



Parents of CAF Personnel

The Experiences of Parents of Canadian Armed Forces Personnel –
Survey Results

June 2018

Canada

Parents of CAF Personnel

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Comprehensive Military Family Plan
Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services

CITATION INFORMATION

Manser, L. (2018). *Parents of CAF Personnel: The Experiences of Canadian Armed Forces Personnel – Survey Results*. Ottawa, ON: Military Family Services, Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services.

Military Family Services

Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services
Department of National Defence / Government of Canada

June 2018

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Abstract

To inform the development of a Comprehensive Military Family Plan, Military Family Services and Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services conducted a research study, “***Understanding the Needs of Parents of Canadian Armed Forces Personnel***”. The objective of this research was to understand the needs of parents of Canadian Armed Forces members – the stressors facing parents of Canadian Armed Forces members and the professional supports accessible and used by parents.

In total, 83 parents of Regular Force personnel completed the survey. The majority of respondents were female between the ages of 45-54. For almost two-thirds of the respondents, their child was single, divorced or separated. Over one-third of the respondents stated that either they and/or their partners/spouses were either currently serving in the military or had served in the military themselves (i.e. their child who is now a Regular Force member had also been a child of a military member). For three-quarters of the respondents, their child had relocated due to a posting less than 2 times. And almost 40% of respondents had seen their child deployed to an overseas mission at least once.

Results revealed that most parents of military personnel experienced positive or mixed emotions specifically in response to their child’s deployment, working environment and/or military operational requirements. Some also experienced fear, worry, anxiety and/or concern over their child’s safety. For many, the most stressful aspect of the military career was fear that their child would be exposed to danger associated with deployments.

Less than half of the parent respondents had accessed any specific military family support services. Of those who had not, the most common reasons included that there were no supports near to where they live, that they did not believe or were explicitly told they were not eligible for services, or that they did not know about available services.

More than half of respondents felt they knew enough about the warning signs to know when to seek help for changes in their own or their child’s mental health, yet one-third stated they would not know where to go for support if they needed it.

Parent respondents suggested a number of resources that they would like to be able to access for support. Most common were education and information about the military culture and how to deal with deployments, peer support, online resources, and information sessions prior to boot camp and deployments.

Recommendations are provided to help address some of these issues, including realignment of the Military Family Service Program with respect to targeted service delivery and accountability, availability of services, and education and support targeted to parents.

Résumé

Pour guider l'élaboration du Plan global pour les familles des militaires, les Services aux familles des militaires (SFM) et les Services de bien-être et moral des Forces canadiennes (SBMFC) ont mené une étude intitulée **Comprendre les besoins des parents des membres des Forces armées canadiennes**. Ce projet de recherche visait à mettre en lumière non seulement les besoins des parents des membres des Forces armées canadiennes (FAC), mais également leurs facteurs de stress et les mécanismes de soutien professionnels qu'ils connaissent et qu'ils utilisent.

Au total, 83 parents de membres de la Force régulière des FAC ont répondu au sondage. La majorité étaient des femmes âgées de 45 à 54 ans. Près du tiers des répondants étaient le parent d'un enfant célibataire, divorcé ou séparé. Plus du tiers ont répondu qu'eux-mêmes ou leur conjoint étaient des membres actifs ou libérés des FAC, ce qui permettait de déduire que leur enfant était un membre de la Force régulière ayant été un enfant de militaire. Les trois quarts des répondants étaient le parent d'un enfant ayant dû déménager moins de deux fois en raison d'une affectation. Près de 40 % des répondants ont vu leur enfant partir en mission à l'étranger au moins une fois.

Les résultats ont révélé que la plupart des parents des membres des FAC avaient des sentiments positifs ou partagés quant aux missions, à l'environnement de travail et/ou aux exigences opérationnelles militaires de leur enfant. Certains ont également déclaré avoir ressenti de la peur, de l'inquiétude, de l'anxiété ou des préoccupations à l'endroit de la sécurité de leur enfant. Pour beaucoup de répondants, l'aspect le plus éprouvant de la carrière militaire de leur enfant était la peur que celui-ci soit exposé à un danger lors d'un déploiement.

Moins de la moitié des répondants avaient eu recours à des services de soutien destinés aux familles des militaires. Les autres n'y avaient pas eu recours principalement parce qu'il n'y avait pas de services de soutien dans leur région, qu'ils ne croyaient pas être admissibles à de tels services, qu'ils s'étaient fait dire explicitement qu'ils n'étaient pas admissibles à de tels services ou qu'ils ne connaissaient pas les services offerts.

Plus de la moitié des répondants ont déclaré qu'ils croyaient en savoir suffisamment sur les signes précurseurs d'un trouble de santé mentale pour aller chercher de l'aide pour eux ou leur enfant, mais seulement le tiers ont répondu qu'ils savaient où se diriger pour obtenir du soutien.

Les répondants ont suggéré quelques ressources et services de soutien qu'ils aimeraient avoir à leur disposition en tant que parents, principalement de l'éducation et de l'information sur la culture militaire et les moyens pour faire face aux réalités des déploiements, du soutien par les pairs, des ressources en ligne et des séances d'information avant les camps d'entraînement et les déploiements.

