Feelings prior to deployment	Often/Always	Feelings during deployment	Often/Always	Feelings after deployment	Often/Always
Capable	79%	Capable	82%	Happy, joyous	86%
Confident	73%	Pride in spouse	79%	Excited	84%
In control	66%	Self-reliant	76%	Compassionate	74%
Sadness	54%	Confident	76%	Patient	60%
Pride	53%	In control	75%	Understanding that he/she needs rest and solitude	57%
Frustration	37%	Independent	66%	Let-down (fantasy of reunion doesn't live up to expectations)	12%
Anxiety	33%	Assertive	48%	Anger at spouse trying to "take over" family activities	12%
Apprehension	31%	Fatigue	46%	Fearful of infidelity	10%
Resentment	30%	Emotional highs and lows	45%	Anger at spouse's need for solitude and rest	7%
Anger	25%	Fears for deployed spouse	34%		
Guilt	8%	Sadness	30%		
		Anxiety	17%		
		Anger	12%		

Deployment and Family Experiences

Spouses' Deployment Experiences:



Items adapted from Thompson & Pasto, 2001

Deployment and Family Experiences

- Lower psychological well-being was reported in the deployed group, $F(3,1627) = 2.91, p < .05$
- Depression levels were greatest among respondents whose CAF spouses were currently deployed, $F(3,1627) = 7.76, p < .001$
- Life satisfaction scores did not vary across the stages of deployment
 - During the deployment and post-deployment phase, spouses with children reported significantly lower life satisfaction than those without children
- Work-family conflict highest for respondents whose spouse was currently deployed or recently returned, $F(3, 1634) = 11.36; p < .001$

Deployment and Family Experiences

- Protective factors
 - Flexible gender roles (multiple roles performed regardless of traditional gender stereotyping was linked to better wellness)
 - Active coping strategies (engagement in a more active role during the separation was linked to better adjustment)
 - Community and social support (involvement with communities helped families to manage the stress of separation)
- Risk factors
 - Families that are alone (service member is not deployed as a part of the unit leaves the family with no support or information)
 - Families that are young and inexperienced
 - Families with additional stressors, traumas, or challenges

Impact of the research program

Strategic

- Understand the effectiveness of existing programs/ policies and guide future programs/policy development for quality of life of CAF members and their families

Tactical

- Understanding the impact of family factors on important organizational outcomes (e.g. retention, performance) can guide commanders in:
 - anticipating shortfalls in readiness;
 - understanding boundaries of unit effectiveness; and
 - targeting prevention and intervention strategies for identified problems

Knowledge Gaps and Planned Research

- Impact of military lifestyle on children (quantitative research) in the CAF
- Care of ill and injured and their families: Evaluation of the rehabilitation/recovery programs
- Impact of repeated postings on family resilience
- Impact of repeated absences and postings of single parents on the child-parent relationship
- New NATO RTG on **Transition to Civilian Life**
 - Current members : US, UK, CAN, EST, NOR, DEN
 - Welcoming participants and contributors (Contact: sanela.dursun@forces.gc.ca)

Thank you

