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**Hearing the educational experiences of primary-aged children from Army families  
*an interpretative phenomenological analysis***

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**Hearing the educational experiences of primary-aged  
children from Army families: an interpretative  
phenomenological analysis.**

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**Jess Lovett**

A dissertation submitted to the University of Bristol in accordance  
with the requirements for the award of the degree in Doctorate in  
Educational Psychology in the Faculty of Social Sciences and Law.

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## Abstract

This thesis explores how children from Army families experience education and contributes to the current evidence base and understanding of educational experiences for this population of children. This group of children may experience military-directed mobility patterns which result in school transitions and can affect the educational attainment, friendships and emotional wellbeing of these children. Some children from military families, inclusive of those from Army families, may also experience prolonged separation from a parent resulting from military deployment.

There is a scarcity of qualitative research which directly explores the educational experiences of children from military families and thus to acknowledge the voice of this group of children, this study directly explores the educational experiences of primary-aged children from Army families. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was used to analyse semi-structured interviews which led to personal experiential themes from each participant. Four overarching themes were identified across the participants: “‘It’s like the same like every kid”: sameness of school experience”; ‘Making sense of unique military lifestyle challenges and their effect on educational experiences’; ‘Leaving, being left and feeling left out’; and ‘Seeking and securing connection: the positives of school relocation’. Findings were discussed in the context of relevant psychological theory and existing research. Implications for educational psychologists are discussed as well as recommendations for future areas of research.

## Acknowledgements

I would firstly like to express my deepest thanks to the children who agreed to take part in this research and for giving their time to speak with me; I feel privileged to have had the opportunity to hear their stories. Without them this research would not have been possible, and I am truly grateful for their participation.

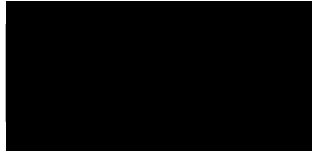
I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr Dan O'Hare, for your guidance and feedback throughout this research project. My thanks also to the rest of the tutor team at Bristol for their knowledge and advice throughout the entirety of the doctorate. To my training cohort, it has been wonderful to train alongside such an inspiring group of women: I am forever grateful for your support and friendship and know this will continue far past the end of the course.

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## Author's Declaration

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the University's Regulations and Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes and that it has not been submitted for any other academic award. Except where indicated by specific reference in the text, the work is the candidate's own work. Work done in collaboration with, or with the assistance of, others, is indicated as such. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author.

Signed:



Date: 31.08.2023

## Glossary of Acronyms

AFC – Armed Forces Covenant

CYP – Children and Young People

DfE – Department for Education

DoDEA – Department of Defence Education Activity

DSTA – Defence School Transition Aide

ELSA – Emotional Literacy Support Assistant

ESF – Education Support Fund

EP – Educational Psychologist

IPA – Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

MoD – Ministry of Defence

NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organisation

SCISS NEAC – Service Children in State Schools National Executive Advisory Committee

SENCo – Special Educational Needs Coordinator

SPP – Service Pupil Premium

RAF – Royal Air Force

REME – Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers

UK – United Kingdom

US – United States

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1. Introduction to the chapter

This research explores the educational experiences of primary-aged children from Army families. This introductory chapter outlines the significance of the topic through consideration of legislative and national contexts within which this research was conducted, whilst simultaneously highlighting the unique characteristics of a military lifestyle. Following this I will discuss the relevance of this research to educational psychology and my personal and professional motivation for choosing this area of research. This chapter concludes by highlighting the aim of the research and guiding research question for the present study, followed by an outline of the succeeding five chapters of this thesis.

## 1.2. Definition of terms

Children in the present study will be referred to as 'children from Army families' throughout. Literature discussed throughout this thesis refers to this group of children as 'Service children/pupils', 'military children' and 'military-connected children/youth'. Such literature often does not separate children into distinct groups such as Army, Navy and Royal Air Force, and tends to talk about these children as a collective group. When discussing such literature, I will endeavour to use the term 'children from military families' when describing this group of children. Additionally, the terms 'military', 'Services' and 'Armed Forces' are used interchangeably to outline the three military branches which make up the United Kingdom's (UK) Armed Forces: British Army, Royal Navy, and Royal Air Force. Finally, when describing children from non-military families, literature uses the terms 'civilian peers', 'non-military connected children', 'non-service children' and 'nonmilitary students'. When referring to this group of children, I will use the term 'the general child population' or 'children in the general population'.

## 1.3. Significance of the topic

### 1.3.1. Legislative context

The Armed Forces Covenant (AFC) is the nation's promise that military personnel, past and present, are treated equitably (Ministry of Defence, 2022c). The AFC imposes a legal obligation on specified individuals and entities to comply with the requirements of the AFC when carrying out statutory activities in the areas of education, health and housing (Ministry of Defence, 2022c). This 'nation's promise' was first enshrined in law in 2011 in the Armed Forces Act and from this the Armed Forces Bill followed in 2021; the Bill highlighted its purpose

to be legislating and further enshrining the AFC in law and providing the continuation of the Armed Forces Act (Ministry of Defence, 2021a). Ultimately, these pieces of legislation are founded on the unique sacrifices of those currently or formerly serving in the Armed Forces, and serve as a nation's promise to those military families that they will be treated equitably. In reference to this sense of fairness, the next section will discuss children from military families and how the Service Pupil Premium (SPP) was introduced to help minimise disadvantage for this group of pupils (Ministry of Defence, 2022c).

### 1.3.2 Population of children from military families

There is currently an unknown number of children from and within UK-based military families. Some estimates from the Ministry of Defence (MoD) statistics provide a number of just under 180,000 children who have a parent in the military (MoD Quarterly Service Personnel Statistics, 2020) with other estimates from the Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey suggesting there are around 121,600 children (MoD, 2022a). The uncertainty surrounding the exact number of children born to military families is further compounded by the fact that parents serving in the British Armed Forces are not required to declare the presence of their children on their military records or to declare their employment to their child's educational institution (Ofsted, 2011).

One way of estimating the number of children from military families in school is through the Service Pupil Premium (SPP) whereby some parents declare their military occupation to schools in England for their child to receive this funding (MoD, 2023b). The SPP was introduced by the Department for Education (DfE) in 2011 in recognition of the unique challenges which these pupils face and to help remove disadvantages for this group of children (MoD, 2022c). To be able to access the £335 SPP per child, schools need to record pupils as 'Service children' on their school census or have had a parent actively serving in the Military within the last 6 years (MoD, 2023a). The 2021–22 Pupil Premium Allocations (Education and Skills Funding Agency, 2021) identified 80,029 pupils from military families were in receipt of the SPP. This highlights there could be nearly 100,000 children unidentified as 'Service pupils' within schools and thus not in receipt of the SPP.

### 1.3.3 Financial support for children from military families in schools

As outlined above, the DfE introduced the SPP to mitigate against the negative effects of deployment and mobility upon children from military families' education (MoD, 2023a). A survey seeking Army parents' perceptions on the impact of Service life upon Army children highlighted that 52 percent of the 384 parents interviewed felt schools' use of the SPP did not

provide any effective support (AFF, 2019). To address parental concerns regarding the use of this funding, the UK government worked with schools to identify the best ways to use the SPP and published these findings for the benefit of all schools (MoD, 2022b & 2023a). Examples of best practice include monitoring children from military families' progress against other children; providing trained teaching assistants and pastoral support mentors; membership of Military Kids Club Heroes (a network for children from military families in education); and school trips to increase awareness of the Armed Forces. However, as highlighted by the Children's Commissioner in her report on children's experiences of growing up as an 'Armed Forces child', there is no guidance for schools on how to best support children's needs through use of the SPP (Children's Commissioner, 2018). In recognition of the individuality of each child within this group of 'Service children', the MoD highlights that schools have the freedom to use the SPP flexibly as they are best able to understand and meet the needs of the pupils for whom funding has been provided (MoD, 2023a).

In addition to the SPP, the MoD Education Support Fund (ESF) has been available to state-funded schools since 2011, in order to further reduce the detrimental impact of deployment and mobility on the education of children from military families (Children's Commissioner, 2018). The ESF provided £6 million per annum which was initially available until 2017/18, but in recognition of the drawdown of Service personnel from Germany, and to provide educational authorities in the UK with the opportunity to implement long-term support for children from military families, the Secretary of State for Defence announced the ESF would be extended for a further two years, with an initial commitment of £3 million for the 2018/19 financial year and an additional £2 million for the 2019/20 financial year (MoD, 2022b). This was further extended in March 2020 by the Minister for Defence Veterans, Reserves and Personnel whereby funding of £3 million was available until 2022/23. However, much like the SPP, there are not clear, accessible examples for schools on how to best meet the needs of their pupils from military families with the MoD indicated that the ESF is available to assist schools in introducing practices that can be beneficial to service children and the school (MoD, 2022b). At present, the ESF in its current form is due to be absorbed by the Armed Forces Families Fund (AF3) whereby the MoD will partner with the Armed Forces Covenant to administer the AF3 (MoD, 2022b). There is a lack of information as to the monetary value of the AF3. To shed some light as to why schools have access to additional funding for children from military families, the following section will summarise the unique challenges for these children in relation to deployment, mobility inclusive of school transitions, and their academic outcomes.

#### 1.3.4 Unique challenges for children from military families

As seen in the preceding sections, the DfE funded SPP and the MoD ESF highlights that the government perceives children from military families to be a vulnerable group who require additional provision accessible through such funding. It is generally acknowledged that although children from military families face the same stressors as the general child population, they also experience additional stress from frequent home and school relocations, which often take place out of county or country and at irregular intervals, and additional family separation, both long-term and short-term, through deployments (MoD 2023a; Ofsted, 2011; Children's Commissioner, 2018). The following section will define the terms *deployment* and *mobility* and will explore the literature related to these two areas, including the related issues of school transitions, transient friendships and academic outcomes affecting military families and their children.

##### 1.3.4.1. *Challenges for children from military families: deployment*

The term *deployment* is used to refer to military personnel who are assigned to Operations for a minimum of 24 hours, excluding those who are on overseas training and those who are permanently stationed outside the UK (MoD, 2016). Deployments are characterised by The Deployment Cycle (Amen et al., 1988) which is comprised of three phases of deployment that military families experience:

- *pre-deployment* where families prepare for the departure of the military parent(s);
- *deployment* in which families psychologically adjust to the separation of the service family member(s); and
- *post-deployment* the reunification of families and reintegration of the returning parent(s) back into the family (De Pedro et al., 2011).

Throughout all stages of The Deployment Cycle, children experience stressors inclusive of susceptance to social and emotional disturbance and a change in dynamics between the remaining parent and child/ren (Ofsted, 2011) which affect every part of children's everyday lives (Children's Commissioner, 2018).

Although there may be adverse effects of deployment upon children's socioemotional presentations, literature highlights the range of protective factors which help to support children during periods of deployment. There can be a sense of comradeship between military families when there is a shared experience of a deployment or a regiment move, whereby infantry regiments relocate together in a large-scale move (Ofsted, 2011), or by the support of other military families when living in military housing during times of deployment (Chandra et



al., 2010a). It is perceived that networks of caregivers and the military community provide support and help most children from military families to be resilient and manage the effects of deployment (Osofsky & Chartrand, 2013). Not only do children have access to these networks of support, but they also develop their own strategies for dealing with the deployment cycle (Children's Commissioner, 2018) and can reapply these coping strategies when faced with subsequent deployments (Chandra et al., 2010b).

#### *1.3.4.2. Challenges for children from military families: mobility and school transitions*

Moving homes, schools and even countries is an inevitable part of life for children from military families (Children's Commissioner, 2018) which comes as a result of the military parent(s) transferring from one duty station to another (Cole, 2016). For some children, their families move as part of a regiment or unit deployment whereby multiple service personnel and their families move to the same location (Yarwood et al., 2021). Such large-scale moves are more likely in the Army; service families from the Royal Navy or Air Force are more likely to move individually (Ofsted, 2011; Yarwood et al., 2021). This is evidenced in a survey by the MoD (2021b) which identified that Army families are the most likely to move, with Royal Navy families least likely to move as Service personnel cannot be accompanied at sea. Irrespective of which Armed Force and contrary to expectations, relocation may not be linked to a lack of social support for children because all immediate family members, inclusive of parents on active duty, typically move with the young person (O'Neal et al., 2022).

Mobility and school transitions can impact upon the social and emotional needs of children from military families. A National Audit Office consultation (Brady et al., 2013) open to Service personnel, their partners and children aged 16 and over had responses predominately from parents of children from military families (95 percent of the sample). Parents were concerned about the impact of geographical mobility on their children's social and emotional development (Brady et al., 2013). This view was mirrored by the Children and Young People (CYP) (aged 8-15) interviewed for a report by the Children's Commissioner (2018): for these children, the most significant event in their lives was the process of relocating to their new school. For younger children, these difficulties were viewed through the lens of anxiety about a new school environment, getting to know new classmates, and leaving friends behind. It has been acknowledged by schools in the Ofsted (2011) review for educational provision and outcomes for children from military families that at key moments in their lives, these children may require additional socioemotional support, such as during or prior to a relocation

Due to the mobility patterns that military families are subject to, applications for school admissions are often outside of the normal local authority admission process; this means to gain a place at a preferred school, parents must almost always go through the appeal process (The Royal British Legion, 2018; Ofsted, 2011). On top of this often-challenging process to gain a place at a preferred school, some children can find it difficult to settle in school, to access a consistent curriculum, and to make new friends (The Royal British Legion, 2018). For other children however they can quickly settle into a new routine and perceive moving to a different school to be a fun experience (Children's Commissioner, 2018). The support network of military families and their children who are sharing the same experience appears to be a protective factor for children when relocating (Ofsted, 2011; Chandra et al., 2010a). In the Children's Commissioner report, children identified it was important to be part of a group of children experiencing the challenges of school relocation together (Children's Commissioner, 2018).

#### *1.3.4.3. Challenges for children from military families: academic outcomes and the challenges in determining such outcomes*

The Ofsted review (2011) of the quality and impact of educational provision and outcomes for children from military families was held in response to national data which suggested these children perform at least the same, if not better than their peers across all key stages (DfE, 2010). Ofsted inspectors conducted a survey of a large number of schools, both in the UK and abroad at 'service children's education schools' in Cyprus and Germany, through use of visits and questionnaires. The findings indicate high levels of mobility from this group of children means attainment data published by schools could be potentially misleading as children from military families' attainment and progress cannot be reliably ascertained due to high levels of mobility (Ofsted, 2011).

Furthermore, the inspectors found the curriculum for children from military families was frequently disrupted by the frequent relocations of the family, resulting in a lack of continuity in the children's education and resultant gaps in their learning (Ofsted, 2011). Arguably as a result of such gaps, this review found discrepancy between geographically mobile children from military families and children in the general population, with mobile pupils performing academically lower in comparison. This finding implies geographically stable pupils are at an academic advantage. However, the picture of academic achievement and progress for military children is further obscured by discrepancies between schools' tracking systems and the transfer of academic data between schools, where parents are often expected to hand-deliver records to a new school (Ofsted, 2011).

#### *1.3.4.4. Summary of challenges for children from military families*

In summary, literature and government policy identifies that being a child within a military family is characterised by unique challenges related to deployment and mobility with further challenges in school transitions, friendships and academic outcomes which arise from these two big life events. An upbringing within a military family can lead to a child's academic and socio-emotional development being at risk due to their high mobility patterns, whilst simultaneously making attainment data difficult to obtain accurately thus putting their educational outcomes at risk. To help mitigate against these unique challenges for children from military families, the SPP and the MoD ESF offer financial support to schools to enable them to respond flexibly to the individual needs of children from military families at the school level.

#### 1.4. Relevance to educational psychology

Broadly speaking, educational psychologists (EPs) can be thought of as applied psychologists who address difficulties pertaining to CYP's learning and development while also advocating for inclusivity and equal opportunities (EPNET, 2005 cited in Cameron, 2006), and playing an essential role in advocating for vulnerable and hidden groups (Fox, 2015).

As aforementioned, schools and governments have unreliable statistics of the total number of children from military families, let alone those in current education: this arguably makes them a hidden group that require the attention of EPs. EPs could advocate and promote inclusiveness for this hidden group and influence or shape interventions and provision for these children alongside key decision-makers, such as Headteachers or Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs), through working directly with children from military families. In this way, EPs could promote the views of children from military families on how to support them best in school and providing an inclusive school environment for them.

#### 1.5. Personal and professional motivation

The military has always been a part of my life, both in childhood and adulthood. As a child I was used to my father being deployed on submarine exercises as a result of his career in the Royal Navy, and 'weekending', whereby he would work away in the week and return to the family home at weekends. My parents met when they were both serving members in the Royal Navy and my early childhood was characterised by four house moves by the age of seven. Although I consider this military lifestyle to be an integral part of my childhood, it is not until

reflecting upon my experiences as an adult that I realise I was not knowingly educated alongside other children from military families until aged 14.

At 14, my parents made the decision to enrol me at a boarding school as my father's military-directed mobility patterns meant we would relocate in the middle of my GCSEs and again partway through my A-Levels. For the first time in my education I met other people, who were also boarders, who had fathers in the military. These friends could relate to starting the term in one married quarter and returning at a half term to a different married quarter in a completely new location. Up until the age of 21, my family lived in nine different houses as a result of my father's Naval career however I only had two school transitions during this time.

As an adult whose partner is in the Royal Air Force, I recognise that my adult life will also be characterised by deployments and military-directed mobility patterns. Wherever my partner is based and therefore where we reside, I will undoubtedly live in a county where there is at least one military base and thus military families with children. I will therefore work as an EP within local authorities who have a population of children from military families who are educated within the county.

Finally, I have had professional experiences in working with and alongside children from military families both in my role as a primary school teacher and in my educational psychologist training. For my placements as a trainee educational psychologist, I have been in local authorities with a number of military bases. In this most recent and final year of my training I have had experience of writing education, health and social care needs assessments for children from military families; sharing my own affiliations with the children and their parents has allowed for a sense of shared experience and understanding between us.

It is from this multitude of experiences I decided to collect the voices of children from Armed Forces families. I wanted to provide a platform for these children to share their experiences as they have been underrepresented in research, particularly of UK-based and psychological-based domains. I wanted to distance myself from the research as best possible and thus chose primary-aged children for this study as my own experiences of primary education were within one primary setting with no other children from military families in the school aside from myself and my brother. I chose to recruit from a school nearby to a military base which had Service personnel from across the services. This said, those that consented to their children partaking in the research were all from Army families. Although this was not my initial intention, this provided further distance from the research as I would be interviewing children from Army families to hear and understand their educational experiences, rather than from Royal Navy

and Royal Air Force families which I have personal experience of. I therefore recruited a population of children whom I had no personal or professional experience of being educated with, or professionally educating, and in a setting in which there was a higher-than-average percentage of children from Army families due to its location close to a military base.

Although I have tried to distance myself as best possible from the research, I recognise there may still be some potential influence of my own personal experiences on the research: I have chosen to recognise these influences and integrate them into my research through my chosen methodology of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) which encourages reflexivity and consideration of how intersubjectivity impacts data collection (Finlay, 2002).

### 1.6. Aims and research question

The research seeks to explore the educational experiences of children from Army families, with an additional aim of uncovering potential implications for educational professionals. In doing so, the following research question will be addressed:

- How do primary-aged children from Army families experience education?

### 1.7. Summary and structure of thesis

The following Chapter 2 presents a critical review of the existing literature around children from military families. I will explain the approach to searching the literature, along with the inclusion and exclusion criteria that were employed. I will discuss the educational experiences of children from military families considering how this is viewed through the perspective of others, as this is where most of the research lies, as well as from children themselves. The chapter will conclude by considering the application of psychological theories to the reviewed literature and justifying the aim of the present study through highlighting the current gaps within the literature.

Chapter 3 presents the methodology for the present study. In this chapter I will remind the reader of the research aims and question and will review my methodological orientation and philosophical approach, including my ontological and epistemological positioning. I will outline the alternative approach considered for this study followed by a more detailed discussion of the chosen methodology and the potential benefits and limitations of the approach. I will present details of the research procedure inclusive of methods of sampling strategy, and data collection and analysis. I shall lastly explore the ethical considerations of the research study.

Chapter 4 presents the findings from the interviews with children achieved through IPA. The chapter will present an overview of the four group experiential themes and seven corresponding sub-themes. I will discuss each theme in detail accompanied by quotes directly taken from the child interviews.

Chapter 5 will discuss the study's findings in light of existing literature and in relation to psychological theory to answer the study's research question. This chapter will critique the research in regard to the areas of methodology, sample selection, and data collection, followed by an overview of the validity of this qualitative research.

In the final chapter of this thesis, I will consider the implications of this research for educational psychology practice on the levels of the individual, group and organisation. I will discuss the strengths and limitations of the present study, and the avenues for dissemination of the research findings. Lastly, I will consider the future directions for research.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### 2.1. Introduction to the chapter

The purpose of this chapter is to review the literature relevant to the research aim of exploring the educational experiences of children from Army families. This chapter begins by providing details of the approach to the literature search and the inclusion and exclusion criteria used to identify research papers for analysis. The chapter will present literature around the educational experiences of children from military families which has been organised into four key themes. Under each of these themes I will consider the perspectives of others on the educational experiences of children from military families, followed by a section which considers the views of children from military families as research participants within literature. This is followed by a section outlining the educational experiences of Army children specifically through consideration of literature which identifies that their research participants had affiliations to the Army. Following my review of the literature, I will introduce psychological theories that I argue are useful in comprehending the unique challenges faced by this group of children: namely bio-ecological systems theory, belonging and resilience. I shall conclude by identifying the remaining gaps within the literature and outlining the rationale for the current study in relation to such gaps and the overarching research question.