Des recommandations sont fournies pour aider à remédier à certains des problèmes soulevés, notamment le réalignement du Programme des services aux familles des militaires sur le plan de la prestation ciblée des services, de la responsabilisation, de la disponibilité des services et des services d'éducation et de soutien spécialement destinés aux parents.

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1 Introduction

Military Family Services (MFS) and Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services (CFMWS) conducted a research study in 2018 called “***Understanding the Needs of Parents of Canadian Armed Forces Personnel***” to inform the development of a Comprehensive Military Family Plan.

The Comprehensive Military Family Plan is an initiative within the new Defence Policy, STRONG SECURE ENGAGED, released by the Government of Canada in June 2017. This policy is deliberately ambitious and provides unprecedented support to Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) members and their families. It offers clear direction on Canada’s defence priorities over a 20-year horizon. It focuses on ensuring military personnel and their families are well-supported, diverse and resilient – physically, psychologically and socially – from the moment they join the Canadian Armed Forces, throughout their careers, to the time they transition out of the military.

As stated in STRONG SECURE ENGAGED, military families are the strength behind the uniform. They share in the stresses and strains resulting from deployments of their loved ones into dangerous operational duty, and the prolonged separations they entail. They also make important sacrifices and face challenges associated with frequent relocation, such as finding new family health care providers, re-establishing child care, moving children between schools and education systems, professional licensing and dealing with inconveniences such as changing drivers’ and vehicles licenses when moving between provinces.

CFMWS was tasked with the implementation of STRONG SECURE ENGAGED Initiative 24 – Develop a Comprehensive Military Family Plan. Specifically, the STRONG SECURE ENGAGED Defence Policy detailed the following to be included within Initiative 24:

- Providing an additional \$6 million per year to modernize Military Family Support Programs, such as Military Family Resource Centres (MFRCs), to provide better support to families when members are deploying or during periods of absence;
- Establishing relocation expertise to help military families find and access the services they need in a new community; and
- Working with federal, provincial and private sector partners to improve the coordination of services across provinces to ease the burden of moving.

The objective of this research was to inform specifically the first and second components of the Comprehensive Military Family Plan – to provide better support to families when members are deploying or during periods of absence and establishing relocation expertise, from the perspective of parents of military personnel.

2 Methods

An online survey was developed based on an initial review of existing literature on CAF family experiences. The objective of this research was to understand the needs of parents of CAF members.

This survey focused on understanding the demographics of respondents, the stressors facing parents of CAF members and the professional supports accessible and used by parents.

This research study was approved by the Director General Military Personnel Research and Analysis Social Science Research Review Board in accordance with Defence Administrative Order Directive 5062-0 and 5062-1 with approval number 1730/17.

An initial “invitation to participate” email was sent in February 2018 to all 32 MFRCs in Canada as well as to MFS Europe and MFS US requesting that the survey be promoted among the families in their communities. Additionally, MFS promoted the research through their social media channels. The survey remained open for 6 weeks, after which data was compiled and analysed.

In total, there were 83 completed responses from parents of CAF members from 25 geographic locations. No responses were received from the following locations:

- Cold Lake
- Comox
- Dundurn/Central Saskatchewan
- Europe
- Goose Bay
- Moose Jaw
- Prince Edward Island
- Suffield
- Trenton
- USA
- Yellowknife

Therefore, all reported results represent only the 25 locations in the following table.

Table 1: Respondents by Geographic Location

Closest CAF Base	Respondent Count	% of All Respondents
Bagotville	2	2%
Borden	6	7%
Calgary	1	1%
Edmonton	5	6%
Esquimalt	6	7%
Gagetown	2	2%
Gander	1	1%
Greenwood	1	1%

Closest CAF Base	Respondent Count	% of All Respondents
Halifax and Region	4	5%
Hamilton	1	1%
Kingston	5	6%
London	6	7%
Mainland BC	10	12%
Meaford	2	2%
North Bay	1	1%
Ottawa (NCR)	8	10%
Petawawa	3	4%
Shilo	2	2%
St John's	2	2%
St-Hubert	1	1%
St-Jean / Montreal	3	4%
Toronto	4	5%
Valcartier	3	4%
Wainwright	1	1%
Winnipeg	3	4%
TOTALS / AVERAGE	83	4%

While the sample size is small, the purpose of this research was not to conduct a comprehensive study with full representation of all parents of CAF members, but rather to gain a more in-depth exploratory understanding of their issues and experiences.

All qualitative comments in this report are taken directly from the surveys, and any errors or apparent errors in the transcribed material do not arise from transcription but rather from being reproduced exactly as spelled or presented in the original source.

3 Results

3.1 Demographics

3.1.1 Respondent Demographics

The typical parent respondent was female (83%), non-military civilian employee (50%), between the ages of 45-54 (48%), and married/common-law to a civilian (64%). For the large majority of respondents (87%), English is their primary language.