### 2.2. Approach to literature review

The aim of this study is to explore children from Army families' educational experiences and is focused on how these children conceptualise their educational experiences. The interpretivist stance underpinning the research aim influences the scope of the literature review and the approach taken, and is further discussed below.

A narrative review was conducted for this current study which is in line with the interpretivist approach to understanding rather than accumulating knowledge (Bryman, 2012). The purpose of a narrative review is to survey knowledge in a particular area and offer a comprehensive background for understanding that specific topic by gathering a broad spectrum of literature on the subject and synthesising it to highlight the main issues, trends, complexities, and controversies (Efron & Ravid, 2018; Jesson et al., 2011). A narrative review was selected over a systematic review as systematic reviews are highly structured and protocol driven to answer a specific question which focuses on testing theories and hypotheses (Efron & Ravid, 2018). A systematic literature review traditionally aligns with a positivist position and, although it may contain some qualitative research, most systematic reviews are quantitative and make use of

statistical data (Gough et al., 2017; Higgins et al., 2019). It is important however to recognise systematic review procedures for qualitative research have received a great deal of attention, especially in the social sciences (Bryman, 2012), but such a review procedure was not used for this present study.

Narrative reviews offer a number of strengths over systematic reviews, however, there are also some potential weaknesses including a lack of clarity and transparency, as well as being more subjective with biased arguments (Bryman, 2012; Jesson et al., 2011; Efron & Ravid, 2018). To address this concern surrounding transparency, I aim to clearly set out the strategy I used to conduct this literature review.

To collate and review the appropriate literature for this study, I conducted a search of relevant databases. Three databases were searched: Web of Science; PsycInfo; and Child Development and Adolescent Studies. Table 1 shows the search terms which were used in the three databases.

Search Terms	
	"armed force*" <b>OR</b> "armed service*" <b>OR</b> military
AND	educat* <b>OR</b> school*
AND	experience* <b>OR</b> view* <b>OR</b> perception*
AND	child* <b>OR</b> adolescen* <b>OR</b> youth <b>OR</b> student* <b>OR</b> pupil*

*Table 1: Search terms for literature search*

It became apparent from this search of relevant databases that much of the literature was conducted with adult participants and normally from American-based literature. To be able to ensure I gathered other relevant literature which related specifically to children from military families in the UK and the relevant UK-based policies my inclusion criteria expanded to include other relevant literature, inclusive of 'grey literature' (e.g., Government reports and policies), were found via internet search engines and included. Grey literature is a type of document produced by, or for, organisations or companies (Matthews & Ross, 2010). The references of selected papers identified additional relevant literature through 'snowballing', and these were included. In the interest of transparency, Appendix A outlines the full procedure for conducting the literature search and provides more detail into the literature retrieved from each of the databases, and a summary of this can be seen below in Figure 1. Searches were conducted in September 2022 and repeated in May 2023. The searches yielded the following results:



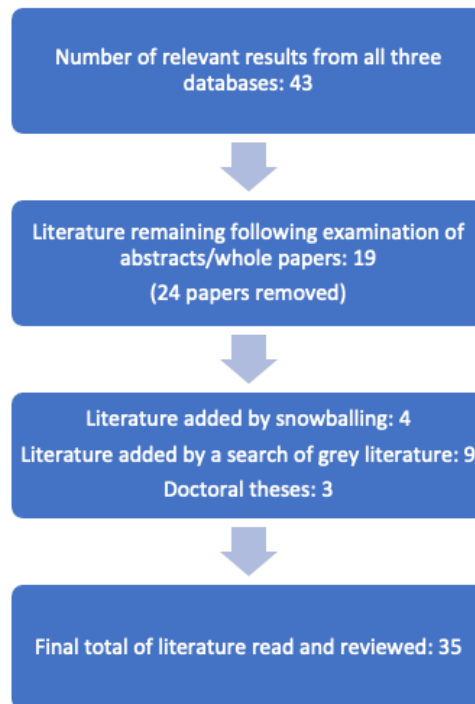


Figure 1: Approach to literature searches

The results of the literature search are summarised in Figure 2, which provides a more comprehensive overview of the literature collected. This includes the participant groups selected for the study, the country of origin of the research, and the military branch of which the participants were associated (if available). This data demonstrates that there is a lack of research on children of military families in the UK in general. Of the nine papers published, only two are journal articles, with the remainder consisting of theses or grey literature. As a result, whilst I was interested in children of Army families' educational experiences, I did not limit my literature search to the experience of the British population or just the Army; I examined the research of this population's educational experiences globally.

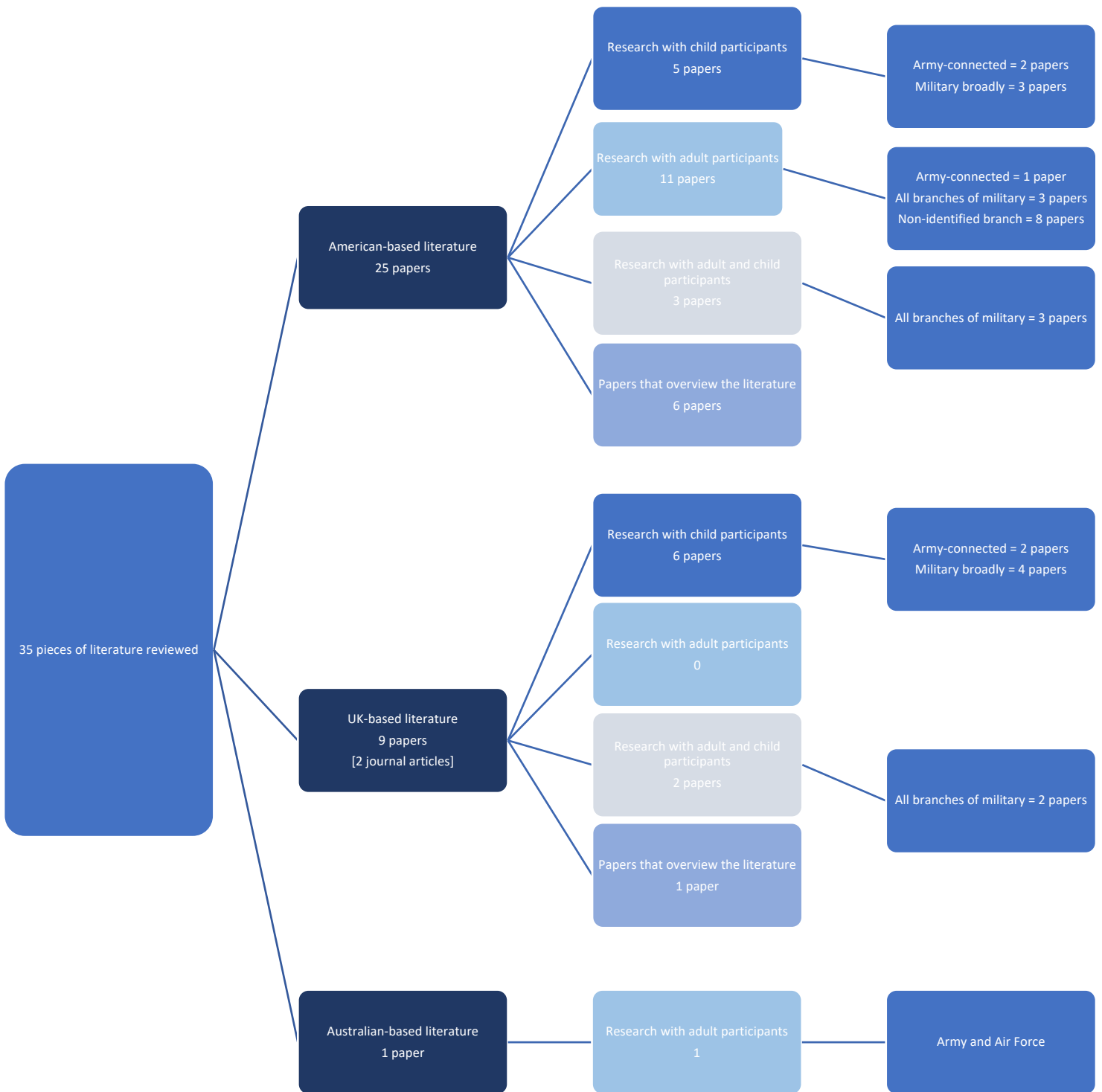


Figure 2: Breakdown of literature

The inclusion and exclusion criteria used in the search for relevant literature are outlined in Table 2. Literature was excluded from the search to maintain relevance to the subject matter or research objectives of the current study. Data collected under conditions that are not directly relevant to the study were also excluded (e.g. War on Terror). Furthermore, studies reporting outcomes on populations other than those of military families generally were also excluded. Examples of such studies include studies on military spouses and deployed fathers, as well as studies on children of military families with Autism.

<b>Inclusion Criteria</b>	<b>Exclusion Criteria</b>
Written in English	Written in any language other than English
Peer-reviewed research	Non peer-reviewed research
Published since 2010	Unpublished research and research published before 2010
Empirical research that focused on the experiences of CYP from military families <i>and</i> is either relevant to their education, conducted with school settings, or with school staff.	Non-empirical research
	Research related to adolescents from military families over the age of 16 or research that focused on further education for this group
	Research related to CYP not from military families
	Research papers where the full text was not accessible

*Table 2: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria*

Research published from 2010 onwards was an inclusion criterion, as this was the year the government declared its intention to embed the key principles in the Armed Forces covenant in law. The SPP was introduced in a commitment to delivering this Covenant, and as a result of a large-scale report by the DfE (2010) on the education of CYP from military families. Resultantly, I considered it important to conduct the literature search from 2010 onwards. The above inclusion and exclusion criteria were used to select papers from the relevant data bases but as aforementioned, my inclusion criteria expanded to include non-empirical research to incorporate literature relating specifically to children from military families in the UK and the relevant UK-based policies. This included grey literature and additional relevant literature though ‘snowballing’: please see Appendix A for the full procedure for conducting the literature search.

After the literature had been subject to the inclusion and exclusion criteria, I used the Critical Analysis Skills Programme's (CASP, 2018) qualitative checklist to appraise the article, study, or grey reference and created a Table of Literature. This table outlines the specific details of the purpose and methodology, details of the participants, and the key findings were recorded in a table. This process allowed me to have a holistic view of the literature noting the emerging themes and patterns in accordance with methodologies, chronologies, participants, and countries of origin. Appendix B shows an extract of this Table of Literature and an example of how I used the CASP.

As highlighted by Appendix C which outlines the papers included within the literature review, the majority of relevant literature for this thesis originates from America. American society has a differing view of their military in comparison to the United Kingdom. It is widely accepted that the United States Armed Forces, particularly the US Army, are primarily concerned with combat operations and operations closely related to combat operations, as opposed to the British military, which is less combat specialised and has a broader role conception (Cusumano, 2015): this creates a cultural reverence towards the US military (Bergman et al., 2014; Laurence, 2011; Greenberg, 2007). It could be suggested Americans perceive serving their country as an honour and may help to explain why the US Armed Forces are better funded than the UK Armed Forces (SIPRI, 2023). This, combined with the relative sizes of the two countries, may account for the disparity in numbers of research articles. Resultantly, it should be considered that the US military, and educational system, will have a different ethos and set of working practices in comparison to the UK which limits the generalisability of the research (Cramm & Tam-Seto, 2018). This said, in the absence of a breadth of UK-based literature, the US-based literature will be considered with these critiques in mind throughout this thesis.

### 2.3. The educational experiences of children from military families: research literature

This next section explores the educational experiences of children from military families. As seen in Figure 2, there are fewer studies which directly gather the voice of children in relation to their educational experiences. As both a result of the scarcity of child-voice research, and that the nature of a narrative review aims to highlight key trends, issues, controversies, and complexities (Efron & Ravid, 2018; Jesson et al., 2011), the literature discussed in this section has been organised into themes to consider both adult and child perspectives on educational experiences.

To create the themes, I read through each paper and took notes, focusing on the key findings from each paper. Following this, I organised common themes together (Green et al., 2006) to create an overarching theme name to encompass the findings from literature. An extract of this theming process can be seen in Appendix D which shows the table for the first literature theme. The table of literature (see Appendix B for an extract) was also used to help consider the literature as a whole and note any patterns emerging from the research literature. The theme names devised from this process of interrogating the literature are: 'A distinctive group'; 'School climate'; 'Relationships'; and 'Staff knowledge and training', and each of these themes are discussed individually below.

### 2.3.1. A distinctive group

#### 2.3.1.1. *Adult perspectives*

As identified in the introductory chapter of this thesis, currently there is an unconfirmed number of children from military families in the UK. The 2011 Ofsted review of education for children from military families recommended an accurate registry be maintained of children in this group and that they be treated as a distinct group to ensure that their individual needs are adequately addressed. However, twelve years after the review, there is still no comprehensive picture of children from military families. As the military status of some children's parents may not be known to schools in England, it is important to be mindful of this when researching educational professionals' views on this group of children. This said, for US-based literature discussed within this section the number of children from military families is collected during the census (United States Census Bureau, 2020) which may be more reliable than UK estimates.

When considering the educational needs for children from military families, 152 American early childhood teachers of three-to eight-year-olds were asked to complete a Likert-type survey with additional open-ended questions (Stites, 2016). The results of this survey did not render statistically significant differences in teachers' perceptions of prosocial behaviour, concentration, and disruptive behaviour between military students and the general child population. This indicates teachers in this study did not believe children from military families display a higher level of negative behaviours. However, the author noted this data provided a surface level understanding of early childhood teachers' perspectives of the educational needs of this group of children, and suggested that qualitative interviews and focus groups should be employed in future studies to gain a more in-depth understanding of how early childhood educators consider the education needs of young children (Stites, 2016). This limitation aside, when asked what they felt were the biggest differences between children from military families

and their peers, teachers' responses portrayed the following differences: having less stability in the home, a view also held by parents in the UK (Brady et al., 2013); a lack of an extended support system; and being more adaptable to new situations, location and/or routines, which will be further discussed below.

It is important to reflect on the positive aspect of difference for this group of children as they are described as being more adaptable than their peers. According to the findings of Bradshaw and colleagues' research, school staff believe that students from military families are more flexible and experience an accelerated maturation process compared to students from the general school population (Bradshaw et al., 2010). This finding suggests the frequent mobility and school transitions that CYP from military families are exposed to may make them more self-sufficient or mature, which may be developmentally appropriate or may hasten the maturity for these young people.

This said, maturity cannot always be viewed as a positive characteristic: some children from military families, particularly with deployed parents, appear to be managing 'adult emotions' (Bradshaw et al., 2010) and, at times, taking on adult roles and responsibilities that are not developmentally appropriate (Byng-Hall, 2002; Bradshaw et al., 2010; De Pedro et al., 2011; Skomorovsky & Bullock, 2017). These additional stressors of having a deployed parent, a lack of an extended support system, and less stability in the home signals this cohort of children require additional support to manage these stressors, as identified in England by the SPP funding (DfE, 2010).

When considering the impact of deployment, a study by Chandra and colleagues (2010a) used computer-assisted telephone interview with children from military families (aged 11 to 17) and their non-deployed caregivers (1507 participants in total). Both participant groups reported children experienced emotional difficulties during periods of deployment. This study found that these children had significantly higher rates of emotional difficulties when compared to a nationally representative sample of caregivers reporting on child emotional difficulties (Chandra et al., 2010a). However, when considering underlying motivations for the study, the authors state they received an unrestricted grant from the National Military Family Association (NMFA) to support the project (Chandra et al., 2010a) and participants were recruited from a camp run by the NMFA. This could be indicative of a researcher bias, most specifically the 'allegiance effect', where authors may seek to produce results that meet the expectations of the funding agency (Leykin & DeRubeis, 2009; Lomangino, 2016; Markman and Hirt, 2002). This limitation aside, other literature exploring the impact of deployment upon children from military families highlights children's behaviour and social emotional adjustment is affected

during deployment (St John & Fenning, 2020; Lucier-Green et al., 2015; De Pedro et al., 2016; Pexton et al., 2018). Research with school staff highlights that deployments and school transitions are the most frequent and severe problems for children from military families which manifest as stress and anxiety in these children (Aronson & Perkins, 2013; Arnold et al., 2014; Skomorovsky & Bullock, 2017; Pexton et al., 2018) which can ultimately impact upon academic performance (Richardson et al., 2011; Garner et al., 2014).

Outside of parental deployment, there are other avenues of a military lifestyle that impact upon the socioemotional needs of children from military families. In a National Audit Office consultation (Brady et al., 2013), parents raised concerns regarding the impact of geographical mobility on their children's social and emotional wellbeing. Schools acknowledge there are times children from military families require additional support socially and emotionally (Ofsted, 2011). Thus, school transitions, mobility and parental deployment are all aspects of a military lifestyle which impact children from military families socially and emotionally. These unique challenges not only produce a distinctiveness between them and children in the general school population, but also highlight this group of children require additional support from schools to mitigate against these effects.

Although the above points have given some supporting arguments to children from military families being viewed as a distinct group in order to access additional school support, particularly during periods of deployment, others disagree with such grouping. Findings from a survey with school staff and administrators across 129 schools in San Diego identified approximately a quarter of school administrators believed students from military families should not be viewed as a distinct group but individually evaluated and referred to educational programs and resources suitable for the individual (De Pedro et al., 2014a). Over a third of school administrators went on to say there were no specialised programs for students from military families within their respective schools; this suggests that across the schools in the study, this group of children may not be in receipt of additional support due to their parental military status. However, as all participants were recruited from schools within one school district which were part of the same consortium, processes and policies associated with this consortium may have influenced participants' responses and contributed to sampling bias.

In additional research by De Pedro and colleagues (2014b), although there was a strong consensus that children from military families have unique needs, the findings highlighted several of the stakeholders interviewed for the study identified many military families and their children did not want to be 'singled out'. It was suggested by some participants that sociocultural norms of military families could be a contributing factor to their reluctance to

accept assistance. It is important to note however that as 87 percent of the stakeholder participants reported having direct family affiliations with the military, participant views may have been influenced by their own experiences with the military. Additionally, this research may have been subject to research bias due to the researcher's upbringing in a military family. The presence of a large number of participants having a military background, and the presence of the interviewer's own personal military affiliations, may have had an impact on the responses to interview questions; there is no detail provided on whether the researcher and participants' subjectivity were addressed throughout the data collection process.

Even in light of the ethical considerations outlined above for De Pedro et al.'s study (2014b), a similar finding comes from Culler and colleagues' (2019) research with 79 military spouses from seven military installations across the branches of the American Armed Services. Interviews with spouses highlighted they did not want their children to feel isolated or labelled for attending student-support programs related to parental absence. They acknowledged the need for additional services to support their children, but also reported concerns surrounding stigmatisation or isolation of the student based on their military connection. This highlights the importance of a supportive school climate for this group of students, which is discussed in the next section of this literature review. Nonetheless, it is first important to consider the potential researcher bias, most specifically an 'allegiance effect' (Markman & Hirt, 2002) which may have arisen from this research: the seven military installations were purposively sampled as they were identified by the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) as one of only two federally-controlled school systems that are responsible for the organisation, direction, coordination, and management of prekindergarten through to 12<sup>th</sup> grade educational programs on the Department of Defense's behalf (DoDEA, 2022). As such, it could be suggested that these specific military installations were selected to produce results in line with DoDEA's expectations.

#### *2.3.1.2. Child perspectives*

When considering a distinctiveness to others, research from children's perspectives portray this as a sense of difference to the general child population. In England, the Children's Commissioner conducted research with 40 CYP (aged 8-15) on their experiences of growing up in an Armed Forces family. A key finding from the interviews highlighted that CYP developed an identity based on their upbringing within a military family (Children's Commissioner, 2018). This was demonstrated in this report by the CYP having a high degree of knowledge and awareness regarding their parent(s)' jobs and position in the Armed Forces, even from the youngest children who were interviewed. Additionally, the Children's



Commissioner (2018) notes there was an awareness that children from military families were distinct to other children, however this was not apparent from the interview quotes included within the report. This said, other literature highlights that having a sense of belonging to a military culture may play a powerful role in the resilience of children from military families (Masten, 2013a).

Although developing a sense of identity based on experiences of growing up in a military family may be viewed positively, other research suggests this identity leads to children feeling different from their peers. In a study by Yarwood and colleagues' (2021), semi-structured interviews were held with fifteen young people from military families to examine the impact of military service on children's lives. Findings from this research indicate deployments may have contributed to a sense of difference between military and non-military families, as children reported that their teachers and peers did not understand the consequences of deployments and were unable to empathise with them (Yarwood et al., 2021). The authors noted children often tried to keep their emotions and feelings private in an attempt to 'fit in' as they shared they did not want to be treated differently in school. This research was conducted in Plymouth which in 2011 was estimated to have 10 percent of the adult population as serving personnel or veterans (Yarwood et al., 2021). It is important to be mindful that these findings are relevant to one city in the south-west of England with a higher-than-average number of military-connected adults residing in the city. As such, it could be suggested there is a higher number of children in Plymouth with parent(s) in the military, with military connections, or historic service in the military and that even with this higher number, these young people still felt a sense of difference to their peers.

Even in consideration of the limitations of Yarwood and colleagues' research (2021), similar findings are reflected in Skomorovsky and Bullock's (2017) research with children aged 8-13 years old. In this study, a significant proportion of children reported feeling distinct from their civilian peers due to two reasons: (a) other children were unable to comprehend the impact of parental absence and the associated emotions; and (b) other children did not have a comprehensive understanding of the military or had a distorted view of it, which could lead to insensitive questions about the military (Skomorovsky & Bullock, 2017). It is likely these problems are exacerbated when children from military families attend educational settings with a smaller percentage of children from military families on role: this percentage of similar peers can impact upon peer relationships, and is discussed in more detail in section 2.3.3.

Feeling a sense of difference to the general child population is also reflected in Hayllar's doctoral research with 8 children (aged 7-11) from military families. Hayllar (2018) noted the

participants spoke openly about the challenges they faced as a result of their upbringing in a military family. Children in this research described how they felt there was a lack of understanding from the general child population as their parents did not go away as often as the participants' parent in the military. This was similarly reflected in Clifton's doctoral research with four Year 8 pupils from Army families where one participant shared that children in the general population did not understand the Army lifestyle and thus friendships with these children were difficult for him (Clifton, 2007). When peers do not understand a military lifestyle, this can lead to children from military families becoming frustrated with the lack of understanding from these children, as found in Pott's doctoral research (2021) with 7 children (aged 11-16). The participants in Potts' research further said they could more easily relate to other children from military families as they better understood their unique experiences in comparison to the general child population.

### *2.3.1.3. A distinctive group: summary*

In summary, research findings highlight that from adult perspectives children from military families are viewed distinctively from children in the general school population as they have less stability in the home, a lack of an extended support system, and are more adaptable to new routines, locations and situations (Stites, 2016; Brady et al., 2013; Bradshaw et al., 2010). It is felt the unique challenges of an upbringing in a military family, such as frequent mobility and school transitions, may lead to these children being more adaptable and self-sufficient, and resultantly more mature, which may or may not be developmentally appropriate (Bradshaw et al., 2010). Bradshaw and colleagues further highlight that maturity cannot always be viewed positively as some children from military families, particularly those with a deployed parent, may appear to be managing 'adult emotions' and taking on adult roles and responsibilities. Although children from military families may have different roles and responsibilities when a parent is deployed, military spouses in Culler and colleagues' research (2019) expressed that they did not want their children to feel isolated or labelled for accessing student-support programs related to parental absence.

Whilst parents did not want their children to feel isolated or labelled when accessing school support during parental deployment, child participants in the research identified that children in the general population could not relate to them during times of parental deployment (Skomorovsky & Bullock, 2017; Hayllar, 2018; Yarwood et al., 2021). Children from military families felt children in the general population did not have a good understanding of the military (Skomorovsky & Bullock, 2017), or the lifestyle these children lead as a result of the military (Clifton, 2007), which at times led to feelings of frustration from children from military families

towards this lack of understanding (Potts, 2021). As such, these children developed a sense of identity based on their experiences of being part of a military family (Children's Commissioner, 2018), which may play a powerful role in the resilience of children from military families (Masten, 2013a). Children found they could more easily relate to other children from military families due to shared understanding of the unique experiences of a military lifestyle (Potts, 2021). This is therefore suggestive that children from military families may need to access additional support at all times, not just during periods of deployment, as they feel that children in the general population do not understand the difficulties they are experiencing.

### 2.3.2. School climate

#### 2.3.2.1. *Adult perspectives*

School climate is comprised of four key dimensions of the school environment: meaningful participation, school connectedness, caring relationships with adults, and high expectations from school adults (Austin et al., 2013). School climate appears to be a topic that has started to receive interest in American literature for children from military families, with two articles by De Pedro and colleagues specifically researching school climate for this group of children (De Pedro et al., 2016; De Pedro et al., 2018) which will be discussed in the next section which focuses on child perspectives.

In consideration of the qualitative data surrounding school climate, Culler and colleagues' (2019) study with military spouses highlighted school climates which are supportive of military culture and regular parental absences were identified as a protective factor for these families to cope during parental deployment. Similar findings are reflected in De Pedro and colleagues' research with stakeholders on their perspectives of the experiences of military-connected students: several participants posited that schools need to be in a place of stability for this group of students due to their multiple school transitions, deployments, and lack of social support in civilian communities (De Pedro et al., 2014b). Participants described such stability as 'stabilising education', 'stable relationships' and 'safety and consistency' so that schools can be more responsive to and supportive of the emotional needs of children from military families. This said however, military families do not always share the same positive view of schools' climates.

In a study by Berkowitz and colleagues (2014), 3914 parents from eight school districts in San Diego, with just over 11 percent (448 parents) who identified they had at least one family member serving in the military, responded to a survey which combined the Core Module and Military Module of the California School Climate Survey. This survey is created by the same

organisation of the California Healthy Kids Survey, as outlined in two studies in the following section (De Pedro et al., 2016; De Pedro et al., 2018), and three of the authors (Berkowitz, De Pedro and Astor) contributed to all three of these articles. Findings from Berkowitz and colleagues' study (2014) highlights parents from military families had a consistently more negative assessment of school climate across all grade levels; felt schools should be educated on military families' specific needs and concerns; and felt schools encouraged their parental involvement less.

Similar findings are present in Arnold and colleagues' (2014) research with American elementary school teachers. Participants in this study commented that misaligned expectations from teachers regarding school environments and education can challenge the development of family-teacher relationships and is a view reflected in other literature (Aronson & Perkins, 2013). These teachers recognised that children from military families would be transitioning from differing teaching styles, curriculums and expectations at other schools (Arnold et al., 2014). To be able to navigate this transition, teachers outline their role is to provide structured and predictable classroom environments which simultaneously provide a place of safety for children from military families who are experiencing parental deployment. Overall, research asserts a positive school climate is essential for the academic, social, and emotional development of students, including those with military connections (Astor et al., 2013).

#### *2.3.2.2. Child perspectives*

In 2016, De Pedro and colleagues studied the impact of school climate on student victimisation in military-affiliated public schools. The authors analysed 14,973 responses of the California Healthy Kids Survey which gathers students' perspectives on school climate, resiliency, and risk behaviours in the United States. The participants were 7<sup>th</sup> (12-13 years old), 9<sup>th</sup> (14-15 years old) and 11<sup>th</sup> graders (16-17 years old) from 38 schools in six military-connected public-school districts in southern California. The authors identify this is the first study of its kind to examine the role of the school climate in the victimisation of students from military families and students in the general population. Findings from this study highlight caring relationships from teachers led to lower levels of physical and non-physical peer victimisation, but the results yielded a weak association. It is important to recognise this research was conducted in schools which were likely to have a higher number of students from military families as they were selected to be in military-connected public school districts. Research posits that students who attend schools with a higher percentage of students from military families tend to experience less stress (Bradshaw et al., 2010) and friendships are often sought between CYP

from military families (Mmari et al., 2010). It could therefore be suggested a higher percentage of students from military backgrounds in schools could also contribute to lower levels of physical and non-physical peer victimisation rather than solely caring relationships from teachers.

These critical reflections are relevant for De Pedro and colleagues' study in 2018. Much like the 2016 study, the authors analysed responses to the California Healthy Kids Survey from 7<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> graders in six military-connected districts in southern California yielding 14,493 responses. Findings from this study indicate that at times of stress for CYP from military families, school climates can be a protective factor for their mental health and well-being. It has been found that a variety of components of school climate are linked to a decrease in rates of depression and suicidal ideation, as well as an increase in wellbeing (De Pedro et al., 2018). However, De Pedro and colleagues acknowledge this study is limited due to a lack of qualitative data on how to improve student perceptions of school climate, as this would lead to homegrown practices and a better understanding of how the elements of school climate can improve student well-being and reduce rates of depression and suicide ideation (De Pedro et al., 2018).

Linked to the 'meaningful participation' aspect of school climate (Austin et al., 2013), doctoral theses which researched children's direct experiences had similar findings related to school curriculums. Clifton (2007) identified participants experienced difficulties within the curriculum caused by mobility patterns. Such a finding was also outlined in Hayllar's research (2018) with participants sharing they either missed or repeated learning experiences. Similarly, children spoke of the challenges they faced when adapting to change and learning how their new schools' function with respect to behavioural expectations and teaching styles (Potts, 2021). One participant in this research discussed ability sets and used the word 'belonged' to highlight where he expected to be as a student which suggests he felt a responsibility to ensure he was placed in the correct set when moving to a new school (Potts, 2021). This depicts a sense that some school climates do not provide a sense of school connectedness and high expectations from adults for those children from military families, particularly when they have first transitioned to the setting. This was evident in Clifton's research where she reflects that she did not feel that the presence of the Army was being felt in the schools and at times, was being ignored (Clifton, 2007).

#### *2.3.2.3. School climate: summary*

This section highlights that school staff feel schools need to be a place of stability and predictability for children from military families whereby there are stable relationships, safety

and consistency, and stable education so schools can be more responsive to and provide support for the emotional needs of this group of children. Teachers reported that positive school climates were essential for the academic, social and emotional development of children from military families.

When considering the role of the school climate, parents in research had differing views. Some felt school climates which are supportive of the military culture and parental deployment were a protective factor and enabled them to cope during deployment (Culler et al., 2019). Other parents however provided a less positive assessment of school climate and highlighted schools needed to be educated on the specific challenges of military families (Berkowitz et al., 2014).

Similarly, there were mixed views from child participants when considering the role of school climate in their educational experiences. Some children highlighted caring relationships from school staff led to lower levels of physical and non-physical peer victimisation, although the results of the study did yield this as a weak association (De Pedro et al., 2016). In another study by De Pedro and colleagues (2018), children highlighted that school climates can act as a protective factor during times of stress. In contrast, other child participants felt aspects of school climate were difficult to navigate upon a school transition such as behavioural expectations, teaching styles and missed/repeated learning experiences (Hayllar, 2018; Potts, 2021). In summary, this literature from both child and adult perspectives provides a mixed picture as to the importance and influence of school climates upon children from military families' school experience.

### 2.3.3. Relationships

#### 2.3.3.1. *Adult perspectives*

As identified above, one of the four key dimensions of the school environment which contributes to school climate is caring relationships with adults (Austin et al., 2013), and thus some of the research considered here is inclusive of school climate research discussed previously which will result in a smaller section below. As an illustration, in De Pedro and colleagues' (2018) research on school climate, deployment and mental health for students from military families, a higher degree of caring and meaningful relationships was found to be significantly associated with high well-being. Literature highlights the importance of these supportive relationships during times of stress for children from military families such as during parental deployment (De Pedro et al., 2018; Macdonald & Boon, 2018; Stites, 2016) and in school transitions (Garner et al., 2014; Bradshaw et al., 2010).

Military students', parents' and teachers' perceptions on school transition stressors was explored in a study by Bradshaw and colleagues (2010). Participants were recruited in five states across the United States by an individual at each military base who had established strong relationships with military families. It should be noted that such a recruitment strategy could have implied the staff member approached specific participants who they perceived to have strong opinions on transitions, which could have led to participant bias. Whilst being mindful of this potential bias, the findings from the study highlight student's transition-related stress can either be buffered or exacerbated based on the interactions from school staff (Bradshaw et al., 2010). Additionally, it was felt that the transition process for children from military families was facilitated by increased communication between the new school and family/student (Bradshaw et al., 2010).

Furthermore, parents in Bradshaw and colleagues' study identified staffs' knowledge of unique challenges for military families is of paramount importance in developing supportive, positive relationships (Bradshaw et al., 2010). Such a view was also held by teachers in Arnold and colleagues' research (2014) as illustrated by a key theme from the findings of the research being titled '*Teacher's cultural awareness of military students*'. Some participants in this research, particularly those who did not have personal experience with the military, acknowledged they did not have enough knowledge about military culture to be culturally responsive to military families and their children. This finding suggests teachers may need to be in receipt of training to help with their confidence and understanding of military culture, and this is the fourth key theme identified by the literature which will be discussed in section 2.3.4.

#### *2.3.3.2. Child perspectives*

Frequent mobility and transferring from one military base to another often means children are forced to physically leave behind friendships and to pursue new peer relationships (Ruff & Keim, 2014). Research suggests children from military families, their parents, and their teachers perceive leaving behind friends and developing new friendships as one of the biggest stressors for these children.

The social connectedness among military youth was explored in research by Mmari and colleagues (2010) with young people from military families (aged 12-18), parents and school staff. Participants were recruited from eight different military bases across America. These bases were purposively selected for their high percentage of military students and were expected to be impacted by base closure and realignment. Each base had a dedicated

recruiting staff member with strong school and military family connections who was responsible for recruiting across participant groups. As noted in consideration of a previous study (Bradshaw et al., 2010), a critique of this recruitment strategy is that the staff member responsible for recruitment may have selected participants whom they believe had strong views about social connectedness and this could have resulted in participant bias. Keeping this potential bias in mind, findings from this study highlight young people felt the most impactful aspects of relocating were separating from their friends and making new friends at their new location, and this view was also reflected by the parents and school staff who participated in this research. If a school transition took place in the middle of the academic year this exacerbated difficulties for students. According to research by Mmari et al. (2010), the most effective way for young people to form new relationships in their new environment was to develop friendships with other students from military families, as these students often shared similar experiences due to the fact that they have also been a new student at some point in their life. An additional strategy which many CYP discussed in helping them to integrate into their new educational settings or communities was through a 'buddy system' or 'meet and greet' programs.

Much like the findings from Mmari and colleagues' study (2010), young people aged 11 to 13 in a study by Bradshaw and colleagues (2010) reported one of their strategies for making new friendships was to pursue these with military students as they seemed to be the most accepting and welcoming. Students also described the difficulty of separating from friends and the frequency of this, which some students reported manifested as anger towards their parents and the military (Bradshaw et al., 2010). However, participants in this study shared they felt better equipped to handle these frequent moves compared to peers in the general school population; some students from military families reported they employed the strategy of 'blending in', or adjusting their personality, to adapt to the new social context.

In the UK, the report by the Children's Commissioner (2018) identified similar findings to above. Children who were interviewed for this report identified leaving friends behind could lead to them feeling unsettled and in younger children, this could manifest as anxiety about leaving friends behind and getting to know peers at their new school. For the older participants in this study, it seemed they felt more comfortable with making new friends in comparison to children in the general population.

It appears the social element of schooling featured most widely in literature with child participants. Clifton's research participants indicated that the social aspect of schooling and the desire to make friends were the primary reasons they attended school (Clifton 2007). The



significance of friends was also evident in Hayllar's research where friendships was described by the researcher as a recurring theme in conversation (Hayllar, 2018), as well as in Potts' (2021) research where participants highlighted forming and maintaining friendships was a key part of school life. When discussing the friendships that participants had made, Clifton (2007) reflected that the male participants made friendships with other children from Army families whereas the females pursued friendships amongst the civilian population. Similarly, in Potts' study (2021) participants felt they could relate to other children from military families as there was a shared understanding of experiences and connecting with such peers was a positive aspect of school life for participants. Such a finding was also reflected in Hayllar's research (2018) whereby some participants expressed that they found it easier to be around other children from military families as they felt similar to such peers, whereas others felt the opposite and would talk about surrounding themselves with children from the general population. In these pieces of doctoral research, relationships tended to centre around those with school peers. When thinking specifically about relationships with adults, participants in Potts' research (2021) inferred that their teachers lacked understanding and empathy, particularly around difficult emotional experiences such as parental deployment: this will be explored in more detail in the next section.

#### *2.3.3.3. Relationships: summary*

Child participants in literature spoke more frequently about the importance of relationships with others. They highlighted that leaving friends behind and making new friends was the most stressful aspect of moving which was even more challenging if this move occurred partway through the academic year. Such moves could manifest as anger towards the children's parents because of this frequency of separating from friends. Children identified that befriending other children from military families was the most successful strategy in making friends as there was a shared understanding of what it was like to be the new starter. Child participants in Bradshaw and colleagues' study (2010) reflected they felt better equipped than children in the general population to navigate relocations and employed the strategy of 'blending in' or adapting their personality based on the new social context. The importance of relationships for children from military families centred around those that they were developing, or separating, with their peers.

In contrast, the adult participants in research reflected on the importance of school staffs' relationships with military families and their children. Their perception is that such relationships can buffer or exacerbate the stress these students experience, but this was not a view reflected by the children in Bradshaw and colleagues' research (2010). Adult participants in

this research reflected that staff's knowledge of the unique challenges for military families is of paramount importance to developing positive relationships. This said, both staff members and parents felt that teachers working with children from military families needed to be educated on military culture to be able to support these children more effectively. This notion of educating staff is explored in more detail below.

#### 2.3.4. Staff knowledge and training

##### *2.3.4.1. Adult perspectives*

An oft recurring theme in the literature is that educational professionals do not fully understand the experiences of children from military families (Hall et al., 2022) and is a view held by staff (Bradshaw et al., 2010; De Pedro et al., 2014b; Garner et al., 2014; Ruff & Keim, 2014) and parents (Brady et al., 2013; Bradshaw et al., 2010; Culler et al., 2019).

When exploring educators' perspectives on the needs of students from military families and the consequences of this on their own work, Garner and colleagues (2014) found that more than half the participants expressed they did not understand the culture of military families and less than ten percent reported they had received specialist training when working with children from these families. Participants identified learning about the needs of students from military families was a priority for them; as such, the authors hypothesised that professional development and training on this topic would be well received (Garner et al., 2014). A need for this training for professional development and knowledge in supporting this group of students is echoed by teachers in additional research (Arnold et al., 2014; Bradshaw et al., 2010; De Pedro et al., 2014a) as well as by parents of children from military families (Berkowitz et al., 2014; Brady et al., 2013)

When considering the content of such training, parents have shared that staff need an awareness on unique military challenges such as deployment (Brady et al., 2013; Bradshaw et al., 2010; The Royal British Legion, 2018; De Pedro et al., 2014b) and the deployment cycle (St John & Fenning, 2020; Yarwood et al., 2021) so staff can advocate for these students (Macdonald & Boon, 2018) and support their social and emotional needs within school (Bradshaw et al., 2010; De Pedro et al., 2014a; Moeller et al., 2015; St John & Fenning, 2020).

##### *2.3.4.2. Staff knowledge and training: summary*

According to literature, both staff and parents consider it essential to understand the unique difficulties faced by military families in order to provide support to children. Furthermore, staff members report a lack of understanding of the military family culture and most staff members

had no specialist training in working with this group of children. This highlights that those who work most closely with children from military families in schools may not have the knowledge of their unique challenges, nor how to best support them.

#### 2.3.5. Summary of the research literature

It is important to highlight that most of the research discussed above is based on parental and school staff reports, and such reports may overstate the challenges that children face or be biased in terms of what parents choose to disclose (Aronson & Perkins, 2013; Pexton et al., 2018; Chandra et al., 2010a; Skomorovsky & Bullock, 2017). As a result of this dominance of adult-focused research, it has been suggested in literature that more research is needed from the child perspective as they will be able to provide unique insights (Skomorovsky & Bullock, 2017).

Research discussed within this section has highlighted that parents/military spouses have acknowledged the need for additional support for their children within school, but report concerns about stigmatisation or isolation of their child based upon their military connection (Culler et al., 2019). This said, when the school climate supports and is knowledgeable of military culture, this can be a protective factor for families during parental deployment (Culler et al., 2019; De Pedro et al., 2014) whereas when parents feel a school is not educated on the specific needs and concerns of military families, relationships between school and home are negatively impacted (Berkowitz et al., 2014; Bradshaw et al., 2010). The literature discussed above generally highlights that staff, parents and children feel educational professionals do not fully understand the experiences of children from military families (Hall et al., 2022; Bradshaw et al., 2010; De Pedro et al., 2014b; Garner et al., 2014; Ruff & Keim, 2014; Brady et al., 2013; Bradshaw et al., 2010; Culler et al., 2019; Yarwood et al., 2021).

As evidenced in the 'child perspective' sections under the four theme titles, there is a scarcity of research with child participants which is evidenced by these shorter or absent sections. However, even with fewer studies which directly explored children's views on their educational experiences, we can conclude that children from military families develop a sense of identity based on their experiences of being with a military family and thus feel a sense of difference from those who are brought up in different familial circumstances as such children cannot empathise with the unique challenges that children from military families face (Children's Commissioner, 2018; Yarwood et al., 2021). Children who participated in the above research expressed anxieties towards moving homes and schools, and the resultant need to pursue friendships upon such relocation. The child participants identified the most effective strategy

for making new friends upon a school relocation was to pursue a relationship with other students from military families due to a sense of shared experience and empathy (Mmari et al., 2010; Bradshaw et al., 2010).

In summary, children from military families experience unique challenges which impact upon their educational experiences. Staff members and parents highlighted adults in school have a lack of awareness of these unique challenges and thus are not best equipped to support children from military families. Child participants however appeared to value the social element of schooling above all else and spoke of feelings of anger at having to separate from friends, as well as anxieties at making new friends upon starting at a new school. These children self-identified the most successful strategy for pursuing new friendships was to bond with other children from military families who had a shared understanding and experience of a military upbringing. They felt a sense of difference to their school peers in the general population, and adults reflected this view by often holding children from military families as a distinct group.

The next section of this thesis will explore the educational experiences of children from Army families by considering research conducted specifically with this population of children.

#### 2.4. The educational experiences of children from Army families: research literature

As aforementioned in the introduction chapter of this thesis, literature does not tend to separate children from military families into their distinctive military groups and talks about them as a single entity. By doing this, it does not acknowledge the complexity of the structure of the military and how the impact and experience of unique challenges related to being within a military family may affect families differently dependent on their military branch (Ofsted, 2011).

Very few pieces of research which have been discussed throughout this literature review thus far have outlined which branch of the military the children's parents belong to. As evidenced in Figure 2, only four papers outline working directly with children from Army families. This section will summarise the researching findings from these four pieces of literature (Pexton et al., 2018; O'Neal et al., 2022; Clifton, 2007; Lucier-Green et al., 2015), and the two papers with adult participants (Macdonald & Boon, 2018; Chandra et al., 2010b), in relation to children Army families.