For comparison purposes, demographics are presented as percentage of respondents to this survey (n=83) alongside the percentage of respondents to the CAF Community Needs Assessment conducted in 2016¹ who were parents of RegF or ResF personnel (n=87).

Table 2: Respondent Demographics

	Overall % of Respondents (n=83)	Comparison to CAF Community Needs Assessment 2016 (n=87)
Gender		
Male	12%	21%
Female	83%	79%
Age		
Under 45	6%	7%
45-54	48%	43%
55-64	33%	40%
65+	11%	10%
Marital Status		
Common-Law with Civilian	10%	n/a
Common-Law with RegF member	0%	n/a
Common-Law with ResF member	0%	n/a
Divorced	15%	n/a
Married to Civilian	54%	n/a
Married to RegF member	6%	n/a
Married to ResF member	6%	n/a
Separated	4%	n/a
Single	0%	n/a
Widowed	4%	n/a

¹ Prairie Research Associates. (2017). *CAF Community Needs Assessment 2016 Overall Results*. Ottawa, ON: Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services.

	Overall % of Respondents (n=83)	Comparison to CAF Community Needs Assessment 2016 (n=87)
Primary Language		
English	87%	95%
French	11%	5%
Current Employment Status		
Civilian Employee (non-military)	50%	60%
Civilian Employee (DND, NPF)	6%	5%
RegF member	1%	0%
ResF member	0%	1%
Self-employed	6%	7%
Homemaker / Not Seeking Employment	6%	7%
Unemployed / Seeking Employment	1%	1%
Retired	30%	16%
Other	0%	4%
Note: Due to rounding and that some respondents did not provide an answer, totals may not sum to 100%.		

3.1.2 Military Characteristics

Respondents were asked to respond to a variety of questions related to the military careers, including connection to military, years served, environment, postings, etc.

Of parents who responded to the question, “Do or did you and/or your spouse/partner formerly serve in the CAF?” over one-third (35%) indicated that either they or their partner have served or currently do serve in the CAF.

More than half of respondents indicated their child was with the Canadian Army (54%). Just over one-tenth (13%) were with the Royal Canadian Air Force. And 20% were with the Royal Canadian Navy. The remaining were with Canadian Special Operations Forces Command (4%) or other elements or commands.

On average, respondents indicated their child had served in the CAF for 6 years. The years served ranged anywhere from 0.5 to 23 years of service.

The majority of parents indicated their child’s marital status was single.

Table 3: Marital Status of Child

	Overall % of Respondents (n=83)
Marital Status of Child	
Common-Law with Civilian	12%
Common-Law with RegF member	1%
Common-Law with ResF member	0%
Divorced	2%

	Overall % of Respondents (n=83)
Married to Civilian	13%
Married to RegF member	1%
Married to ResF member	0%
Separated	2%
Single	61%
Note: Due to rounding and that some respondents did not provide an answer, totals may not sum to 100%.	

3.1.3 Relocations Due to Postings

Respondents were asked a variety of questions on their child’s military career postings and relocations.

For most respondents, their child had moved residences less than 2 times due to a posting to a new base. For comparison purposes, these results are presented alongside the results of both the Relocation Experiences study conducted by CFMWS² and the Impacts of Military Lifestyle on Military Families study conducted by DGMPRA³. Overall, the percentages are higher for few numbers of relocations, however given the years served are also lower, it is not surprising that at this point in their careers, there have been fewer relocations.

Table 4: Total Number of Posting-Related Relocations During Military Career

	% of Respondents (n=83)	Comparison to Relocation Experiences	Comparison to Impacts of Military Lifestyle
Total Number of Relocations			
0	16%	0%	15.7%
1	39%	20%	28.3%
2	18%	24%	19.3%
3	12%	22%	13.4%
4-6	6%	26%	17.5%
7-9	1%	4%	4.1%
10+	0%	4%	1.5%
Note: Due to rounding and that some respondents did not provide an answer, totals may not sum to 100%.			

² Manser, L. (2018). *Relocation Experiences. The Experiences of Military Families with Relocations Due to Postings – Survey Results*. Ottawa, ON: Military Family Services, Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services.

³ Wang, Z., Aitken, N. CAF Family Research Team. (2016). *Impacts of Military Lifestyle on Military Families: Results from the Quality of Life Survey of Canadian Armed Forces Spouses*. Director Research Personnel and Family Support, Director General Military Personnel Research and Analysis, Defence Research and Development Canada Scientific Report DRDC-RDDC-2016-R012, Ottawa, Canada.

3.1.4 Deployments to Overseas Missions

Respondents were asked a variety of questions on their child’s deployment experiences.

For most respondents, their child had not been deployed to an overseas mission while serving with the CAF.

Table 5: Total Number of Deployments to an Overseas Mission

	% of Respondents (n=83)
Total Number of Deployments to an Overseas Mission	
0	55%
1	17%
2	10%
3	6%
4-6	5%
Note: Due to rounding and that some respondents did not provide an answer, totals may not sum to 100%.	

For the majority of respondents, they had not attended any deployment-related briefings. Results are presented in comparison to the CAF Community Needs Assessment.

Table 6: Deployment-Related Briefings

	Overall % of Respondents (n=83)	Comparison to CAF Community Needs Assessment 2016 (n=87)
Yes, through the CAF	15%	8%
Yes, through the MFRC	17%	15%
Yes, online through the Road to Mental Readiness Training	0.1%	n/a
No	67%	77%
Note: Due to rounding and that some respondents did not provide an answer, totals may not sum to 100%.		

3.2 Experiences of Parents of RegF Members

3.2.1 Emotional Reactions

Respondents were asked a number of questions related to the emotions they experienced in the past year specifically in response to their child’s deployment, working environment and/or CAF operational requirements.

Parents of CAF Personnel - Emotions Experienced

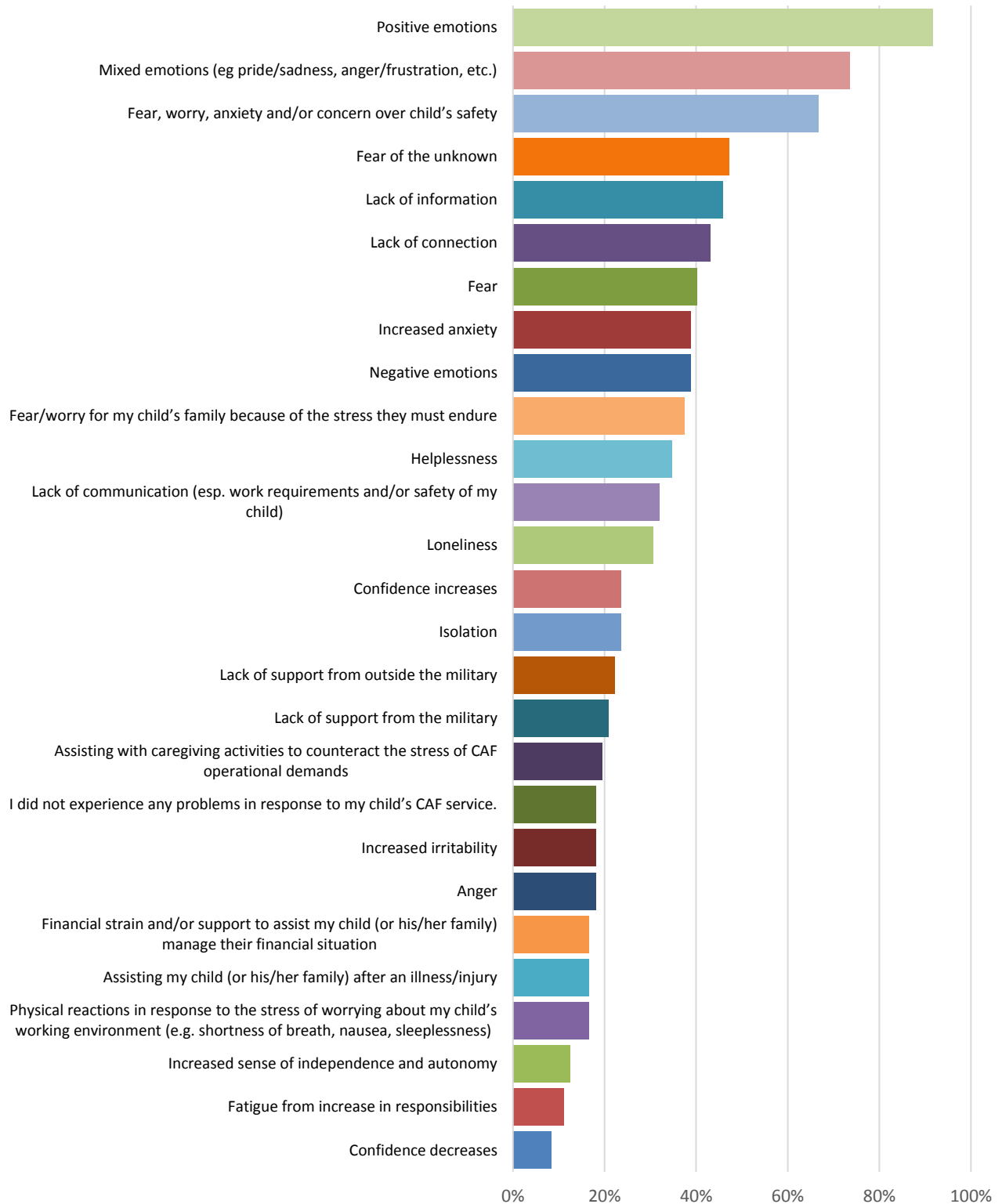


Figure 1: Emotional Reactions Experienced by Parents of CAF Personnel

These emotional reactions are similar but reported at higher percentages to those identified by parent respondents to the CAF Community Needs Assessment.