#### 2.4.1. The impact of deployment in school

Four of the six papers identified above specifically focus on deployment (Pexton et al., 2018; O'Neal et al., 2022; Chandra et al., 2010b; Macdonald & Boon, 2018). These pieces of research are US-based (Chandra et al., 2010b; O'Neal et al., 2022), Australian-based (Macdonald & Boon, 2018) and UK-based (Pexton et al., 2018) which highlights Army-directed deployment occurs in all three countries. Deployments are longer and more frequent following the September 11 attacks in America (O'Neal et al., 2021; Cunitz et al., 2019). As there is a conception that the US Army has a focus on combat operations (Cusumano, 2015), it is likely these were the prevalent branch of the military deployed in relation to the September 11 attacks and subsequent conflicts, and thus research has been conducted with those who have affiliations with the Army. This is also highlighted in Pexton and colleagues' (2011) introductory section to their article in which they state that parental deployment to combat zones can often lead to heightened stress for children and families and this is compounded by intermittent periods of absence through training deployments to prepare for deployment to these combat zones. This said, Pexton and colleagues recruited children with a parent in the Army who was deployed to Afghanistan, or was on a training deployment, at the time of research in January 2011. Hence, even though the article was published in 2018, the data was gathered at a time when there was NATO-led (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation) military operations in Afghanistan (Operation Enduring Freedom) in response to the September 11 terrorist attacks in 2001 (MoD, 2015). Operation Herrick, the last phase of the United Kingdom's military presence in Afghanistan, ended on 31 December 2014 (MoD, 2015).

Findings from these articles related to school experiences highlight that being educated in a school nearer to a military base has a less detrimental impact of deployment as school peers had a shared knowledge of this experience helping to normalise this unique military event (O'Neal et al., 2022). When there were higher levels of social support during periods of deployment, children in this research had more school engagement and homework commitment, and better academic performance (O'Neal et al., 2022). However, when children from Army families were compared to children from the general population, they were found to be more anxious and to have clinically significant intrusive and avoidance thoughts of their fathers being deployed, including fear of capture, attack, or death (Pexton et al., 2018). When children attend schools farther from military installations with fewer children from military families enrolled, they may have less access to the military community, making them more likely to experience a decrease in psychosocial support and school performance (O'Neal et al., 2022). The support of the military community was mirrored in Macdonald and Boon's (2018) research whereby Defence School Transition Aides (DSTAs) felt that students

benefitted from the support the DSTAs provided as well as the support they received from other students as the sharing of experiences helped students to recognise and build upon their own strategies to mitigate against the negative impact of parental deployment.

School staff noticed that during periods of deployment, children from Army families appeared sad and angered which in turn disrupted classroom activities and impacted peer relationships (Chandra et al., 2010b). In contrast however, child participants in O'Neal and colleagues' study suggest that parental separation was not associated with depressive symptoms in adolescents (O'Neal et al., 2022). Staff members in Chandra and colleagues' research (2010b) further shared that when a parent was first deployed academic performance may have initially declined but children were then able to organise themselves to perform well in future and thus their academic decline did not last for the entirety of the deployment.

Findings from these studies indicate that the support of the military community and other children from military families helped to mitigate against the negative impact of parental deployment for children from Army families. When there was a high level of social support, the children's academic attainment, and engagement with homework and school were not impacted by their parent's deployment. It further appeared that even when there was an initial decline in academic performance when a parent was first deployed, it did not continue to decline for the duration of the deployment (Chandra et al. 2010b). These findings are indicative that there are protective factors that help children from Army families to manage the impact of parental deployment.

#### 2.4.2. Relationships

Lucier-Green and colleagues (2015) recognise in their research that children from military families have the same stressors as children their age as well as the added unique challenges of being brought up in a military family. These stressors, referred to as 'risk factors' in this research, influence child wellbeing; the accumulation of risk factors is thought to be especially problematic (Lucier-Green et al., 2015). The authors highlight that cumulative risk has a detrimental effect on the occurrence of depressive symptoms, academic performance, and perseverance in military youth. To help mitigate against the influence of risk, findings from this study highlight the importance of social connection with family, peers, and others outside of the home.

In Clifton's doctoral research (2007), there was a disparity between the relationships that children from Army families had with their friends and classmates in comparison to those with

teachers. From her ethnographic study, Clifton (2007) observed that there was a lack of engagement from the participants with teaching staff and concludes that participants may have disconnected with teachers as a coping mechanism for the everchanging teaching staff.

When asked why they attend school, all participants in Clifton's research indicated the importance of obtaining an education and some mentioned the social aspect of schooling and the desire to make new friends. Clifton noted some participants' friendships appeared to be defined by fluidity as friendships changed throughout the school year (Clifton, 2007). Clifton observed that the female participants in her study sought to form relationships with children from the general school population, while the male participants formed relationships with children from military families, which, according to Clifton, demonstrated the children's attitudes towards the military. Clifton further explains this is because the female participants in the study did not often mention the Army in their interviews, whereas the male participants were well-versed in the military's role and involvement in their lives and were able to articulate their father's role and regiment.

Findings from these two studies indicate that relationships are important to and for children from Army families in mitigating against stressors or risk factors. However, in reference to Clifton's research (2007), it seems children can distance themselves from adults and peers as a coping mechanism in protecting themselves against changing teachers and friendships.

#### 2.4.3. Summary of the educational experiences of children from Army families

When considering children from Army families, only Clifton (2007) specifically named children from Army families in the title of her research: for the other papers, this information was given in the 'participant' section of the articles. Four of the seven papers which identified as focusing on children from Army families specifically researched the impact of deployment. It can be inferred that as the Army is a "primarily war-fighting organisation to protect the nation and, if required, fight the nation's enemies with absolute commitment" (Army MoD, 2023), they are more likely to be sent on combat operations. Thus, they may experience more deployments in relation to training and to conflict zones in comparison to other branches of the military. As such, deployments to conflict zones may incur the risk of injury, this helps to explain why children from Army families have intrusive thoughts about the possibility of their fathers' being captured, attacked, or killed (Pexton et al., 2018).

Although this helps to give justification for research with children from Army families regarding deployment, it does not consider the other unique challenges of a military lifestyle, such as

mobility and school relocations, and the impact these have on children. Additionally, it does not consider life for children from Army families more broadly or at times of stability for these children. Clifton (2007) and Lucier-Green and colleagues (2015) research this group of children more broadly and both highlight the importance of relationships to and for children from Army families. Such relationships help to mitigate against the influence of risk for children from Army families and facilitate positive youth development (Lucier-Green et al., 2015). Children from Army families can disconnect from relationships, both with teachers and with friends throughout the school year, which may be reflective of constant changes in teaching staff (Clifton, 2007) and perhaps also a reflection of the changing friendships these children experience through their own mobility patterns.

To conclude, children from Army families share the same unique challenges as children from military families as a group: mobility and deployment. It appears research with this population of children has tended to focus on the impact of deployment which may be because Army personnel are more likely to be deployed, particularly during the 2001 to 2021 war in Afghanistan: a time period in which three of the four deployment-related research papers with children from Army families were written. There is a need to understand the experiences of education for children from Army families more broadly, not just during periods of deployment particularly when parents were deployed to conflict zones.

## 2.5. Application of literature to psychological theory

This section of this chapter will explore the psychological theories which underpin the research. Although most literature discussed in this review has not come from psychological domains, there is some reference to psychological models within the articles. The models evidenced in literature are Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977), belonging, and resilience theory. I will outline each psychological model in turn, referring to the research with children from military families, and outline how each model can be viewed in relation to the school experiences for this group of children.

### 2.5.1. Bronfenbrenner's Bio-ecological Systems Theory

The range of support which young people receive during periods of mobility and school transition can be viewed through the key psychological model of bio-ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological systems theory of development (1977) conceptualises the development and experience of children as a complex network of interactions mediated by five interrelated systems: microsystem (school, family, peers); mesosystem (interactions between microsystems); exosystem (settings and practices that



affect the child but do not directly involve them e.g., parental workplace); macrosystem (societal cultures and systems); and chronosystems (ecological changes occurring over a lifespan). This theory holds that an individual's experience is influenced by the way their unique characteristics and personality interact with the interconnected systems they inhabit. It is the interactions between these different interconnected systems and one's individual biology which determines child outcomes.

Bio-ecological systems theory may be helpful in exploring the experiences of children from military families and the interconnected systems they are in (e.g., family, school, military community), some of which change during deployment, periods of mobility and in school transitions. The military, which can be conceptualized as a microsystem or exosystem, has an impact on military families due to its own social customs. Children from military families are embedded in and affected by a variety of interconnected systems, including their families, local communities, educational institutions, and the military itself (Kudler & Porter, 2013). This embedment in multiple contexts means that effects of unique military challenges, such as parental deployment, are experienced in the home, school, and social environments (Moeller et al., 2015).

Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological systems theory (1977) has been explored in research around the social connectedness among children from military families (Mmari et al., 2010). Mmari and colleagues (2010) state that children are exposed to a variety of social groups and environments as they mature, which can have an impact on their ability to adapt. These children become parts of multiple social networks, for example classmates, friends, neighbourhood children, and with each of these social ecologies comes multiple opportunities for connectedness to others (Bronfenbrenner, 1979 in Mmari et al., 2010).

With every relocation and parental deployment, the systems that children from military families inhabit shift. As a result of this, it could be suggested that in comparison to peers in the general population and in consideration of the fluidity of systems they inhabit and the micro/exosystemic view of the military, children from military families exist within systems of deeper complexity. Although Mmari and colleagues' study (2010) does lightly consider social connectedness through the lens of systems theory, there is a lack of literature to support or refute the application of this theory to children from military families generally and more broadly than social connectedness. This said, this theory will be returned to in Chapter 5, the discussion section of this thesis.

### 2.5.2. Belonging

The psychological concept of belonging can be broadly defined as the desire to belong to a group (Ostermann, 2000). Developing a sense of belonging is a fundamental basic human need and is linked to the concept of relatedness: this need for relatedness includes experiencing oneself as worthy of love and respect and wanting to feel securely connected to others (Maslow, 1943; Greenwood & Kelly, 2019; Ostermann, 2000). Abraham Maslow believed belonging to be one of the five fundamental human needs in addition to physiological, safety, esteem and self-actualisation. The educational community has adopted Maslow's hierarchy of needs, and research indicates schools are a crucial system where belonging should be nurtured to achieve positive outcomes socially, emotionally and academically (Osterman, 2000). Children from military families' sense of belonging could be impacted by the nature of the military lifestyle which is characterised by frequent school and house moves and the resultant change in friendships.

As aforementioned in the introductory paragraph to this section, research articles included in this literature have generally come from non-psychological domains and thus speak about 'belonging' more broadly. It is generally perceived in research with children from military families that a positive school climate leads to a strong sense of belonging and subsequently reduced school victimisation (Astor et al., 2013). Additionally, research asserts that growing up within a military family contributed towards a strong sense of belonging to a stable and supportive network of family and peers which was further bolstered by an emphasis on self-sufficiency, community loyalty, personal discipline and adherence to shared behavioural norms (Held et al., 2021). This suggests a sense of belonging is based on a connection to family and social networks as well as the educational environment. Children from military families who are accustomed to high levels of mobility and thus frequent school relocations are likely to experience fluctuations in their sense of belonging during periods of movement or deployment. However, the notion of belonging for military children has not been extensively studied in literature.

### 2.5.3. Resilience theory

Resilience is a concept that can be difficult to define, however, it is generally accepted to be a flexible concept that enables certain individuals, particularly those who appear to be at risk, to overcome challenges and significant obstacles in their lives (Dent & Cameron, 2003). Resilience is not something that someone does or does not have, but rather is a result of the interactions between individuals, their social environment, their family, and their educational environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1994; O'Hare & Riviere, 2020; Hill et al., 2020). Resilience is

typically conceptualised as a combination of risk factors and protective factors, which demonstrates resilience is applicable at all levels (Zimmerman & Arunkumar, 1994; Toland & Carrigan, 2011). When thinking about children from military families specifically, Masten (2013a) highlights that resilience in these children can be bolstered in multiple ways at differing systems levels. Masten (2021) emphasizes that a child's resilience at any point in time depends upon the other systems they interact with, both internally and externally to the child, and particularly in relation to family, educational institutions, peers, communities, and culture. Theron and Donald (2013) caution that processes that promote resilience should not be assumed to be applicable to children from differing backgrounds and cultures and thus, it is suggested the focus should be shifted away from people and towards what ecologies can do to promote resilience (Ungar, 2011; Theron & Donald, 2013). Promoting resilience in individuals necessitates more than simply unpicking protective factors, as this is not a guarantee for resilience; rather, it is essential to understand the interactions between individuals and their ecosystems in order to co-direct the ever-changing pathways to resilience (Theron & Donald, 2013; Rutter, 2005). While it cannot be assumed that resilience promoting processes are the same for children from different cultures and contexts, children from military families should not be seen as a group that is more in need of such resilience-promoting processes. This is evidenced by Masten (2013a) as she highlights that uncovering what promotes resilience and protects child development among military families may have significance to the future for all American children.

An increasing number of researchers have applied the concept of resilience to military families (e.g., Masten, 2013a; Palmer, 2008; Kudler & Porter, 2013; Osofsky & Chartrand, 2013; Wadsworth et al., 2017; Oshri et al., 2015). Some researchers, such as Masten (2013a), Cramm et al. (2018), and Palmer (2008), consider a resilience framework in relation to military families to support the exploration of how such families successfully navigate the unique challenges of military life, such as deployment. Although there is evidence of a resilience framework being considered with military families as a group, there appears to be a lack of research which considers a resilience framework used specifically with school-aged children from military families. This said, it has been suggested that developing resilience for military families must come from a familial, school and community level to assist children and their families in developing protective factors which will improve their capacity to cope with the unique challenges of a military lifestyle (Russo & Fallon, 2015).

## 2.6. Argument for the current research

Children from military families are a particularly vulnerable population, as evidenced by research and legislation. These children face a variety of unique difficulties, including high mobility inclusive of school transitions, and parental deployments, which can have a negative impact on their social, emotional, and academic development. However, gaps in the literature remain.

In particular, there is a lack of knowledge on the direct lived experiences of children from military families in UK schools broadly. While the SPP is being used to mitigate the negative impacts that deployment and mobility can have on these children's education, there is still a lack of clarity on the needs of these children and how to support them. This literature review indicates the experiences of this group of children in school have been examined to a certain extent in the US literature, however, this usually involved obtaining the views of school staff and parents, while few studies have been conducted to explore children's perspectives. While the adult perspectives on schooling for this group of children provide a valuable perspective, there is a dearth of research that directly examines young people's experiences. Furthermore, this review reveals there is a particular lack of qualitative research in the UK that examines the school experiences of children from both adult and child perspectives.

As evidenced in the narrative review of literature, there is no recognition of the considerable complexity in the structure of the military, with children from military families being regarded a single entity (Ofsted, 2011). Very few pieces of literature discussed in this literature review distinguish between the branch of the military which these children's parents belong to, as seen in Figure 2 where only five of the 35 papers give such information. All five papers who distinguished the military branch conducted research with children from Army families however three of these papers used quantitative methods with this group of children (O'Neal et al., 2022; Pexton et al., 2018; Lucier-Green et al., 2015), and a fourth was an ethnographic study which also collected data from teachers, parents, and a children's group interview, to build a nuanced picture of the school experiences for these participants (Clifton, 2007).

Finally, in consideration of the quality of the research, it could be suggested that some research papers may be subject to research bias. Some research articles were either funded by organisations with strong military links (Chandra et al., 2010a), or had a large influence in the military installations selected for studies (Culler et al., 2019). Other pieces of research raised questions around their recruitment strategy such as whether participants were selected based on their strong views regarding transitions (Bradshaw et al., 2010) or social

connectedness (Mmari et al., 2010). Three of the articles discussed in the literature review (Berkowitz et al., 2014; De Pedro et al., 2016, and De Pedro et al., 2018) had three of the same authors contribute across all three studies, and in one study (De Pedro et al., 2014) there was consideration as to whether the researcher and adult participants' own experiences of the military may have influenced their view of children's experiences. Some authors also reflected upon their research and suggested that qualitative data should be gathered in future studies to gain a more in-depth understanding of perspectives (De Pedro et al., 2018; Stites, 2016): this indicates that the researchers may have felt their present research design was not wholly appropriate to gather the in-depth data that they required. This, alongside the above points regarding overrepresentation of staff and parental reports particularly in American-based literature, highlights that there are some weaknesses in the quality of research concerned with the educational experiences of children from military families; in relation to the CASP, these weaknesses typically centred around the relationships between researcher and participants, appropriateness of research design, and recruitment strategy.

Considering the above and the gaps identified, this study will focus on eliciting the direct experiences of education from children from Army families. The purpose of this research is to hear from young people directly on their experiences of schooling and led to the development of the research question:

- 1) How do primary-aged children from Army families experience education?

## Chapter 3: Methodology

### 3.1 Introduction to the chapter

This chapter will discuss the methodology used within this research. It will begin by reminding the reader of the research aims and question followed by a discussion of the philosophical, ontological and methodological approaches adopted for the research. There will be a brief discussion of the alternative approach considered followed by a more comprehensive discussion of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), the chosen methodology, and its potential benefits and limitations. As IPA is the chosen methodology for this research project, and within such a methodology the researcher has an active role in interpreting accounts of participants' experiences, this chapter will be written in first person. Following a discussion of IPA, the chapter will outline the research design inclusive of research procedures, sampling and recruitment procedures. The chosen data collection methods will then be discussed and the IPA analysis process for such data. The chapter concludes with an exploration of the ethical considerations of the research and a chapter summary.

### 3.2. Research aims and question

The literature review chapter of this study demonstrates there is a dearth of research on and representation of the primary-aged school experiences of military children in the UK. The aim of this study is to address this issue by eliciting and listening to children from Army families regarding their school experiences and to examine their perspectives on a range of key topics.

The motivations for this research are twofold. Firstly, to explore how children from Army families make sense of their school experiences and whether these are impacted, positively or negatively, by their caregiver's career in the Army. Secondly, to supplement the limited research base and offer suggestions for further research around this topic.

The research question which was devised from these aims is:

- How do primary-aged children from Army families experience education?

### 3.3. Philosophical assumptions of the research

The purpose of this research is to gain an understanding of the educational experiences of primary-aged children from Army families. I decided a qualitative approach would be the most appropriate research paradigm to gain an understanding of such experiences through hearing personal accounts inclusive of subjective understandings, feelings, beliefs and opinions (Matthews & Ross, 2010). Qualitative data is typically gathered when an interpretative stance

is taken to understand the meaning of a social phenomenon (Creswell, 2016; Matthews & Ross, 2010; Andrews, 2012): this underpins my research rationale and the notion of 'multiple realities' (Creswell, 2016) allies closely with phenomenological studies. The philosophical assumptions concerned with experience of a social phenomenon underpin this research; these assumptions can be considered through researcher's ontological and epistemological positioning and these are discussed below.

### 3.3.1. Ontology

Ontology refers to the "fundamental nature of the world and what it means to exist in that world" (Oliver, 2014, p.30) or, put simply by Creswell (2016, p. 16), "a stance toward the nature of reality". 'What is there to know?' is the question that drives ontology (Willig, 2013): is there a single reality in which social phenomena can be measured objectively, or is social phenomena socially constructed and composed of multiple realities (Oliver, 2014; Willig, 2013; Bryman, 2016)? Realism, or objectivism, posits that social phenomena have their own significance and reality independent of the individuals involved in or associated with it (Blakeegg, 2016; Matthews & Ross, 2010). On the other hand, relativism, or constructivism, argues that the social phenomena that make up the social world consist of constructed ideas which are constantly reviewed and changed by social actors through social interactions and reflection (Bryman, 2004; Blakeegg, 2016; Matthews & Ross, 2010).

I consider my ontological position to align with social constructivism as I believe that there is no single truth, and the same phenomena can be experienced and interpreted differently by individuals who develop subjective meanings of their experiences from interactions with others (Creswell, 2016).

### 3.3.2. Epistemology

Epistemology refers to the theory of knowledge and how it is obtained (Matthews & Ross, 2010) and concerns itself with the construction of knowledge and how it is developed (Creswell & Creswell, 2003). Broadly speaking, there are three epistemological positions which are commonly articulated in literature: positivism, realism and interpretivism. Although there are more epistemological positions, I will discuss these three commonly identified positions.

Positivism is the epistemological position associated with quantitative methodologies (Willig, 2013; Bryman, 2016) and is defined as an epistemological approach that posits that the knowledge of a social event is determined by what is observable and recorded, rather than by a subjective understanding (Matthews & Ross, 2010). In contrast to positivism is interpretivism

which is commonly associated with qualitative methodologies and seeks to prioritise individuals' subjective experiences and interpretations of social phenomena and their own actions (Bryman, 2016; Matthews & Ross, 2010). Interpretivism emphasises the role of interpretation of those studied and the researcher (Becker et al., 2012). Using an inductive approach, research from an interpretivist epistemological stance seeks to create a theory from the data rather than to prove or disprove hypotheses as in the case of positivism (Becker et al., 2012; Goldkuhl et al., 2012). And finally, realism is defined as an epistemological position which recognises reality, independent of senses, is accessible through the researcher's theoretical speculation and tools (Clark et al., 2021).