Table 7: Emotional Reactions Experienced by Parents of CAF Personnel

	Overall % of Respondents (n=83)	Comparison to CAF Community Needs Assessment 2016 (n=87)
Mixed emotions	74%	54%
Fear, worry, anxiety and/or concern over child's safety	67%	42%
Fear of unknown	47%	30%
Lack of communication	32%	13%
Assisting my child after an illness/injury	17%	8%
Feeling helpless	35%	7%
Physical reactions in response to child's working environment	17%	6%
Lack of support from military	21%	1%
Did not experience any of the above	18%	26%
Note: Respondents could provide multiple answers; totals may sum to more than 100%.		

3.2.2 Most Stressful Aspects

When asked which aspects of their child’s military career they feel is the most stressful for them, many respondents described fear of danger associated with deployments.



Figure 2: Word Cloud of Most Stressful Aspects

Some of their comments about those aspects of the child's military career they feel is most stressful included below (*sic*).

- *upcoming future deployments*
- *Separation*
- *Fear of the dangers of deployment, the career itself and separation*
- *I am not a huge supporter of the military but I will support my boy in anything he does. Hearing of people being killed while training and doing other activities has me on edge! I don't know what he does or what they tell him he has to do!*
- *Emotional changes*
- *CAF wait too long to give leave forms back, and posting assignments*
- *lack of communication*
- *his safety*
- *Dangerous situatione*
- *Fear of possible deployment*
- *Lack of communicating*
- *Lack of information*
- *lack of sleep and health care*
- *distance from child*
- *The unknown of when his leaves will be. He is far from home & we need to book flights.*
- *Deployment and his safety and ptsd on return*
- *Lack of equipment/supplies to do there jobs*
- *lack of information*
- *How it affects him and his children*
- *unknown future*
- *getting deployed to a war zone*
- *Isolation*
- *Fear of deployment to hot zones*
- *Not knowing if or when he will deployed and if he has enough training*
- *lack of information*
- *Pay issues, training leadership, lack of information*
- *fear of the unknown when someone has been injured/killed and they are out of communication*
- *Not knowing where they will be posted to. Feeling left behind and cut off from my child and grandchildren.*
- *Deployment to a war zone*
- *Distance to Post*
- *His long and ongoing struggle with PTSD and aloholism*
- *Deployments. News media taking such a negative slant on CFs. News would rather report the bad things but ignore the good the CF do*
- *the age of the equipment*
- *Unknown action overseas*
- *Not being home for holidays/disconnect from family*
- *possible war*
- *Unknowns regarding courses and occupation*

Table 8: Additional Stress

	None At All	-	Some	-	A Great Deal
How much extra stress is added to your life because of your child’s CAF operational demands?	26%	14%	40%	20%	2%
How well do you feel you know how to deal with the extra stress added to your life because of your child’s CAF occupational demands?	10%	8%	30%	30%	23%
Do you feel you have support to handle the extra stress associated with your child’s CAF occupational demands from...					
...your family?	14%		42%		44%
...your friends / personal networks?	19%		49%		32%
...the CAF?	41%		45%		14%
...the MFRC?	30%		41%		30%
Note: Due to rounding and that some respondents did not provide an answer, totals may not sum to 100%.					

3.2.3 Support Resources

Parent respondents were asked if they had ever accessed specific military family support services.

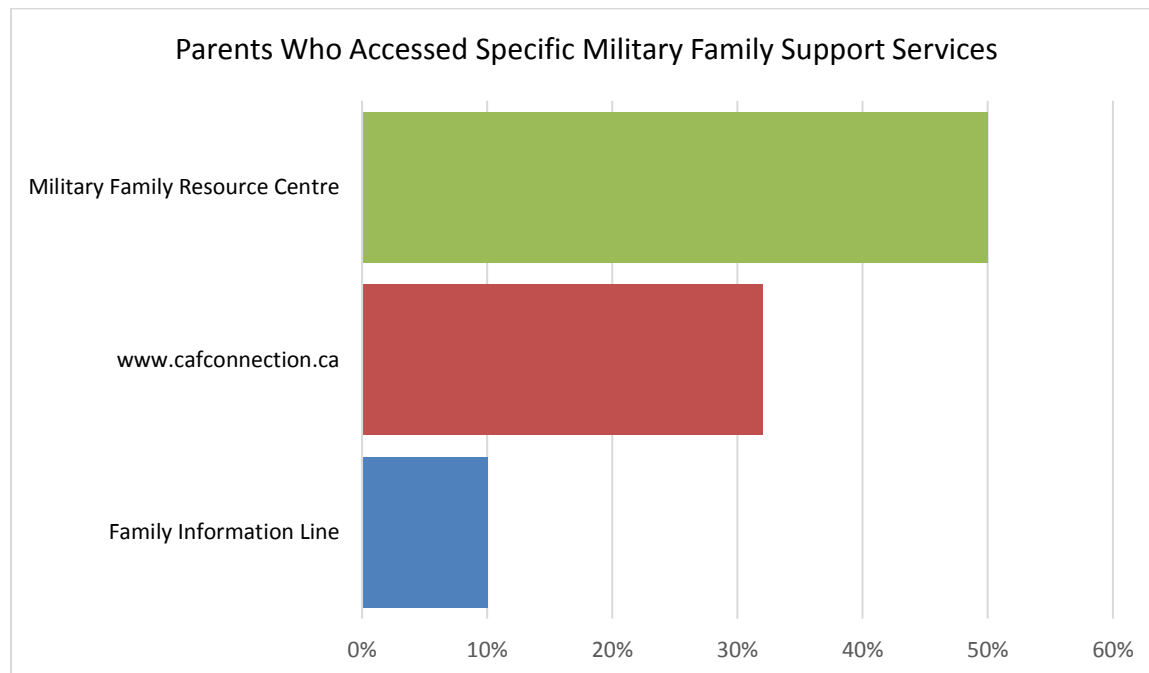


Figure 3: Access of Military Family Support Services

These results of those accessing MFRCs (50%) and the Family Information Line (10%) are similar to those of parent respondents to the CAF Community Needs Assessment who accessed MFRCs (44%) and Family Information Line (6%). More respondents in this study accessed www.cafconnection.ca (32%) than those in the CAF Community Needs Assessment (6%).

Of those who had accessed specific military family support services, their additional comments included (*sic*):

- *Parent's of military member group; very useful, good to chat with others going through the same experience, knowing you are not alone*
- *Both shilo and Winnipeg centres are very supportive*
- *started a Parents of Military Members in person support group. I also started a Facebook group.*
- *to find out what could be sent to son when deployed. It was useful*
- *I contacted MFRC in Labrador (as I had a contact there) to get help for my daughter in law in Ottawa who has had no contact with any MFRC after my son left the special forces unit*
- *Connections with mail to member deployment and it was very useful*
- *We had many questions about our sons first posting and MFRS was extremely helpful*
- *Counselling was recommended to us. this plus Mental Health First Aid Course were very helpful.*
- *Halifax fabulous*

Of those who didn't access specific military family support services, some of their additional comments included (*sic*):

- *Don't know how or what to ask!*
- *We live an hour from the city.*
- *Too far away*
- *Don't know where one is in my area*
- *not required as yet*
- *None in my area*
- *Didn't think I was allowed.*
- *useless. Many calls not returned*
- *Where would I go. Gagetown tells me I belong to Edmonton because that is where our child is based - Edmonton says Gagetown. Gagetown is 1.5 hour drive at the very best but certainly wouldnt know what an Edmonton member is doing*
- *no need*
- *Focus seems to be on spouses and children, not parents*

When asked what resources they would like to be able to access for support, some of the comments included (*sic*):

- *Education and information surrounding being the parent of a military member, stories from other parents on how to get through your child's deployments*
- *Meet with other caf families support groups*
- *More programs geared towards parents*
- *Anything would help*
- *Live in northern BC no support up here*
- *would like to be kept updated regularly on all aspects*

- Meeting with other families of military members.
- Something pertaining to his specific unit, since I otherwise cannot talk to other military
- All that's possible
- email support
- Support on social activities for functional parent and ex-service personal
- General information line
- JPSU
- Prayer group
- Information sessions prior to bootcamp and deployment
- An information line so that I can know what we are entitled to in terms of visiting, out of Canada visits, etc.
- Online post resources
- MFS
- MRFC

3.2.4 CAF Mental Health Continuum and Seeking Support

The CAF developed the Mental Health Continuum to help explain how individuals cope. The Mental Health Continuum describes the spectrum of mental health concerns that may impact CAF members and their families. Mental health is not an all or nothing concept – individuals are not either sick or healthy. Rather mental health exists along a continuum.