I consider my epistemological position to align with interpretivism for two reasons. Firstly, I aim to explore the subjective educational experiences of children from Army families and secondly, I recognise my role as a researcher must be considered when interpreting the behaviour of my participants (Becker et al., 2012). This acknowledgement of researcher interpretation of children's accounts is closely linked to hermeneutics, one of the three fundamental principles of the chosen methodology (Bryman, 2016; Smith et al., 2009; Dallymar, 2009). Such a position encourages reflexivity and how intersubjectivity impacts the data collection (Finlay, 2002).

### 3.3.3. Consideration of alternative methodology and rationale for selecting IPA

In the infancy of developing my research project, I considered using narrative inquiry as the methodological approach. Narrative inquiry is the study of an individual's perspective on the world, which is characterised by a narrative experience that can be experienced both in the living and the telling, and that can be explored through listening, watching, living with another person, writing, and interpreting texts (Clandinin, 2006). Narrative inquiry does not aim to look at whether participants' stories are objectively 'true' or 'false' but rather what the stories mean to participants (Willig, 2013). When considering this methodology, I was drawn to the fact that a mix of data collection tools could be used to help elicit the stories of participants and the idea there is no 'right' way to conduct a narrative inquiry (Webster & Mertova, 2007). Additionally, another consideration for narrative inquiry was that it was developed from social constructivism (Smith et al., 2009) and thus fits with my belief that there is no single truth, and the same phenomena can be experienced differently by each individual (Creswell, 2016).

Upon careful consideration, I felt the researcher's removed role from narrative inquiry research did not fit with my interpretivist epistemological positioning (Riessman, 2008) nor did it recognise my own experiences of being a child within a military family. I favoured the IPA



approach which acknowledges the researchers' role and influence and the role of reflexivity in addressing the effect of my position on outcomes and processes (Fox et al., 2007). Additionally, as I recognise myself to be a novice researcher, I was drawn to the clear set of guidelines provided within IPA to complete the research as successfully as possible.

IPA is consistent with my ontological and epistemological positions as it is concerned with how individuals conceptualise specific phenomena, values multiple realities, uses phenomenology to examine personal lived experience, and through hermeneutics interprets meaning derived from individual lived experiences and realities (Smith et al., 2009; Smith, 2004; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012; Larkin et al., 2011; Smith & Osborn, 2007; Smith & Shinebourne, 2012). IPA offers the opportunity to explore the educational experiences of children from Army families, whilst also considering my role as the researcher in interpreting such experiences.

### 3.4. Introduction to IPA

IPA is a relatively new approach, having been developed in the 1990s by Smith (1996). This qualitative research methodology aims to enable researchers to explore how individuals make sense of their unique lived experiences and to understand this from the individuals' point of view (Smith, 2011; Larkin et al., 2011; Shinebourne, 2011). As IPA is grounded in the detailed examination of lived experiences and how people make sense of such experiences (Smith, 2011), IPA studies typically have a small sample which allows for a detailed case-by-case analysis and interpretation of the rich data based on a certain phenomenon, and not making generalised claims across the whole population (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012; Larkin et al., 2011; Smith & Shinebourne, 2012; Smith, 2019). Such research encourages individuals to tell their own story of their lived experiences in their own words, with researchers seeking to gain an insider perspective of these first-person accounts from a third-person position; to do this, IPA draws upon three fundamental philosophical principles (Noon, 2018; Larkin et al., 2011).

The three philosophical principles that inform IPA are the study of experience (phenomenology), interpretations of the experience (hermeneutics) and a focus on examining specifics rather than a generalised whole (idiography) (Smith et al., 2009). IPA synthesises ideas from these positions resulting in a methodology that is descriptive in nature, as it focuses on the appearance of phenomena, and interpretative in nature, as there is no uninterpretable phenomenon (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). As researchers have an active role in offering an interpretative account of participants' lived experiences, IPA studies can be described as a 'dynamic' process (Smith & Osborn, 2007; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012; Larkin et al., 2006). The

three positions of phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography, and their relation to IPA, will now be examined in turn.

#### 3.4.1. Phenomenology

Broadly speaking, phenomenology is a philosophical approach concerned with the study of *experience* with work from Husserl (1927), Heidegger (1962/1927), Merleau-Ponty (1962) and Sartre (1956/1943) (as cited in Smith et al., 2009) being influential in shaping the application of phenomenological philosophy to IPA.

Phenomenological studies seek to examine the way individuals view the world in light of their own experiences and how they interpret other's words and behaviour through their own subjective understanding of the world (Davies & Hughes, 2014). In other words, phenomenology is concerned with the world as it is experienced by individuals in specific contexts at specific times, as opposed to the world in general (Willig & Rogers, 2017). It is important that IPA studies focus on providing a detailed account of individuals' experiences by encouraging people to tell their own story through their own words (Noon, 2018). It is therefore unsurprising from a phenomenological perspective that individuals experience the 'same' phenomenon in different ways (Willig & Rogers, 2017). It is however important to recognise that the researcher's preconceptions can also influence the data.

Husserl developed phenomenology as an eidetic method whereby the essential components of experiences are identified which make them distinguishable from others (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). However, to be able to concentrate on the perceptual experiences, a key feature of phenomenological studies, Husserl suggests 'bracketing' one's preconceptions (Husserl, 1927 cited in Smith et al., 2009). The concept of bracketing is that the researcher's preconceptions are contained within brackets and separated from the individual participant's perceptions of their experience (Smith et al., 2009; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). To address such limitations, in the instances of any preconceptions arising within this study, I will practice reflexivity to address my positioning in the research (Leavy, 2017). The reasoning for practicing reflexivity opposed to bracketing in reference to IPA research, it is acknowledged that pre-understanding cannot be 'bracketed' (Koch, 1995) and that to bracket is problematic and inconsistent with an IPA approach which is grounded in hermeneutics, as will be discussed in more detail in the following section (LaVasseur, 2003; Chan et al., 2013).

As phenomenology is concerned with individual's subjective reports, it is important such research involves a detailed examination and exploration of individual's personal experiences,

perceptions and accounts of an event, opposed to producing an objective view of the event (Brocki & Wearden, 2006; Smith & Shinebourne, 2012). Phenomenological research is dynamic in nature as a two-stage interpretation process, or double hermeneutic, is required: thus, a distinguishable feature of IPA is that it recognises the researcher's analysis are an *interpretation* of the participant's experiences (Willig, 2013). This leads us to the second philosophical underpinning of IPA: hermeneutics.

#### 3.4.2. Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is the art of interpretation (Dallmayr, 2009) and the researcher's own interpretation invariably influences and complicates this process in IPA (Heidegger, 1962). This makes it impracticable to gain access to the exact personal world of another, so the objective of IPA is to present a comprehensive account that is as accurate as possible; thus, IPA researchers attempt to understand experiences through the view of their participants (Larkin et al., 2006; Noon, 2018; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). IPA studies combine empathic hermeneutics and questioning hermeneutics to have a two-stage interpretative process whereby participants are trying to make sense of their experiences and the researcher takes an active role in trying to make sense of the participants making sense of their experiences (Smith, 1996, 2004, 2011, 2019; Smith & Shinebourne, 2012). This two-stage process allows the researcher to garner an 'insider perspective' of the individual's experience (Noon, 2018).

Of most relevance to IPA is the 'hermeneutic circle' which consists of the original data collected from participants and the interpretative transformation of such data by the researcher (Davies & Hughes, 2014). This process shows the circular relation between understanding of the parts and how it relates to the larger whole. In line with idiography, which will be discussed next, the whole can only be understood in the context of the part and the part can only be understood in the context of the whole.

#### 3.4.3. Idiography

The third and final philosophical underpinning of IPA is idiography; it refers to the extensive analysis of individual cases and examination of the perspectives of participants in their individual contexts (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). To achieve such detailed, nuanced analysis, IPA studies typically have a small number of participants whose accounts are subject to an intense and detailed analysis (Larkin et al., 2006; Smith, 2004); there is a fundamental principle to explore every case in detail before progressing to the next (Cassidy et al., 2011) and before producing any generalised statements (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). This contrasts with nomothetic principles which underlie most empirical work in psychology which instead

makes generalised claims about groups and populations and does not focus on individual experiences of a certain phenomenon (Larkin et al., 2006; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012).

It is therefore fundamental that IPA studies commit to learn from each participant's individual story through an in-depth analysis in a corpus detail whereby the researcher has a more informed understanding of the individual's thoughts, beliefs and behaviours (Noon, 2018; Smith, 2011). Only after a thorough analysis of specific cases can there be a comprehensive analysis of the similarities and distinctions between cases to create detailed descriptions of patterns of meaning and reflect on shared experiences (Shinebourne, 2011). However, IPA does also acknowledge the nuances of experiences of participants by illustrating the individual's responses and elucidating how they align more generally with the themes generated within the data analysis through comparison and contrast (Smith & Eatough, 2006; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012).

#### 3.4.5. Limitations to IPA

Although there are many positive aspects of IPA, as with any methodology there are arguably limitations which must be considered: presenting these considered limitations is felt to be important in understanding the decision to use IPA within this research study. Willig (2013) identifies there are three main limitations to IPA: the role of language; suitability of accounts, and explanation versus description.

Considering the role of language in IPA, Willig (2013) argues the language participants use to (attempt to) communicate their experiences to the researcher constructs, rather than describes, reality. She goes on to say the words chosen to describe an experience always construct a particular version of the experience, and the same event can be described in many differing ways. Such a view is supported by Langridge who posits that criticisms of phenomenological approaches have focused on the naïve view of language; the function of language is operational, and any discussion of an experience allows us to examine the discourse of that experience, but not the experience itself (Langridge, 2004). An additional considered limitation is how language is collected: it has been suggested semi-structured interviewing diminishes the control the researcher has over the situation, is time consuming and is harder to analyse (Smith & Shinebourne, 2012).

Considerations must also be made in using IPA with children and young participants. According to Smith (2004), one of the criticisms of qualitative methods is they necessitate reflective, articulate descriptions from participants. Therefore, it could be argued that IPA may

not be considered appropriate when researching children's experiences, as they may not be able to articulate their opinions at an interpretable level. However, this should not prevent IPA from being used with children, but rather it should be adapted to research such a group (Smith, 2004). Adaptations may include the researcher playing a more prominent role in leading participants during interviews, adopting an interventionist style of interviewing, and altering existing protocols. Furthermore, the researcher could include additional props and games to further support the interview (Smith & Dunworth, 2003).

It is important to have a critical understanding of IPA as a methodology which includes considerations of the limitations of the approach. To address such limitations, the current study interviewed children in Key Stage Two who were between the ages of 7 and 10 as Smith and Osborn (2021) share it may not be advisable to hold interviews with young children. All year groups within Key Stage Two were invited to partake in the interviews as it was felt these children may be of an age to be able to better articulate their educational experiences. In addition, games and props, tailored to the children's interest, were used to assist the interview. The children's interests were gathered during the initial telephone conversation with parents (more detail in section 3.5) where parents shared that colouring, drawing, card games, and sea creatures were some of the participants' interests. Through use of creative methods in eliciting the participants voices, it is hoped children felt listened to by myself as the researcher, and understood their voices and experiences were seen as valid (Leigh, 2020). Additionally, a timeline created with parents acted as a prompt within interviews to further facilitate conversations surrounding the children's schooling experiences. The next section will further explore the quality of my research in addition to the points outlined above.

#### 3.4.6. Ensuring quality of research

Yardley (2000) presents four key characteristics of good qualitative research: (i) sensitivity to context; (ii) commitment and rigour; (iii) transparency and coherence; (iv) impact and importance. These characteristics were born out of the fact that qualitative researchers have been criticised by quantitative researchers for their studies not having representative samples and the outcomes not being replicable (Yardley, 2000); thus it is inappropriate to apply quantitative research criteria of reliability and validity to qualitative studies (Clark et al., 2021). It is however important that qualitative studies can demonstrate value and integrity and therefore, I aimed to adhere to Yardley's key principles for validity which are discussed below. I will also return to these key principles in my critical reflection at the end of this thesis to consider them further.

### Sensitivity to Context

Such sensitivity can be established in numerous ways inclusive of sensitivity to relevant theoretical literature, consideration of the socio-cultural context of the study, and sensitivity towards participants involved in the research (Shinebourne, 2011). As suggested by Shinebourne (2011), my decision to employ IPA as my methodology shows my commitment to idiographic principles. I aimed to be sensitive to the context of my study by ensuring reference was made to the verbatim extracts of the participants' data which simultaneously gave participants voice in the study as well as providing opportunity for the reader to check the interpretations being made (Smith et al., 2009).

### Commitment and Rigour

This encompasses the depth at which the researcher engages with the topic and analyses the data, and how they develop their competency and skills in the methods being employed (Yardley, 2000). In this research study, I feel the use of tools to support children in their engagement and depth to which we could explore the research topic showed my commitment and rigour. Additionally, the use of the pilot interview to ascertain the effectiveness of the interview schedule, and the joint reflection on my interview schedule with my supervisor, both evidenced me adhering to this principle.

### Transparency and Coherence

Transparency can be evidenced in the overt detailing of each aspect of the data collection process (Yardley, 2000). I aimed to provide a clear description of each stage in the research process, including all the information I deemed necessary for readers to access. In regard to coherence, I tried to ensure the theoretical assumptions of IPA were evident and linked to my data collection and analysis. I have included a sample transcript as an example of idiographic data analysis (Appendix E) and a table of personal and experiential themes for each group experiential theme (Appendix F). By doing this I hoped to show my consideration of the reader who is trying to understand how I, as the researcher, have made sense of my participants making sense of their schooling experiences (Smith et al., 2009).

### Impact and Importance

The reader's involvement is a key factor in evaluating the validity of qualitative research (Shinebourne, 2011) as real validity lies in whether the research tells the reader something important or useful (Smith et al., 2009). Yardley (2000) suggests there are numerous types of usefulness, however, the appropriateness of a study should be evaluated in relation to its objectives and the intended audience for whom the findings are deemed relevant for. As this study aimed to promote children from Army families' voices, a current gap in the literature, it

was important to share their perceptions with the school and families to have an understanding of their experiences of education.

### 3.5. Overview of Research Design

The research processes and procedures of the study will now be discussed, inclusive of the sampling and recruitment of participants.

#### 3.5.1. Sampling and participants

Studies that employ an IPA methodology tend to utilise a homogenous sample which has been purposively sampled to identify a more specific population for which the objective of the study will be significant (Smith & Shinebourne, 2012). Hefferon and Gill-Rodriguez (2011) recommend that for professional doctorates the research is comprised of four to ten interviews; they further advise students include fewer participants in the sample, fewer questions in the interview schedule, and fewer themes in analysis to achieve more depth to their IPA.

It was my aim to recruit between four and six participants with the intention to interview each participant. Purposive sampling was used as it is a 'non-probability' form of sampling and allowed me as the researcher to strategically identify participants who had the relevant life experience for the research in question (Clark et al., 2021). The criteria for participants in the current research were to have a parent serving in the Armed Forces and for the child to be educated within a Key Stage Two class (Years 3 to 6). This age range was selected for the likelihood that the children may have moved schools at least once and may be more able to share their experiences as their language abilities are likely to be more advanced than those of younger children. Additionally, it serves to create a more homogeneous sample, as participants are likely to be of similar ages. I did not feel that gender was a necessary sampling distinction as all children, irrespective of gender, would be able to comment on their educational experiences. It is worth noting that although my criteria for participants was to be educated in Key Stage Two, the participants who consented to be involved in the data collection were in Year 3 to 5 making their age range between 7 and 10 years old. The child participants will be treated as a homogenous group who share the experience of having a parent currently serving in the Army, are aged between 7 and 10 years old, and are currently being educated in the same primary school.

#### 3.5.2. Process of recruiting participants

Ethical approval from Bristol University School for Policy Studies Research Ethics Committee was granted in April 2022 (please see Appendix G). The recruitment process occurred

between May and July 2022 with consent of all participants and their parents being gained by September 2022. The data collection phase was initiated in July 2022, through speaking with parents about their children's educational and relocation experiences and ceased in November 2022 once the child participants were interviewed.

The research took place in one primary school located 0.5 miles from a military base in a local authority in the southwest of England. A purposive sampling method was employed to recruit one school near a military base with a number of potential participants for this study: this is known in IPA as purposive homogenous sampling (Smith et al., 2022). This helped to create a participant group as uniform as possible which therefore allowed for consideration of variability within the group (Smith et al., 2022). Only one school was recruited so comparisons of school experiences were not made between participants at differing schools as this would require more participants than a single group study and careful consideration (Smith et al., 2022).

I contacted the school Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo) via email to introduce myself and the research via an information sheet (please see Appendix H). As the recommended spending of the SPP centres around providing pastoral support (MoD, 2022b & 2023a), which could be seen to relate to social, emotional and mental health support, I felt that the SENCo may be aware of the number of children from service families within the school and may be in charge of coordinating pastoral support for them. In the email sent to the SENCO, I outlined that I would call them the following week to discuss the research and answer any initial questions she may have. From this follow-up telephone call, we agreed I would write an email which the school office would disseminate to parents which briefly outlined the research project and asked parents to email me with their initial interest. A copy of this email can be found in Appendix I. The email was sent once on 6 June and again on 14 June 2022.

Following these two emails, five parents initially expressed interest in the research project. These parents were emailed electronic copies of the parental and child consent forms, and information letters for both parents and children. I also provided paper copies of these documents with a pre-stamped and addressed envelope for return of the consent forms to the University of Bristol. Copies of these documents can be seen in Appendix J. Three parents consented to their children participating in the study and this provided four children for the research project. Telephone calls were made to parents prior to the interviews with child participants to share the children's interests: this helped in the selection and creation of creative methods for use in the data collection phase. Also during the telephone call, parents



outlined a timeline of the children’s educational journeys inclusive of school and house moves, parental deployment, important people, and key events. This timeline was created to promote discussion of the child’s educational journey at differing stages in their life. This said, I ensured the children shared their own educational experiences rather than me leading conversation with parental reports.

The pseudonyms chosen for the four participants were Arlo, Charlie, Eden and Faye, and Eloise was chosen as the pseudonym for the pilot interview. The demographics of the participants can be seen in the table below.

<b>Participant Pseudonym</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Year Group</b>	<b>Military Affiliation</b>	<b>Number of school moves</b>
Arlo	9	5	REME* (Army)	3
Charlie	8	4	REME (Army)	2
Eden	7	3	Parachute Regiment (Army)	1
Faye	9	5	REME (Army)	3

*Table 3: A summary of participant demographic information*

\* Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers

### 3.6. Data Collection

#### 3.6.1. Semi-structured interviews

As IPA researchers are primarily concerned with eliciting rich, detailed, first-person accounts of how participants make sense of their experiences and world, semi-structured interviews are deemed the most popular and effective method in achieving these aims (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012; Smith & Osborn, 2007). To maintain a balance between guiding and being guided, such interviews should be conducted in a more open-ended manner. Interviews should be brief, starting with broad, generic questions that allow the participant to define the scope of the topic to ensure the researcher does not impose their knowledge of the studied phenomenon onto the participant’s narrative (Hefferon & Gill-Rodriguez, 2011; Smith et al., 2009).

There are several advantages for using semi-structured interviews in IPA research. Firstly, they provide a sense of flexibility during the data collection process where the researcher can explore unexpected issues or topics of conversation which arise during the interview process (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). Secondly, this dynamic nature of semi-structured interviewing allows researchers the opportunity to divert from their interview guide to get the best data from each participant (Clark et al., 2021). A copy of the interview schedule used in this research project can be found in Appendix K.

Although there are advantages for using semi-structured interviews, there must also be consideration of the disadvantages of this data collection method. There are disputes within literature around what level of rapport and reciprocal relationships are appropriate when conducting semi-structured interviews: the issue of power asymmetry is a perennial concern with the researcher 'ruling' the interview being informed by their interview topic, devised questions and initiating and closing of the interview, portraying the interview as a one-way dialogue (Kvale, 2006; Becker et al., 2012). Such power dynamics are exacerbated by the adult researcher and child participant roles in interviews. It is therefore important efforts are taken to promote children as active participants in the interview process (Westcott & Littleton, 2005) and are seen as social actors who are 'experts' in their own lives (Fargas-Malet et al., 2010). Semi-structured interviews can be a time-consuming process, require a high level of concentration, and require a variety of social and communication skills that may only become more developed over time (Becker et al., 2012).

I developed my interview schedule through utilising knowledge gained from the literature review, from guidance surrounding suitable questioning for an IPA interview (Smith et al., 2009) and meeting with my supervisor to jointly reflect upon the schedule to ensure the questions were as open as possible, as per Smith et al.'s guidance (2009). The schedule was not intended to be followed rigidly but instead to act as a prompt when responding to the interviewee, allowing for the opportunity to follow participants' responses and interests.

As highlighted in section 3.5.2, creative methods were used in the interviews based on the children's interests. These tools were used to assist in the interviews and were not used as a data gathering tool in their own right. All parents shared their children enjoyed playing games at home and thus I took Dobble and Uno with me when I first met the participants and at subsequent interviews. As one participant had a particular interest in sea creatures, I took an octopus toy that communicated 'happy' and 'sad' which the participants could use to show whether they wanted to continue or cease the interview. As other participants enjoyed drawing and colouring, I took paper and pens and the 'Blob Tree' (Wilson & Long, 2018) with me. The

'Blob Tree' was used to promote discussion around feelings of school experiences. The final resource that I took was the 'Bear Cards' (St Lukes & Veeken, 1997) which complemented the 'Blob Tree' when talking about feelings about educational experiences.

Participants were interviewed once, and interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Upon completion of the interview, I wrote reflections on the interview and on my interaction with the participant. The transcribing of the interviews was completed promptly to assess my research abilities and to build upon them to prepare for future interviews.