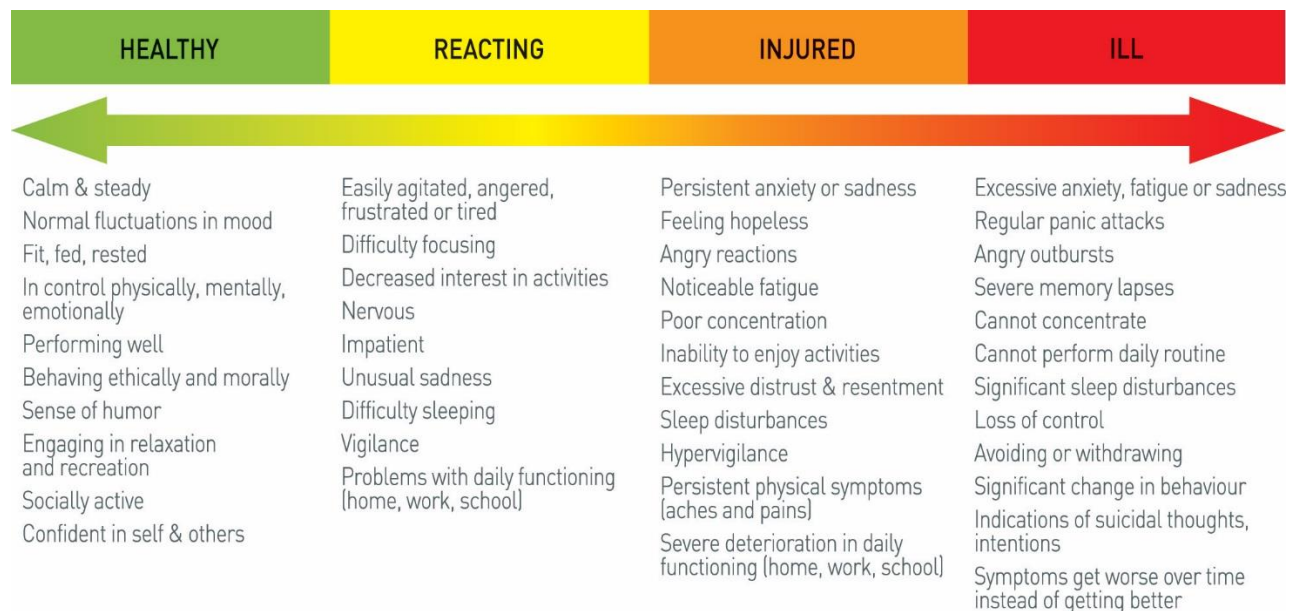


Figure 4: CAF Mental Health Continuum

The Mental Health Continuum Model goes from healthy, adaptive coping (green), through mild and reversible distress or functional impairment (yellow), to more severe,

persistent injury or impairment (orange), to clinical illnesses and disorders requiring more concentrated medical care (red).

Throughout one’s life, an individual may find themselves moving in and out of the yellow/reacting zone of the continuum. This is a normal reaction to stressful situations. However it is important at this stage along the continuum to employ positive, effective coping strategies to return to green. It is equally important to monitor one’s mental health and watch for signs that an individual may be moving further along the continuum in the orange or red zones so that they can get the extra support required to return to green.

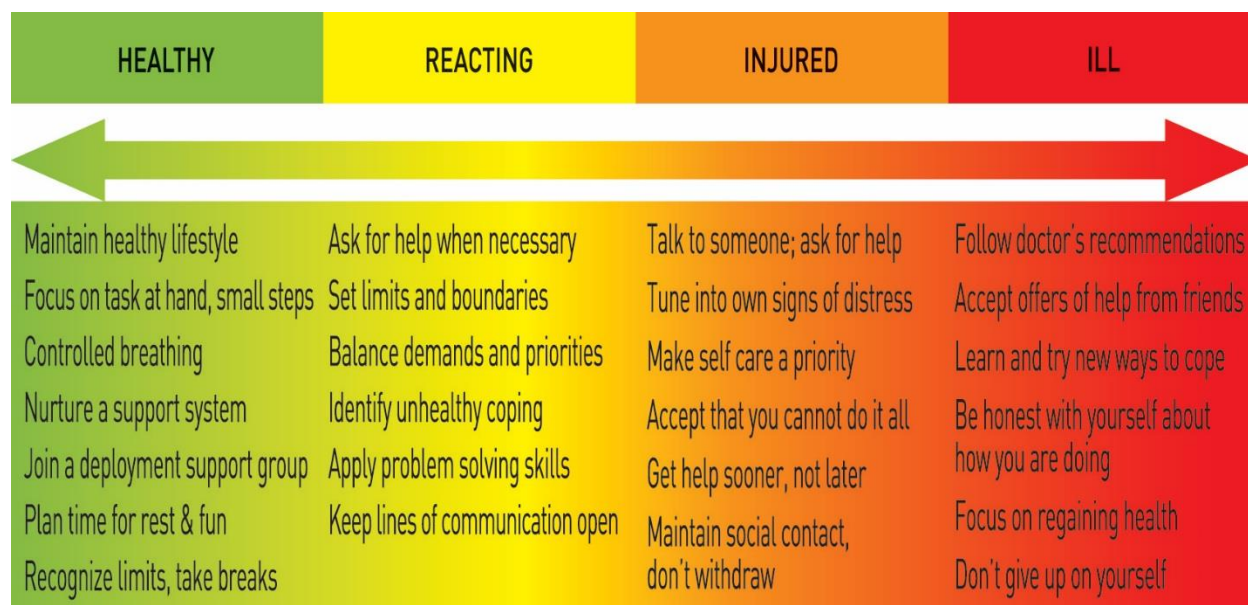


Figure 5: CAF Mental Health Continuum Support Strategies

Every situation differs and each person will move along this continuum at a different pace. But movement can happen in both directions along the continuum, indicating that there is always the possibility for a return to complete health and functioning.

Depending on where each person is on the Mental Health Continuum, a different level of service may be required. And each member of a family dealing with a mental health issue may fall in different areas of the continuum. For family support to be truly effective, mental health services must be tailored to fit the unique needs of each individual where he/she falls within the Mental Health Continuum.

When asked if respondents had heard of the CAF Mental Health Continuum, more than half of respondents (55%) had not heard of it. Despite this, more than half of respondents felt they knew enough about the warning signs to know when to seek help for changes in their or their child’s mental health, and one-third felt somewhat sure they knew enough. Only 14% felt they did not know enough to know when to seek help.

One-third of parents stated they did not know where to go for support if they needed help to deal with their own or their child's mental health struggles. Less than half (45%) felt they know where to go, and 21% felt they somewhat knew where to go.

4 Discussion

While the sample size for this study is small, it does shed some light to give an exploratory understanding of the experiences of parents of CAF personnel. More than half of all RegF personnel posted in Canada are under the age of 34 with less than 10 years of service, and almost half of all RegF personnel are single⁴. The respondents to this survey appear to be a reflection of this demographic. The majority of respondents were female between the ages of 45-54 and for almost two-thirds of the respondents, their child had served in the CAF for 6 years and was not married or in a common-law relationship.

Over one-third of the respondents stated that either they and/or their partners/spouses had served or were currently serving in the military themselves (i.e. their child, who is now a RegF member, had also been a child of a military member).

For three-quarters of the respondents, their child had relocated due to a posting less than 2 times. And almost 40% of respondents had seen their child deployed to an overseas mission at least once.

Most parents of military personnel experienced positive emotions and/or mixed emotions specifically in response to their child's deployment, working environment and/or military operational requirements. Some also experienced fear, worry, anxiety and/or concern over their child's safety. For many, the most stressful aspect of the military career was fear that their child would be exposed to danger associated with deployments.

Less than half of the parent respondents had accessed any specific military family support services. Of those who had not accessed any supports, the most common reasons included that there were no supports near to where they live, that they did not believe or had explicitly been told that they were not eligible for services, or that they did not know about any of the available services.

More than half of respondents felt they knew enough about the warning signs to know when to seek help for changes in their own or their child's mental health. Yet one-third stated they would not know where to go for support if they needed it.

Parent respondents suggested a number of resources that they would like to be able to access for support. Most common were education and information about the military culture and how to deal with deployments, peer support, online resources, and information sessions prior to boot camp and deployments.

⁴ Manser, L. (2018). *Profile of Military Families in Canada: 2017 Regular Force Demographics*. Ottawa, ON: Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services.

5 Conclusion and Recommendations

The vast majority of parent respondents indicated they experienced positive emotions in response to their child's deployment / work / CAF operational requirements. Additionally, more than half felt they knew enough about mental health warning signs to know when to seek help. However, based on the results of this research, there are some areas of concern requiring attention, and the following recommendations are offered to help address these areas.

Recommendation #1: Military Family Services Program Realignment

The Military Family Services Program exists to help families through the more challenging aspects of the military lifestyle – those primarily being relocations due to postings, repeated absences from the family, and injury/death. The military family includes more than just the spouse and child. Given more than half of all RegF personnel posted in Canada are under the age of 34 with less than 10 years of service, and almost half of all RegF personnel are single, their “family” presumably includes their parents. It is also important to note that of all RegF personnel posted in Canada who declared caring for a dependent elderly parent, over one-third were under the age of 34 and over one-third were also single⁵, so while they may be single members without a spouse or child dependant, they are caring for a dependent parent, and as such, are a family unit eligible for services. Yet when respondents were asked if they accessed any family support services, the majority had not, and some had been explicitly told they were not eligible for services. This speaks to a serious disconnect between military family needs, organizational mission, services offered and accountability mechanisms. The Military Family Services Program operational directive, funding and accountability mechanisms must be reviewed and realigned in light of existing research and evidence, including this study. Services need to be available to military families, regardless of their configuration, in a manner that directly addresses their needs, using evidence-based practices. And accountability measures need to be built in to ensure that those services are delivered in accordance with researched needs and evidence-based practices, and that military families, regardless of their configuration, are not being turned away or finding themselves unable to access those services.

Recommendation #2: Service Availability

The majority of respondents had not accessed any military family support services, primarily because they were not available in their area, they were not eligible or they did not know about them. One-third of respondents stated they would not know where to go for support if they needed help, specifically concerning the mental health of their child or themselves. Yet many of the supports they requested should already be

⁵ Manser, L. (2018). *Profile of Military Families in Canada: 2017 Regular Force Demographics*. Ottawa, ON: Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services.

available through the Military Family Services Program (parents of single serving members are considered as part of the population eligible for services). These supports could also easily be delivered virtually for parents who are not near physical centres. Efforts and resources should be invested to ensure information and services are made available to parents of CAF members, regardless of their physical location.

Recommendation #3: Education and Support for Parents

While some existing services may be relevant for parents of CAF personnel (e.g. mental health information and resources), some services should be tailored specifically to the realities and experiences of parents. For instance, education and information about the military culture would be relevant to those parents who have never served in the military themselves. Tailored education should be available to parents on how to prepare for and deal with the deployment of their child, from their perspective and while not having access to the same types of deployment supports or access to information as a military spouse or child. Virtual information sessions prior to boot camps would help parents know how best to support their child from a distance through this significant life transition. And more online resources and peer support groups for parents would also be valuable presuming these are marketed effectively and widely to reach potential users.