### 3.6.2. Pilot interview

The pilot interview allowed me to reflect on the semantics of questions, the flow of the interview, the relevance of the questions to the interviewee, and to develop my experience of interviewing (Clark et al., 2021). Ultimately, conducting a pilot interview assesses the research process and reflects upon its effectiveness (Oliver, 2014) and allows the researcher to become familiar with the interview schedule, as encouraged by Smith et al (2009). My pilot interviewee was Eloise, a Year 4 pupil from a different school in a different local authority who I know through my own military links. The pilot interview was conducted in a neutral location in August 2022 and took approximately 30 minutes.

As a result of this pilot interview, I recognised the initial question and use of resources in my interview schedule helped to build rapport with Eloise and I could pull on her self-chosen strengths/characteristics throughout the interview to further build our rapport. When reflecting on the interview as a whole, I realised the order of my interview schedule needed adjusting to allow conversation to flow more naturally. I recognised the language around my questioning needed tweaking to make questions more open to focus more on the experiences for the participants. This pilot interview process allowed me to practise my interviewing skills to follow the participant narrative rather than following the interview schedule exactly. Based on my reflections following this pilot interview, I adapted the interview schedule for data collection.

### 3.7. Data Analysis

I reflected on each interview in my 'researcher diary' (Appendix L): this provided me the opportunity to immediately reflect upon the interview process and my feelings throughout the process, as well as making notes on how I perceived the participants felt during the interview. Within this, I also reflected upon what I learnt during the interview and what I may do differently next time. As aforementioned, this reflective journal allowed me to consider my position as a researcher: how my own experiences may be influencing interpretations, how I was being

changed by the research and how the research was being changed by me through the hermeneutic circle (Davies & Hughes, 2014).

Following each interview, I transcribed the data verbatim to enable an in-depth analysis of each transcript. As Becker et al. (2012) highlight, transcription is a lengthy process and thus they suggest analysis of the data, once interviews have been transcribed, begins as soon as possible to counteract feelings of overwhelm. Larkin et al. (2006) suggest that IPA researchers approach their data with two aims in mind:

- I. To try to understand the participants' world and describe what it is like acknowledging that the account is constructed by both participant and researcher;
- II. To interpretatively analyse the data to position the initial description in relation to wider contexts.

Although this appears to be separated into two stages of an empathic sharing of participants' feelings through to a more interpretive stance (Shinebourne, 2011), Smith et al (2009) outline a six-stage analytical process described in Table 4 below. It is important to note the authors have recently brought out a second edition of their book "Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis: Theory, Method and Research" (2022) which has introduced new terminology. They write, "*We realize that both sets of terms will be used for a period of time*" (Smith et al., 2022, p.76). I have therefore shown the link between the previously outlined six stage analytical process by Smith et al., (2009) and the new terminology outlined in the newer second edition of the authors' work which is displayed in italics as well as outlining what I did at each of these steps.

Table 4: Analysis stage outlined by Smith et al (2009)	
1: Reading and re-reading	The first step is to read and re-read the transcript to familiarise oneself with the data. I listened to the audio recording of the interview whilst reading the transcript, which is believed to create a slower, more reflective process that leads to a more comprehensive analysis (Smith et al., 2009). During this initial stage, I made notes to capture my initial thoughts on reflections
2: Initial noting	This stage of the analysis is considered to be the most comprehensive and time-intensive due to the need to provide complex and detailed notes and comments on the data (Smith et al., 2009). I examined the semantic content and language by making notes on three types of comments: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <u>Descriptive comments</u> – captures the participant’s subjective experience of important topics such as family, relationships, experiences</li> <li>- <u>Linguistic comments</u> – explores participant’s particular use of language</li> <li>- <u>Conceptual comments</u> – interpretative analysis of the language focusing on the participant’s experience. I needed to be reflexive of my own experiences and knowledge when attempting to begin to understand the meaning of participant’s experiences.</li> </ul>
3: Developing emergent themes  <i>Constructing experiential statements</i>	I then moved away from the transcripts and used the detailed and comprehensive noting from step two to convert notes to emergent themes. These themes aimed to reflect the participants’ words and the interpretation of myself as the researcher (Smith et al., 2009).  <i>In the 2022 guidance, the authors outline that such statements should directly relate to the participants’ experiences or the experience of understanding the things that happened to them. I aimed to do this by including interview quotes in the construction of experiential statements.</i>
4: Searching for connections across emergent themes  <i>Searching for connections</i>	In this stage, themes are explored to see how they fit together to create clusters of super-ordinate themes and subthemes (Noon, 2018) <i>or more recently called personal experiential and group experiential themes by Smith et al (2022)</i> . Smith et al (2009) provides guidance for how to seek connections between emergent themes [ <i>experiential statements</i> ] through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <u>Abstraction</u> – putting ‘like with like’</li> <li>- <u>Subsumption</u> – recognising that an emergent theme can subsume other emergent themes</li> </ul>

<p>across experiential statements</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <u>Polarisation</u> – exploring the oppositional relationships between emergent themes</li> <li>- <u>Numeration</u> – noting the frequency in which emergent themes appear</li> <li>- <u>Function</u> – identifying the function of the emergent themes</li> </ul>
<p>5: Naming the personal experiential themes (PETs) and consolidating and organising them in a table</p>	<p><i>“Each cluster of experiential statements is given a title to describe its characteristics. These clusters hereby become that participant’s Personal Experiential Themes” (Smith et al., 2022 pg. 94).</i></p>
<p>5: Moving to the next case</p>	<p>After completing steps 1 to 4 for a transcript from one participant, I then moved onto the next transcript and repeated the process for the next participant. Smith and colleagues (2009) stress the importance of treating each participant as an individual and thus analysing each case in its own right.</p>
<p>6: Looking for patterns across cases</p> <p><i>Working with personal experiential themes to develop group experiential themes across cases</i></p>	<p>This final step involves identifying patterns across cases to demonstrate shared meaning while preserving the individualised themes that reflected each individual experience. I examined the representation of each theme across the sample by including quotations from multiple participants (Nizza et al., 2021) which helped to show how participants shared higher order qualities without losing sight of the individual participant’s idiosyncratic characteristics (Smith et al., 2009; Nizza et al., 2021).</p> <p><i>The authors highlight that the aim of this final stage of analysis is to look for patterns of similarity and difference across the personal experiential themes to create a set of group experiential themes (GETs) (Smith et al., 2022). Some are likely to be ‘scaled-up versions’ of the PETs.</i></p> <p>I did this by printing off the PETs and laying them on my dining room table to provide a ‘birds eye view’ of all the experiential statements and allowed me to move them around and explore possible connections (Smith et al., 2022).</p>

Table 4: Analysis stage outlined by Smith et al (2009)

### 3.7.1 Accounting for researcher subjectivity

As part of the rationale for selecting IPA for this research, I acknowledge my own subjectivity and how this is a crucial part of the process. As aforementioned, I was a child from a military family and have my own personal military connections as an adult: careful reflection regarding my own subjectivity is imperative. Such reflection in research is known as 'reflexivity'.

Reflexivity is essential in both research and practice in understanding how one's own position affects outcomes and processes (Fox et al., 2007) and in research, makes the process open and transparent (Palaganas et al., 2017). When conducting qualitative research, researchers strive to be aware of their influence in the (co)construction of knowledge, thus making it clear how inter-subjectivity has affected data collection and analysis (Finlay, 2002). Literature highlights that reflexivity should be acknowledged as a significant part of the research findings (Palaganas et al., 2017) and is an identified strategy which is used to enhance the rigour of qualitative researchers' work (Barusch et al., 2011).

Reflexivity plays an important role in IPA research because the researcher's interpretation of the world is inextricably linked to the participant's (Oxley, 2016). The researcher needs to be aware of how their own language becomes central to the research process and the way they construct the world (Fox et al., 2007). Ultimately, it is impossible to escape subjective interpretations that come with qualitative data analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2003), which is not the aim of being a reflexive researcher, but instead to understand such subjectivity to see how it has affected the research (Fox et al., 2007).

Leavy (2017) suggests that through practising reflexivity the researcher should address topics of their place in the research project and their attention to power issues within the research process. This is important as from a phenomenological perspective researchers must first understand themselves before they are able to understand their research (Fox et al., 2007). The use of a reflective journal helped to consider the ways in which I was being changed by the research and the subsequent change of the research because of this. I will consider reflexivity again in the discussion section of this thesis (Chapter 5). A reflexive account of my personal and professional background and how they have contributed towards and within this study are discussed in Appendix M.

### 3.8. Ethical considerations

It is essential research is carried out ethically in accordance with relevant guidelines. There are a number of guidelines that can be utilised for both research with CYP and professional

EP practice, including those developed by the British Psychological Society (BPS) such as the BPS Code of Ethics (2009) and Conduct (2018), the BPS Professional Practice (2017) Guidelines, and the BPS Human Research Ethics Code (2014). This section will provide an overview of the key ethical considerations associated with conducting research projects with children.

### 3.8.1. Informed Consent

The informed consent process highlights researchers have a responsibility to explain to participants what the research is about and the risks and benefits of taking part before participants make an informed decision whether to participate in the research (Becker et al., 2012; Clark et al., 2021). Guidelines surrounding consent clearly state participants should be able to freely give their consent and understand they may withdraw their consent and any data subsequently generated (BPS, 2014). Professionals should respect participants and remain sensitive to the dynamics of perceived power imbalances: the Code of Ethics outlines that to adhere to the principle of respect, professionals should ensure persons are given ample opportunity for information dissemination and professionals should keep an adequate record of when, how and from whom consent was obtained (BPS, 2009).

To disseminate information in an age-appropriate way, I created an information sheet and consent form using age-appropriate language with pictures to visually support the written information (Appendix J). At the beginning of each interview, I went through these forms again with the participants to highlight the aims of the research project and their involvement. As participants were under the age of 16, consent needed to be gained from the persons legally responsible (BPS, 2014): information sheets were provided to parents to highlight the aims of the study and what participation would be required from their children.

### 3.8.2 Avoidance of Harm

It is essential to consider the potential physical or psychological harm the research may cause to participants, either directly or indirectly, and how such harm can be avoided or minimised (Becker et al., 2012) and is relevant for the participants, researcher, and people affected by the research findings (Clark et al., 2021; Westcott & Littleton, 2005). Researchers have a responsibility to protect participants from and this falls under the BPS Code of Ethics and Conduct principle of 'responsibility' and (BPS, 2018).

In research, one of the most common ways of avoiding harm to participants is through concealing identities and allocating pseudonyms (Becker et al., 2012) but this may not



eliminate the possibility of identification (Clark et al., 2021). Pseudonyms were used in my research for both participants and any schools or military bases identified during the interview to conceal participants' identities and ensuring anonymity as best possible.

Noon (2018) outlines that IPA research aims to explore personal experiences and can resultantly lead to participants experiencing a range of emotions. It was therefore important I monitored the effect of interviews on participants and considered whether to terminate the interview should it be emotive for the child. I took a number of steps to ensure I prevented harm to the participants which included a visual prompt to stop the interview should the participant wish, continual monitoring of the participant's emotional presentation throughout the interview, and checking with the participant if they wanted to continue or cease the interview. A debrief sheet was provided outlining a variety of support and services available to participants and their families if the participant or researcher deemed them necessary.

### 3.8.3. Confidentiality

In the context of research, confidentiality refers to the fact that the data provided by participants will not be disclosed to others (Becker et al., 2012) and participants hold the expectation that their data will be adequately anonymised by the researcher (BPS, 2014; 2018). It must be recognised however there are limits to and exceptional circumstances in which confidentiality needs to be breached e.g., if the researcher deems the participant to be at risk of harm (BPS, 2014).

I explained the concept of confidentiality at the beginning of each interview, its relation to my research study and was explicit about its limits inclusive of the protocol I would follow if I felt a participant was at risk of harm. It is specified in the consent forms and information sheets that data will be anonymous, real names will be anonymised and pseudonyms will be used, and that data will be confidential. It is important to recognise there are limits to anonymity for this research. The use of IPA and recruiting a small number of participants within one school means these child participants may be more easily identifiable. I have tried to counteract this by not including specific details of where the participants previously lived or went to school, and used pseudonyms opposed to their real names, to help best achieve anonymity.

### 3.9. Chapter summary

This chapter presented a description and justification of the methodology and methods employed to conduct the research project in response to the research question. It provided a justification for the choice of qualitative research paradigm, considering the epistemology and

ontological positions of the researcher, and locating them within the context of IPA. It discussed the methodology of IPA and its theoretical and philosophical foundations, along with its three philosophical principles of phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography. It discussed the limitations of IPA, and highlighted a consideration of narrative inquiry for the study. It also provided information on the research design, the research procedures, and the data collection and analysis process in accordance with IPA. Finally, it reflected on the researcher's subjectivity and discussed the ethical considerations of the research project. The findings for the research will be presented in the next section.

## Chapter 4: Findings

### 4.1. Introduction to the chapter

As outlined in Chapter 3, I used an IPA methodology to analyse my data and this chapter will share my research findings following such analysis. In accordance with the principles of idiography and phenomenology within IPA, I begin this chapter by sharing the short educational stories of the participants. This will enable the reader to gain an understanding of who the children are and their educational experiences thus far. However, to ensure anonymity, only the essential information for each participant will be included in this chapter. For added clarity, brief contextual information on the school in which the research was conducted will be provided.

Following the stories of the children and the contextual school information, I will discuss the four identified group experiential themes. I will consider each of these themes across the participant group, which provides the reader with a holistic understanding of each theme. Within each group experiential theme, the sub-themes which sit underneath each group experiential theme will also be discussed. Throughout the findings I will address how each sub-theme relates to the participant's experiences of education.

### 4.2. Participant stories

This section provides an overview of the participant stories which includes the information shared with me both within interviews with participants and in conversations with their parents, and my interpretations of what the participants said, which will be discussed in depth later within the chapter. Within these overviews I have included key personal experiential themes (PETs) for the participants: a more detailed table of PETs can be found in Appendix N. For ease of reference, I have included the table of participant demographics from Chapter 3 (Table 3 page 53).

<b>Participant Pseudonym</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Year Group</b>	<b>Military Affiliation</b>	<b>Number of school moves</b>
Arlo	9	5	REME* (Army)	3
Charlie	8	4	REME (Army)	2
Eden	7	3	Parachute Regiment (Army)	1
Faye	9	5	REME (Army)	3

Table 3: A summary of participant demographic information

\* Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers

### Arlo

Arlo lives at home with his parents, his younger brother, and told me that his grandparents lived with him for a while during a period where they were visiting the United Kingdom from a different country. At the time of interview, Arlo's father was weekending meaning he works away during the week and returns to the family home at weekends. Arlo shared that he likes exploring new places and meeting new people. He explained that he had been to two primary schools, and these were close to where he was living which was near to a military base. Arlo was educated at this present school for 20 months before relocating countries; he then returned to this school 17 months later and was excited about seeing some of his friends again.

When considering Arlo's personal experiential themes (PETs) from the research, he was the participant who spoke most positively about school transitions, and this was captured in the PETs "excitement towards making new friends: feeling welcomed and supported" and "redirecting sadness into optimism: new friendships are a positive of relocation". Owing to Arlo's unique positioning of returning to the present school, he also spoke about his "hopefulness towards reconnecting with old friends". Although Arlo spoke most positively about school relocations, and this was perhaps partly due to him returning to the primary school, he still had PETs related to "sadness at leaving friends behind" and feeling "nervous towards moving schools".

### Charlie

Charlie lives at home with her parents and older sister, Faye. At the time of interview, Charlie's family had recently experienced a military-related move and subsequent school transition for Charlie and her sister. She told me her family now lived closer to her Auntie, and this was a good thing as she gets car sickness if the journey is too long. Charlie explained that she had been to three primary schools in England, and the current school is the only one which was close to a military base.

Charlie shared in her interview the sense of sadness towards leaving her best friend behind when moving schools but also spoke about the lack of control she had in maintaining relationships upon moving as evidenced by her PET "change in relationships: no autonomy". Much like the other participants, and as represented by her PET "versatility of friendships", Charlie recognised the transient relations that came in relation to her own relocation patterns, however she was seeming less aware of the impact of classmates or friends relocating due to their own mobility patterns in comparison to some of the other participants in the research.

### Eden

Eden lives at home with her parents and her older sister who attends a different school. At the time of the interview, Eden had just been put in 'Golden Book' for her ideas in English which would be read out at the whole school assembly, and she told me she was proud about this. Eden had not long moved to the current school and this was her first school move: she had not previously been educated close to a military base.

Eden was a participant who was more reserved in her interview evidenced by fewer PETs (please see Appendix N). A unique perspective that Eden brought was her worries about experiencing a sense of difference from her peers as evidenced by her PET "fear of standing out from peers and being unable to make friends". This concern for Eden centred around her accent, as she was not from England and felt that others would comment upon that. Although this was initially a concern for Eden, she reflected upon the welcoming nature of children at the present school as seen by her PET "'they're a little bit nicer here"- more accepting peers".

### Faye

Faye lives at home with her parents and her younger sister, Charlie. Faye and her family had recently relocated to the area as a result of a military-directed move and subsequent school transition. Faye was able to tell me all the places that she had lived and told me she had been to three primary schools in England, but her present school was the only one which was close to a military base.

Out of all of the participants, Faye was the one to speak more at length about the difficulties that come with a school relocation as evidenced by her PETs “exasperation towards the frequency of relocating” and “concerns about bad friends/bullies”. Much like Eden, Faye had concerns about peers being mean to her but reflected that this school allowed her to truer to herself (“being more myself”) and that she soon felt she found a social group upon transition (“feeling accepted by peers on the first day”).

#### 4.3. Description of school context

This research was conducted with four participants from one primary school in the southwest of England. The school is located 1 mile from a military base and over 75 percent of the school population is in receipt of the SPP: this highlights at least three quarters of the school population are children from military families. Although all four participants from this study are from Army families, with most having a father in the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, the military base affiliated with the school has personnel from across Services. Considering the range of Service personnel at the nearby military base, when discussing children at the primary school they will be referred to as ‘children from military families’ as they may come from across Services whereas the participants have all come from Army families and thus will be referred to in this way.

This chapter will now outline the findings from the analysis of the participant interviews with quotations from individual transcripts used to highlight how each theme presents within the data.

#### 4.4. Overview of themes

An overview of the group experiential themes and sub-themes can be seen in Table 5 which shows the complex nature of each theme and how they are connected and influential to others.

<b>Group Experiential Theme</b>	<b>Sub-theme</b>	<b>Arlo</b>	<b>Charlie</b>	<b>Eden</b>	<b>Faye</b>
"It's like the same like every kid": sameness of school experience		x	x	x	x
Making sense of unique military lifestyle challenges and their effect on educational experiences	Experiencing moving together as a military family	x		x	x
	Going away and coming back eventually: deployment and school-based support	x	x	x	x
Leaving, being left and feeling left out	Anxieties of new friendships and being left out	x	x	x	x
	"They've gone and you can't find them": Sadness, grief and frustration at leaving and starting over	x	x	x	x
Seeking and securing connection: the positives of school relocation	Connection and kindness from staff	x	x		x
	Feeling welcomed and accepted	x	x	x	x
	The positiveness of seeking new friendships	x	x		x

Table 5: A summary of group experiential themes and sub-themes

Each of these four group themes offer an understanding of how these children from Army families are experiencing education. Analysis showed the first theme, “It’s like the same like every kid”: sameness of school experience’, to be a central theme to the research and mentioned by all participants. The other themes show the disparity between the theme of educational sameness, as mentioned by participants, compared with the differing aspects of educational experience they further mention or that has been subject to interpretation. The next sections of this chapter will discuss the themes and quotations from individual transcripts will be used to evidence how each theme was presented in the data.

#### 4.5. “It’s like the same like every kid”: sameness of school experience

This group experiential theme explores how participants perceive their educational experiences to be the same as other primary-aged children. When participants spoke about their educational experiences, they placed importance on the academic focus and support they received in school. In this way, participants presented a view that the purpose of school is for an education; the following extract in which Arlo reflects upon his educational experience illustrates this:

*I think schools are basically all the same I guess cos... here’s the same option, in this school they teach you, in another school they teach you. It’s the same.*

Arlo identifies the function of school, irrespective of school demographics, is to provide an education through teaching. However, further linguistical analysis of the phrase *‘basically all the same I guess’* suggests Arlo is accepting there may be some differences between his educational experiences in comparison to others. Use of the phrase *‘I guess’* hints towards feelings of discomfort at acknowledging this sense of difference, but by Arlo shifting his focus to the taught element of schooling, he understands the educational experience of schooling to be the same for himself and other primary-aged children: they all attend school for an education.

Other participants shared a similar view by placing value upon the academic focus of school. Most participants shared that the school support they received centred around their learning, which again highlights a sense of sameness of their educational experience:

*Some of the good things about school is getting your education. (Faye)*



*They help me learn by helping me. They... they... they... print stuff my work out in a special colour so I can read it because I can't really read that much stuff without it printed. (Charlie)*

*[Interviewer]: What sort of things do you get help with in school?  
With my writing. (Eden)*

Participants understood their school experiences to centre around receiving an education and that this is the same for any school-aged child. Such a view is highlighted by Faye when she was asked to consider any differences in schooling experiences between herself and peers who do not have a parent in the military:

*I think it is actually the exact same.*

When Arlo was presented with the same consideration, his initial response suggests he too views his educational experiences as the same as others:

*Oh no. I don't think it's really different. I think it's like the same like every kid. I guess except there's one thing that is different I guess that your dad is in the Army. Some dads don't go in the Army but some goes.*

When we start to unpick Arlo's choice of words however, this shows him considering the difference between himself and others. The use of '*really different*' highlights that Arlo acknowledges there are some differences between his educational experiences compared to others, but such differences are not vast in nature. In contrast to this however, Arlo's use of the phrase '*like the same like every kid*' could suggest he perceives all children to feel they have the same educational experiences as one another. A sense of sameness is reinforced by Arlo as he expresses the only difference between himself and others is that '*some dads don't go in the Army but some goes*'.

The use of the word '*same*' by both Arlo and Faye provides a sense of a shared educational experience with all primary-aged children, irrespective of whether their parent/s are serving in the military. An alternative angle of experience is offered by Charlie who felt her educational experience was influenced by the school she attended. When reflecting about her experience at a school where she was one of few children from a military family compared to her experience of the present school with a higher percentage of children from military families, Charlie shared:

*It doesn't look the same. It sounds a bit the same, but it isn't the same.*

In this extract, by Charlie referring to school as sounding *'a bit the same'* it suggests she recognises elements of school are the same, but this does not make experiences of school the same. Charlie has been able to reflect upon and compare her experiences between two primary schools and has highlighted her educational experiences have been different at these two settings. As explained throughout her interview, and discussed later within this findings chapter, Charlie felt the children at her present school were kinder and more welcoming in comparison to her previous setting. Thus, we can infer Charlie's comparison of differing educational experiences may be due to the school demographics (a higher percentage of children from military families) and the nature of the children within the schools.

#### 4.5.1. Summary

All participants responded to questions about their educational experiences by sharing there is little or no difference to other primary-aged children. They held a view that school was about gaining an education and this was no different for any primary-aged child. Through a deeper level of interpretation, some participants (Charlie and Arlo) highlighted there are some differences in their educational experience and parts of this can be based on the demographics of the school they attend. Although the participants expressed they felt there was little or no difference in their educational experiences compared to other primary-aged children, analysis and deeper interpretation of their responses throughout their interviews provides some insight into how their parents' careers in the military impacts upon their educational experience and this is evidenced and discussed in the below themes.

#### 4.6. Making Sense of Unique Military Lifestyle Challenges and Their Effect on Educational Experiences

The second group experiential theme describes how participants' educational experiences are impacted by challenges unique to a military lifestyle. It is worth noting this theme was not one participants openly spoke about but has come from a deeper level of interpretation; this illustrates the dichotomy between the participants' initial responses to their educational experience as outlined in the theme above, and the unique characteristics of their lifestyle which impacts upon educational experience. The first sub-theme, 'experiencing moving together as a military family' describes the participants' awareness of having to move schools and houses as a result of their fathers' career in the Army. The following sub-theme 'going

away and coming back eventually: deployment and school-based support' illustrates the participants' awareness and sense of normalcy around their father being away and the school support they have received during such military deployment.

#### 4.6.1. Experiencing Moving Together As a Military Family

Within their interviews, some participants expressed an understanding that they had to relocate both houses and schools due to their fathers' career in the Army as illustrated by Arlo:

*Yeah because my dad received a message at the Army and he said "guys, you have only... you have only like three days and then we have to move back to [town name]"*

Arlo portrays a sense of the Army dictating where and when his family should move and at what time. The use of the phrase '*only like three days*' suggests such moves can happen at short notice and does not allow time for the family members to come to terms with the relocation. By use of the word '*we*' when thinking about the Army-directed relocation, Arlo presents a shared family experience; this gives a sense that he sees his family experiencing this together, but also highlights his knowledge and awareness of what was happening for and to his family unit.

A sense of a shared experience of relocation was reflected by other participants which further suggests participants see themselves as part of the event which impacts upon their family as a whole:

*We have to move to England because his job is in the Army (Eden)*

*Yeah I was born in [town name] hospital and mummy drove a different place that I don't know, I think it was before... after... before [country name] and a few years after Charlie was born I think we moved to [country name] (Faye)*

For some participants, like Eden and Arlo, they had a good understanding that relocations were a result of their fathers' careers and were able to make sense of their frequent school transitions because of moves dictated by the Army. For other participants, like Faye, they were less directive in their understanding of the familial circumstances and instead inferred frequent mobility was a by-product of their fathers' military career.

In a similar non-explicit manner, participants discussed the number of house and school moves they experienced as a result of their fathers' military career. Within their interviews some participants spoke of moving house upward of four times as outlined by Faye:

*[Interviewer]: Have you ever moved school?*

*Many, many times. I have lived in more than five places.*

Faye then speaks of related school moves linked to the housing relocations and how this was a further challenging experience for her:

*I went to two different [place name] schools actually so four. So I went to a primary school which I had to wait for for like fifteen weeks to even get in the school cos like there was so many people on the blimmin queue.*

Here Faye helps us to understand that often with a housing move comes a school relocation which involves applying for a school place. For Faye, this meant she could not start at the school straight away and instead had to wait for her school space. Use of the word '*blimmin*' portrays a sense of frustration at having to wait for a school place and this is likely to have affected the family unit whereby a parent would have had to remain home with Faye whilst waiting for a school place: thus, further highlighting that military-related mobility impacts the family as a whole. The next section moves away from talking about the impact of unique challenges of a military lifestyle upon the family as a unit and instead looks at the impact of the absence of the children's fathers and the school support that they receive for this on a child-centred level.

#### 4.6.2. Going Away and Coming Back Eventually: Deployment and school-based support

Participants all reflected on periods of time where their father was not at home, whether that be working away during the week and returning home for the weekend, or on a longer-term deployment, as illustrated by Arlo and Eden:

*Well he did go away this week to finish something and now he is coming back today. So on Monday my dad's gone, Tuesday my dad's gone, Wednesday my dad's gone, Thursday my dad's gone but on Friday my dad is coming back cos it's the weekend. (Arlo)*

*He would go away because he was in the Army and he needed to come to England. (Eden)*

*He wasn't there for my sister when she was being born he was in the desert. (Eden)*

Here Arlo and Eden share there are periods of time where their fathers are not at home due to their career in the Army. This can mean they miss important family events which can be outside of the participant's memory, such as Eden's sister being born: Eden's sister is older than her, so she was not yet born to understand her father was absent for the birth but has possibly heard this story shared by family members and internalised this as a shared familial experience. For these participants, it seemed their father being away was a normal experience for them:

*[Interviewer]: Ahh so he goes away and stays away does he?  
For a bit but then he will come back eventually (Faye)*

Although Faye's response can suggest that her father's absence has been normalised and she has faith that he will '*come back eventually*', the deployments are still emotive for her. She speaks of feelings of sadness in her interview towards her father being away and when asked if school helped her when her father was away, she shared:

*School would help me... they would say... since I have a daddy teddy umm it's like a stuffed animal but it's got like my daddy's face on it and it's called a huggable hero and they say you can bring your huggable hero in for a few days and I would just hug that during the sessions.*

And when asked how this made her feel, Faye replied:

*It makes me feel very very happy actually cos it reminds me of him when he has gone and I'll hug it forever even if he is gone forever.*

It is important to Faye that she feels connected to her father when he is away on deployment and that this connection is also felt whilst at school. The use of a tangible object with her father's face on has fulfilled that desire for Faye as she can seek physical connection through hugging the teddy throughout the school day. For Faye, she recognises that this teddy is a

permanent object in which she can seek connection with her father as she acknowledges *'I'll hug it forever even if he is gone forever'*.

Charlie also has a 'daddy teddy' which her school allowed her to bring in when her father was on deployment, and much like Faye she sought connection with her father by having the 'daddy teddy' near her throughout the school day:

*My old school used to let me have my daddy teddy and have it sat next to me. It used to literally let me get a spare seat and sit it next to me.*

For Faye and Charlie, it appears the most effective emotional support they received from school during their father's deployment was being given the permission to bring to school an object that reminded them of their father. This physical object with their father's face on allowed them to be reminded of their father throughout the school day. When both asked what their current school would do to support them during parental deployment, both Faye and Charlie felt they would still be able to bring their 'daddy teddy' amongst other things:

*Let me bring my daddy teddy in or let me bring a picture of him in. (Faye)*

*Well 'Nest' we go to a lot and I would have to go and bring my daddy teddy in a lot because I'd be sad. (Charlie)*

Faye identifies that having a visual reminder of her father, such as her teddy or a photograph, is something that would be supportive for her during her father's deployment. For Charlie, it appears that having a place to go such as the 'Nest' would be supportive.

#### 4.6.3. Summary

To be able to understand the participants' educational experiences, we must consider the unique challenges a military lifestyle brings and the impact of such challenges upon education. Although participants did not make these links explicitly themselves, an interpretative analysis of their interviews highlights that their educational experiences are impacted by mobility, inclusive of school and house moves, as well as parental deployment. For these participants they felt they experienced relocations and deployments as a family unit and had a shared experience of this. In respect to deployments, participants could recall events which happened outside of their memory which had become part of the family narrative. Participants also highlighted the all-encompassing emotional impact of deployment whereby feelings of

sadness were experienced during the school day. When viewing their educational experiences through this military culture lens, participants spoke of the emotional support they sought in school during deployments to combat feelings of sadness, and of having to relocate schools and at times waiting for a school place to become available for them. The below theme discusses the emotional impact that relocating has upon these participants.

#### 4.7. Leaving, Being Left and Feeling Left Out

All participants shared experiences of loss within their interviews: whether that be leaving friendships behind or having friends leave them. Participants expressed sadness or frustration towards these changing relationships and a fearfulness towards pursuing new friendships or being left out by the peer group upon a school transition.

To ensure a deeper understanding of the aspects that participants spoke about in relation to their experience of leaving and being left by their classmates, this section will be organised under the following two sub-themes: 'anxieties of new friendships and being left out', and "'they've gone and you can't find them": sadness, grief and frustration at starting over'.

##### 4.7.1. Anxieties of New Friendships and Being Left Out

This was a prominent theme for all participants with the words '*scared*' or '*nervous*' being used by all to describe their emotions towards relocating schools. For some participants this feeling of fear centred broadly around starting a new school whereas for others it was directed towards making new friends:

*[Interviewer]: What were you scared about?*

*That I wouldn't make any new friends (Eden)*

Eden's use of the word '*any*' highlights her concerns about loneliness and isolation by emphasising her worries of nobody wanting to build a friendship with her. Such a view is also held by Charlie and is repeated almost verbatim:

*[Interviewer]: What were you feeling scared about?*

*Because I thought that I wouldn't make any friends*

Similar anxieties around feeling isolated from the peer group was expressed by Faye in her interview:

*I was just scared about no one liking me or wanting to be my friend or everyone making fun of me... people just saying “ha ha that kid’s ugly, she’s got glasses, she’s got four eyes” like what happened in my old school*

Similarly to Charlie and Eden, Faye worried about ‘*no one liking*’ her and again feeling ostracised from or by her peer group. Faye also shares her concerns about history repeating itself whereby children make unkind comments based on her appearance. This shows Faye’s worries were twofold: she was anxious that people will not want to be her friend, and she was anxious that peers may ‘make fun’ of her appearance. The use of the phrase ‘*like what happened in my old school*’ implies Faye may be expecting her negative experience within school to be a recurring issue in the present school.

Other participants also shared anxieties around appearing different from others and feeling isolated from them. Eden expressed worries about appearing different to her peers and the attention this would attract. Much like Faye, she had concerns about how she would be treated by others and reflected such fears did come true for her:

*I thought everyone would look at me and I thought everyone would crowd me and that’s the exact thing that happened!*

As well as participants outlining their concerns about being ostracised from or by their peers, one participant also spoke about their anxieties of the quality of new friendships. Faye highlighted one potential negative of moving school is that ‘*you can sometimes get worse friends*’. It is unclear what Faye means exactly by ‘worse’ friends, but the following quote allows us to understand that she views bad friends and bullies as separate entities:

*You could get bad friends and you could get bullies.*

Bullies are something which other participants spoke about and is suggestive that not only were the participants worried about being unable to make new friendships, but they were also anxious about not being accepted by their peers or not fitting in. As illustration, when asked to think about potential negatives about relocating schools, Arlo shared the following:

*Oh they would be nervous about... maybe .. maybe like a bully would come*

By speaking in third person, this suggests Arlo finds this a difficult topic to discuss and finds it more comfortable thinking about the situation hypothetically from another’s point of view. Use



of the phrase *'a bully would come'* hints that this is a worry of Arlo's: he is concerned new people coming to the school could be a 'bully'. This is reinforced by the following quotation which followed directly after the above quotation within Arlo's interview, and which highlights that Arlo feels safe from bullies at the school at present:

*I've never had a bully ... I've never had someone bully me so I don't think there's any bullies in this school. And also we have this badge called anti-bullying and I don't know how to get it.*

Arlo's shift to first person shows his concerns about bullies are likely to be his subconscious thoughts. Repeated use of the word *'never'* emphasises Arlo's feelings of connectedness to his peers and safety in school. His sense of safety is also supported by his awareness of the school's anti-bullying values: *'we have this badge called anti-bullying'*. Use of the word *'we'* highlights that not only does Arlo feel part of the school community, but he too feels he shares the responsibility for not having bullies in the school and this helps us to understand Arlo's concerns that *'a bully would come'* would disrupt these feelings of harmony and safety. Arlo helps us to understand bullying is a concern for both those arriving to the school who do not know the school community, and for children in the school who are anxious a new child may be a bully.

Although Arlo reflects on the school's antibullying policy and has implied he feels safe in school, this is not a view held by all participants. At the time of interview Faye had been in the school for four months and was still experiencing episodes of sadness and anxiety towards pursuing friendships:

*sometimes I just feel like I'm in a bubble and I sometimes feel scared I can't make any friends, no one likes me and just cry.*

By describing herself as being *'in a bubble'* it suggests Faye feels separate to her peers and thus produces an image of difference. Faye shared she feels she is unable to make friends and that nobody likes her. It seems even after a settling in period, Faye feels she has not yet made secure connections within her peer group and is experiencing feelings of difference or being left out.

#### 4.7.2. “They’ve gone and you can’t find them”: Sadness, Grief and Frustration at Leaving and Starting Over

All participants discussed feelings of frustration and sadness towards leaving friends behind due to relocation. When phrased with the question ‘is there anything not so good about your dad being in the Army?’, some participants identified moving away from friends was a negative of being within an Army family:

*Sometimes you can get new friends but it can be upsetting to leave your old friends so I picked middle because of that (Faye)*

*I mean... no I don't think so except the only bad thing I can think of is you have to ... you have to say bye bye to your friends and I will be really sad (Arlo)*

This sense of sadness around leaving friends behind is suggestive of feelings of loss and some grief of the friendships they had before. As further illustration, when Faye was asked to select the blob on the Blob Tree which represented how she felt about moving schools she explained the following for her choice:

*It means that you miss your friends and they've gone and you can't find them.*

The use of the word ‘gone’ implies a sense of loss and a friendship that has ended now that Faye has relocated. Faye implies this is against her best wishes through the phrase ‘you can’t find them’ which suggests she is wanting these friendships to continue despite the physical distance between them. This feeling of having a lack of control towards her friendships was also reflected by Charlie:

*[Interviewer] Do you still speak to Rose<sup>1</sup> now?*

*No, because Faye has a phone ... she doesn't really like her and umm my mummy and her mummy agreed that once we moved we'd never talk again.*

Here Charlie shares the decision to stay in touch with her best friend was decided by her sister, her mother and her best friend’s mother. In this process, Charlie was a passive participant who had the choice of remaining in contact with her friend removed from her. In this uncontrollable situation Charlie has lost her friend and has had her autonomy removed in being able to keep in contact. This lack of control over relocating and having to leave

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<sup>1</sup> Pseudonyms

friendships behind was also an issue for Eden. She shared in her interview that having to leave her old school made her feel '*mad*' and when asked to explain this, Eden shared:

*[Interviewer]: Why were you mad to leave your old school?  
Because I had my bestest friend there, Lyla<sup>1</sup>*

The emotive response that moving house and school provoked in Eden is a response also shared by other participants. For some participants, like Eden and Faye, their frustrations were directed towards leaving friends behind or being left by friends:

*[Interviewer]: How did it feel when your friends from here were leaving?  
Really really upsetting cos I was like moody. (Faye)*

For others, the frustration was directed towards the frequent mobility that comes with having a parent serving in the Army:

*it is also really annoying to move like .. like you are one place, you move to another place, you go back and back (Arlo)*

Arlo expresses his frustration towards the situation as annoyance which implies this is a mild inconvenience to him. When Arlo explains his relocation as '*you go back and back*' this is acknowledging his unique situation compared to the other participants: he has returned to this primary school after a period of 17 months in another country. Arlo had the position to be able to compare his friendships from when he was at the school initially compared to his return; he explained that some friends had left the school when he had been educated elsewhere:

*There was a girl called Jenna<sup>2</sup> and she was in my class a long time ago then when I came back she was gone. Also there's another one too. There's this girl called Amelia<sup>2</sup> and she was friends with another girl called Emily<sup>3</sup> and then when I came back I only saw her best friend Amelia<sup>2</sup> and also was... and she was gone.*

As discussed previously, Arlo's use of the word '*gone*' implies a definitive end to a friendship and provokes feelings of loss. Here Arlo shows us his school experience not only involves him saying goodbye to his friends as he relocates but also is characterised by friends, most likely

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<sup>2</sup> Pseudonym

<sup>3</sup> Pseudonyms

children from military families, also relocating. Arlo shares how him and other military children share this understanding of the fluidity of friends due to mobility patterns, and how they continue to hold hope that their paths cross again in the future:

*Except one of my friends from [country name] came here. Her name was Jenna<sup>2</sup> and she used to live in [country name] where I was before but then.. but then... but then before I went to year five she left and I left and ... and ... and that girl from earlier that I had the phone number, I called and she called and said “Jenna is coming to England, you might see her” and I was like “wait, I gotta.. I gotta find her” and I’m on the lookout to find her.*

In her interview, Faye also shares her awareness of the fluidity of classmates and the changing relationships that comes with both the move itself and the anticipation of the move:

*Cos some of my friends they just move away and some of my friends stay and then they’re like “I don’t want to be your friend anymore because you’re moving”.*

Faye is expressing a sense of loss both through her friends leaving the school and by others pulling away from her when they become aware that she is moving. She categorises her friends into two groups: those who move away and those who stay. However, for Faye, even those friends who stay she feels a sense of loss to as they pull away from her and their friendship changes. She reiterates this at another point within her interview when reflecting on friendships from previous schools who she has tried to remain in contact with:

*I get to talk to them sometimes but some are really really rude to me since I’ve moved now.*

*I feel like they just don’t like me anymore and don’t want me to be their friend anymore.*

It appears Faye feels her friends’ attitudes towards her have changed since she has moved and thus views the relocation as the catalyst to these changing relationships. She seems to place the blame on herself for these friendships changing, first by emphasising the change in behaviours since she has moved and then through the phrase *‘don’t want me to be their friend anymore’*. Use of the word *‘me’* places Faye at the centre and could communicate she feels a sense of responsibility for this breakdown in relationship rather than her peers not wanting to be friends with her. This is reinforced by Faye expressing that she gets *‘to talk to them*

*sometimes*' and has tried to continue the friendships but has been met with rudeness from her friends.

#### 4.7.3. Summary

When making sense of their educational experiences, friends in school were of paramount importance to all participants. Participants expressed feelings of anxiousness towards making new friends and held anxieties around appearing different to their peer group upon being faced with a school transition. With such anxieties, participants spoke openly about bullies, and this seemed to be a point of concern for most participants: they did not want to be left out or not accepted by their peer group.

In further consideration of school transition, participants reflected upon feelings of sadness, loss, and grief when they were due to move away from friends or when one of their friends was due to relocate. In these circumstances, some of the participants expressed feeling a lack of control over friendships and that friends pulled away from them when they learnt they were due to move. Therefore, not only did participants feel a sense of loss when moving schools away from their friends, but they also experienced a sense of being left behind when their friends relocated and moved schools.

To help counteract feelings of sadness and grief towards relocating and leaving previous friendships behind, participants spoke of the importance of seeking connection with adults and peers which is discussed in the theme below.

### 4.8. Seeking and Securing Connection: The Positives of School Relocation

All participants spoke of positive aspects of relocating schools and the accepting, welcoming and supportive nature of children from military families within their present school. Through a deeper level of interpretation, it seemed participants reframed their thinking towards relocations by expressing their enjoyment at pursuing new friendships upon school relocation (sub theme three: 'the positiveness of seeking new friendships') as well as the importance of positive teacher relationships (sub theme one: connection and kindness from staff) and the kindness of classmates (sub theme two: feeling welcomed and accepted) being influential to a positive school experience.

#### 4.8.1. Connection and Kindness from Staff

When speaking about school experiences broadly, most participants spoke about one or a few important key adults at school. This included adults at their present school but also those

at previous schools who had been influential to the participants' educational experiences, and this was particularly true for Faye:

*[Interviewer] So can you tell me what that school was like?*

*It was hard sometimes but I had a very very nice teacher for when I was in year five but I did not get her yet cos we had to move. She had dwarfism and was very very kind, sweet and very nice to be around*

*I got quite a few nice teachers and on my last day my teacher Miss Brooks<sup>4</sup> gave me some stuff...she was taking me around the classroom to make me remember all the good times there*

These extracts highlight how important connection and relationships with staff are for Faye. She describes her experiences at her previous schools as being '*hard sometimes*' but then explains how these difficulties were supported by having a kind teacher. When transitioning from this school to her current school, Faye identifies the importance of the class teacher taking the time to support Faye in saying goodbye and having closure from this setting. Leaving this school appeared to be an emotive experience for Faye as she did not want to leave her friends behind, and it seemed this reframing by the teacher to support Faye to '*remember all the good times there*' helped to ease her transition from this setting. Relocating from one school to another comes with further emotional challenge for these participants which for Arlo centred around the type of teacher he would have upon transition:

*I was kind of nervous that I would get a strict teacher cos I don't really like strict teachers, but my mum said, "You're not going to get a strict teacher, you're going to get a nice kind teacher" I guess*

Arlo shares his worries about being placed in a class with a strict teacher and suggests that he seeks a more lenient teacher or perhaps one that he perceives as kinder. Arlo helps us to understand that a relationship with staff, and most centrally the class teacher, is hugely impactful to his and the participants' educational experience. When speaking about key school staff, the word 'kind' was used by participants to describe these adults and further highlights the importance of a positive connection with school staff:

*Yeah but now I have like a kind teacher and now I like it here (Arlo)*

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<sup>4</sup> Pseudonym

*Mrs Grant<sup>5</sup>, she's really really kind. A really lovely lady (Charlie)*

As highlighted by Arlo and Charlie, kind staff were influential to their (re)integration to the current school. When Charlie spoke of the kind and lovely member of staff, this was in acknowledgement of who helped her on her first day at the school; other participants echoed that they too were in receipt of adult support upon their initial transition. For these participants it seemed this early positive connection with school staff was a lasting memory of the support they received during their transition. For Charlie this positive connection with staff extends past the initial transition and encompasses the children whom she is educated alongside (and this will be discussed in more detail in the next theme).

*It's just got lovely kids, and children, and teachers in it.*

#### 4.8.2. Feeling Welcomed and Accepted

This theme captures how the participants described the nature of the school children during participants' initial transition to the school and henceforth. All participants reflected on the welcoming nature of the children at school and how this helped to ease the transition to this new school, as outlined by Arlo:

*On my first day everyone greeted me really kind*

This quote shows that Arlo felt welcomed by his peers upon his first day at the school. This is a view held by other participants who could also reflect on their classmates and wider school children making them feel welcomed and accepted upon their arrival:

*On my first break time a lot of kids I think wanted to be my friend (Faye)*

*[Interviewer] Can you tell me what happened on your first day?*

*I made the whole class...the whole class was my friends straight away! (Charlie)*

For Faye and Charlie, having the acceptance of peers, particularly at breaktime, appears to be an important element of school for them. Faye further reflects that having so many '*kids*' wanting to be her friend made her feel '*popular*' and thus highlights feelings of acceptance by

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<sup>5</sup> Pseudonym

her peer group. The importance of peers being approachable at break times was also reflected by Eden:

*So Alice<sup>6</sup> asked me if she wanted to play with me and she was the first ever one to talk to me*

Eden reflects on the lasting impression one of the children made on her by being not only the first person to talk to her but also showing their welcoming nature by asking Eden to join them in play. It seems participants positively remember their first break time experience and memories centre around the school children being approachable and welcoming during this unstructured time. As well as these fond memories of the approachability and kindness of children at break time, most participants also reflected that their classmates were influential in helping them during their initial transition to the school:

*On my first day when I looked round they....she, Mrs Young<sup>7</sup>, got the newest two people, they're both of them really good. They're both in different classes (Charlie)*

Charlie highlights that the class teacher selected the two newest people in the year group to support Charlie on her first day. By emphasising the fact that the children were the '*newest two people*' it tells us this is important to Charlie as it is likely that these children have recent memories and experiences of being a new starter at the school. Having such peer support was something all participants remembered as being helpful to their transition, especially on their first day. Arlo was able to offer a different view in his interview where he could reflect on a time that he provided support for children upon their transition to the school:

*I've helped them with some work. Cos I know they are a little nervous so...when someone like new comes to the school I think you should probably pay respect because they probably don't know what to do because they're new*

This respectfulness mentioned by Arlo highlights the importance of being kind towards children who have just started at the school and appears to be part of the school ethos as this notion of welcoming and accepting peers was reflected by all participants with words such as '*kind*', '*nicer*' and '*great friend*' being used to describe the children within the school. By feeling

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<sup>6</sup> Pseudonym

<sup>7</sup> Pseudonym



accepted by these kind peers, it allowed Faye the opportunity to be herself and connect with her peers on a more authentic level:

*I had to show them who I really am. In my old school people ummm...only my friends used to say I'm rich and I like that about you and people would want to be my friends because they knew I had a mansion and wanted to be my friend because of my money but I actually didn't have money so yeah.*

#### 4.8.3. The Positiveness of Seeking New Friendships

When reflecting upon some of the good things about moving house and school, most participants spoke of making new friends as a positive aspect of relocating, as illustrated by Charlie:

*[Interviewer]: Are there any good things about moving school?  
Yeah, because you get to make new friends.*

This experience of the physical act of making friends was something which was a positive for Charlie and is a view echoed by Arlo who speaks not only of his excitement at making friends but also of meeting new people:

*Oh I was excited about make very good friends*

*I mean there is one good thing about that's about like meeting new people cos like you've got to meet new people I guess*

Arlo shares his excitement towards the prospect of making '*very good friends*' which implies that he seeks secure connections with friends whenever he relocates. Although Arlo goes on speak about the '*one good thing*' about relocating is meeting new people, the use of the phrase '*you've got to meet new people I guess*' suggests Arlo feels this is an inevitable and unavoidable part of a military lifestyle. It appears Arlo has shifted this experience to a positive one as he recognises this is a unique challenge of his upbringing.

For others, as reflected in the sub-theme 'anxieties of new friendships and being left out', making friends was something which caused worry and feelings of discomfort. When asked to reflect back upon how it was making friends at the current school, for some participants, like

Faye, they seemed almost surprised at how positive and enjoyable the aspect of making new friends at the school was:

*[Interviewer]: What was it like making new friends?*

*It was actually quite fun!*

For other participants however they reflected that although they deemed the process of making friends a positive one, it did not come without its challenges:

*[Interviewer]: So how was it making friends at this school then?*

*Good, hard (Charlie)*

With his set of unique circumstances, Arlo reflected upon the challenge of leaving friends behind but also of his excitement of being reunited with his friends and not only his positivity towards this but also how his return will be a positive experience for his friends too:

*I was excited to see my old friends from a long time ago I guess from the past*

*I would feel excited not nervous I guess. I've been there before and there will be like...it will be a surprise that I came back I think*

Here Arlo identifies his enjoyment towards being reunited with friends upon his reintegration into the school but also this predicted reciprocated excitement from his friends. Perhaps Arlo is recalling what did happen when he returned to the school and the warm, welcoming nature of his friends at this time: thus, a positive of relocation being not only making new friends but reuniting with friends.

#### 4.8.4. Summary

When discussing their educational experiences, and how these were punctuated with school relocations and developing new relationships with friends and school staff, participants viewed this mostly through a positive lens. Participants highlighted the importance of connecting with school staff, friends and in some cases, reconnecting with friends. Participants reflected that the accepting, welcoming and supportive nature of children from military families made relocating and developing these connections with their peers a positive experience. All participants reflected on the support they received from other children from military families upon transition, the support provided by school staff at the present school and from staff during

transition from their previous setting. This sense of connection with adults and children appeared to be central to these participants having a positive schooling experience.

#### 4.9. Chapter Summary

When considering their educational experiences, all participants placed value on the educational aspect of schooling and felt this was the same for all primary-aged children. This said, participants placed greater importance however on the social element of schooling. All participants commented on how their school experiences were not only punctuated by making or reconnecting with friends upon school relocations, but also by friends relocating and thus leaving them behind.

The participants had an awareness that relocations were a result of their father's career in the Army, and they expressed a sense that relocations and deployments were experienced as a family unit. There were times where participants would share information about events that happened outside of their memory which provided a sense that this was part of a shared family narrative. When thinking specifically about military-related deployment, participants spoke of the emotional impact of such deployment throughout the school day and how they had previously received emotional support in school during this time to combat feelings of sadness.

In consideration of the emotional impact of relocation for participants, they shared feelings of anxiousness towards making new friends upon a school transition and most participants expressed not wanting to be left out or unaccepted by their peer group. Participants shared feeling of a lack of control over friendships and expressed a sense of loss when moving away from friends but also when friends moved away. It seemed that for participants the social element of schooling was an area of concern for them upon relocation. This said, when talking about school relocations and developing new friendships with children and school staff, participants were mostly positive about this. They shared that relocation and developing new friendships was a positive experience as children from military families were perceived to be accepting, welcoming and supportive. It seemed the support from children in school was most important during the participants' transition as they all named children who helped them during their first few days at the school. Participants also spoke of support provided by school staff, and it seems this connection with staff and children made schooling a positive experience for participants. As relationships with staff and children came up within two themes ("Leaving, being left, and feeling left out" and "Seeking and securing connection: the positives of school relocation"), it appears that for these participants relationships played an important part in their school experiences.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

### 5.1. Introduction to the chapter

This chapter discusses the four themes in the context of existing literature and applicable psychological theory. These themes are used as sub-headings to allow for individual discussion of each theme. As highlighted in the literature review section of this thesis (Chapter 2), much of the literature talks about children from military families more broadly and thus this terminology will be used throughout this discussion when referring to such literature. Following a discussion of each theme and relevant literature and psychological theory, I will critique the present study focusing on the specific areas of methodology, sample selection, and data collection followed by an assessment of the quality of qualitative research and IPA studies using Yardley (2000) and Nizza and colleagues' (2021) quality assurance criteria.

Findings are discussed in relation to the research question: "How do primary-aged children from Army families experience education?"

### 5.2. "It's like the same like every kid": sameness of school experience

There is an assumption within existing literature and UK government policy that the mobility patterns of military families are impactful upon educational experience (The Royal British Legion, 2018; Ofsted, 2011) which creates a sense of difference between children from military families and their civilian peers (Yarwood et al., 2021). Findings from the current study appear to initially challenge this assumption as this group of children from Army families did not perceive their educational experiences to be different from others. Most of the participants in the current study expressed their educational experiences were the same as other children their age and is a finding which does not appear to be present in the previously reviewed literature. This sense of sameness was understood through participants' feeling that all children attended school for an education. This view was further strengthened by participants where they spoke of the importance and value of receiving an education and that this was a positive and important aspect of school experience for them.

In recognition of the school demographics in this present study whereby at least 75 percent of the school population are children from military families, participants' feelings of sameness of educational experience may partly come from considering their educational experiences to their surrounding school peers who also face the same unique experiences of a military family upbringing. This is important to note as existing literature highlights children from military

families can feel a sense of difference from their civilian peers, particularly throughout the stages of the deployment cycle (Yarwood et al., 2021; Amen et al., 1998), and can contain their emotions in an attempt to 'fit in' and not be treated differently in school (Yarwood et al., 2021).

As participants in the present study described school as a place to gain an education, and that their experiences were the same as other primary-aged children, this could be viewed as them not wanting to draw attention to themselves or be treated differently from others. This can be seen in the findings section when linguistically analysing Arlo's choice of words in his interview, whereby phrases such as '*I guess*' hints at feelings of discomfort towards acknowledging a difference in educational experience between himself and others. However, Arlo does speak of experiences being 'like the same like every kid' which suggests his internal struggle with how his educational experiences fit with the educational experiences of others. Alternatively, it could be suggested this group of participants did not feel a sense of difference as they were comparing their educational experiences to other children from military families, as this is whom they are educated alongside at the school in which the data was gathered. To aid in understanding the discrepancy between existing literature and findings from the present study I will explore the participants' responses in relation to Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and Bronfenbrenner's Bio-ecological Systems Theory (1977).

The notion of social identity describes how people's self-concepts are shaped by their membership in social groups such as gender, ethnicity, occupation etc. Such categorisation into groups feeds into an 'in-group' versus 'out-group' narrative whereby positive social identity is based largely on the 'in-group' being perceived as "positively differentiated or distinct from the relevant 'out-groups'" (Tajfel & Turner, 1986 pg. 16). Social Identity Theory proposes that group formation occurs through in a four-step process:

- 1) Social Categorisation – the concept of perceiving oneself as a part of a group. In addition to one's personal identity, individuals may have a social identity, or a sense of belonging to a group, based on factors such as gender, social status, educational background, or social relationships.
- 2) Social Identification - When a person has a social identity, they automatically categorise all individuals with whom they interact as either members of their ingroup (with whom they share a shared social identity) or members of the outgroup. They pay close attention to members of the ingroup and imitate their behaviours, attitudes, values, and physical appearance.

- 3) Social Comparison - This concept is derived from the notion that one's social identity is more important than that of another's. It is based on the belief that the behaviours, attitudes, or language of one's ingroup are more important than those of another's outgroup. This leads to prejudice, which in turn will lead to discrimination if one has the capacity to influence the outgroup.
- 4) Self-Esteem – a fundamental component of social identity, and according to Social Identity Theory, self-esteem is the motivating factor behind inter-group behaviour (Trepte, 2013) and is derived from the positive evaluation of one's group.

While Social Identity Theory was initially formulated with adults in mind, it has been suggested that it may also be applicable to the group processes in children (Nesdale & Flesser, 2001). Participants in this study may have perceived they belonged to the groups of 'child from an Army/military family', their own 'primary school', 'primary-aged children', and their individual 'family' group, amongst others. Considering the social identity of this group of participants as children from Army families, when comparing their educational experiences to those of non-Army children, this is where the majority of participants highlighted that their experiences were the same. This could be viewed through Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) as participants not wanting to be viewed different or distinct from other primary-aged children, hence their comments that school experiences are the same for all primary-aged children.

This perceived sense of sameness can also be considered in relation to the demographics of the school and the high percentage of children from military families. In this sense, the steps of social categorisation (seeing oneself as a member of a group) and social identification (adopting attitudes, behaviours, and values of group members) may have been easier for the participants. By identifying themselves as a 'child from an Army family' and this forming a majority group at the school in which the research was conducted, the participants may have increased self-esteem owing to the positive evaluation of their group, as outlined by Trepte (2013). Therefore, stemming from this increased self-esteem and positive evaluation of their group, participants may have felt a sense of shared experience with their group and thus explained this through outlining their educational experiences were the same as others and centred upon receiving an education.

Additionally, participants may have considered their educational experiences in comparison to those that they not only identify as being within the 'in-group' of children from military families but also in comparison to those they are presently educated alongside who are likely to be from military families. These children share similar interacting systems which influence their

development and experience which we can consider through Bronfenbrenner's Bio-ecological Systems Theory (1977). The participants in this study, and most of their school peers, shared some of the same interacting systems: the same school on a microsystemic level, the same parental career for at least one parent (the military) on an exosystemic level, and the shared experience of being within a military family (microsystem or ecosystem). For participants, being surrounded by other children from military families may have contributed to them feeling a sense of sameness in their educational experiences due to these shared experiences on differing systems levels and a social identity with each of these groups on each systems level. This said, studies of children have often examined aspects of microsystems or mesosystemic interactions between microsystems, with less frequent studies exploring exosystems and macrosystems (Neal & Neal, 2013). As such, research with military families and children which considers systems theory has tended to focus on the impact of deployment on children (Moeller et al., 2015) or upon family systems (Paley et al., 2013) or links systems theory to risk and resilience highlighting that risk and resilience should be viewed at different levels (Masten, 2013b). It therefore seems literature is yet to explore systems theory on a child-level, on broader topics outside of risk, resilience and deployment, and in consideration of exosystems and macrosystems.

Charlie's interview offers a contrasting view to this sense of sameness as she was able to recognise that school "*sounds a bit the same, but it isn't the same*" as elements of schooling, such as receiving an education, remain the same but on a systemic level the demographics of schools can impact educational experience. Charlie considered her educational experiences from the position of a child from a military family being a majority group at her present school and a minority group at her previous school and thus links to the previously discussed Social Identity Theory and the 'in-group' versus 'out-group' narrative. In this regard, when at the social comparison stage of group formation, it could be that Charlie's social identity was not superior to others and that may have come from the far smaller percentage of children from military families compared to the general population at her previous school setting. Linked to this, Charlie shared that the type of school and its population was impactful to schooling experience and this is reflected later within her interview when she compares the friendships she made in her previous and present school. However, it is important to consider that Social Identity Theory relies on the participants as identifying they are from an Army family or putting significance on this part of their identity. Even if the participants do place significance on this part of their identity, it is important to recognise there is variability in the dynamics and characteristics of families, even if they do share the same unique experiences of mobility and deployment.

In summary, participants considered their educational experiences to be the same as other children; it is highly likely that, owing to the demographics of their present school, any level of comparison participants made between educational experiences were with that of other children from military families. In this sense, most pupils at the school where the research was conducted would also be contending with the unique experiences of a military upbringing and this is likely to contribute to a sense of normalcy and shared understanding for this group of children from military families. Additionally, when considering the participants' experiences through the lens of Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), social categorisation (seeing oneself as a member of a group) and social identification (adopting attitudes, values, behaviours of group members) may have been easier steps towards social identity owing to the higher percentage of children from military families who were also educated at the school. In this sense, the group of 'children from Army/military families' formed a majority group and there was less social comparison to the group of 'children from non-Army/military families' and therefore explains how all participants did not feel their educational experiences differed from others.

This can be further considered through the notion that frequent transitions and parental deployment which characterise an upbringing within a military family were not explicitly considered by the participants as impactful upon their educational experiences, with participants viewing school as a place to receive an education. It may be suggested that as most of their school peers also experienced these challenges unique to a military upbringing, participants may not feel their schooling experiences were different to those whom they share a social identity with. This said, participants did have some understanding of the effects of growing up within an Army family and the below theme explores how this upbringing impacts educational experiences.

### 5.3. Making sense of unique military lifestyle challenges and their effect on educational experiences

Existing literature highlights school-aged children who are required to manage the unique challenges of deployment and mobility inclusive of school transitions may make them susceptible to social, emotional, and academic challenge (De Pedro et al., 2016; Cole, 2016; Arnold et al., 2014). From an ecological theory perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1977), children are embedded in multiple contexts which influence each other and resultantly, children experience the effects of parental deployment in the home, school and social environments (Moeller et al., 2015). Within the UK, the DfE funded SPP was introduced to help mitigate against such challenges in school and support this group of children in receiving the same



standard of education as any other UK citizen (Armed Forces Covenant, 2011 cited in Brady et al., 2013). In concurrence with literature, findings from this current study outline how participants inadvertently discussed deployment and mobility through the two sub-themes “Experiencing moving together as an Army family” and “Going away and coming back eventually: deployment and school-based support” as being entwined in their educational experience.

This theme captures the sense the participants’ fathers’ careers in the Army is all encompassing. The first sub-theme (“Experiencing moving together as an Army family”) reflects that the fathers’ Army career impacts the family unit as a whole whereas the second sub-theme (“Going away and coming back eventually: deployment and school-based support”) reflects how the unique military lifestyle challenges seeps into the participants’ schooling whereby emotional support was provided during periods of deployment. Although literature highlights mobility is an inevitable part of life for children from military families because of parental transfer to a new duty station (Children’s Commissioner, 2018; Cole, 2016), experiencing mobility as a shared familial experience was not found to be discussed so explicitly within literature reviewed for the present study. It may have seemed obvious that due to the participants and their parents forming an Army family they experienced the same unique challenges of a military lifestyle. This said, literature asserts that a shared family narrative can improve adaptation and resilience (Saltzman et al., 2011), and much of this theme will be considered through resilience theory.

When participants spoke of the experience of moving as an Army family, they implied a distance between their family and the Army in an ‘us’ versus ‘them’ scenario. For illustration, Eden and Arlo spoke of their family unit (described as ‘we’) as having been directed by the Army to move. In this sense, Eden and Arlo portray a lack of control as a family over mobility patterns and their families as passive participants in this aspect of their life, under the direction of the military. Although existing research highlights children can have anger towards the military and their parents regarding the frequency of separating from friends (Bradshaw et al., 2010), it does not seem literature explicitly discusses children’s feelings towards the military more broadly.

All the participants in this study spoke of a time when their father was away from the family home, and it may be suggested such absence has been normalised for them as illustrated by Faye: “*he will come back eventually*”. Literature reviewed for the current study highlights the negative implications of deployment such as higher levels of anxiety compared to children in the general population (Pexton et al., 2018) and a negative effect on emotional presentation

in school (Bradshaw et al., 2010; Richardson et al., 2011; Skomovorsky & Bullock, 2017; Moeller et al., 2015; Garner et al., 2014; Chandra et al., 2010a; Berkowitz et al., 2014; Arnold et al., 2014). For participants in the present study, links were not explicitly made between parental deployment and its impact upon educational experience.

The fact participants did not explicitly express that their educational experiences were impacted by parental deployment may also be understood through consideration of the schooling environment. As highlighted throughout this thesis, the school in which the research was conducted had a high percentage of children from military families. Existing research suggests children from military families can tend to pursue friendships with other children from military families due to a sense of shared understanding and acceptance (Mmari et al., 2010; Bradshaw et al., 2010). It could perhaps be suggested that as this research was conducted in a school with such a high percentage of children from military families this sense of shared understanding and acceptance may be abundant at this school. Thus, it could be participants did not see the impact of deployment upon educational experience as this was a more regular occurrence for them and their peers due to the high number of children from military families educated at the school.

Participants not explicitly recognising the impact of parental deployment upon educational experiences may also be understood through resilience theory. Masten (2021) highlights some protective factors for resilience is social connectedness and a sense of belonging. Support from friends can help mitigate the negative impacts of deployment (Skomorovsky & Bullock, 2017; Moeller et al., 2015), and having supportive social networks can help reduce stress and build resilience. For example, when children from a military family spend time together, they may help build resilience by modelling coping strategies or sharing information on how to access emotional, physical and social resources (Easterbrooks et al., 2013). Children from military families are in the unique position of experiencing challenges specific to a military lifestyle and thus may be able to support one another in a way that children in the general school population may be unable to do. It could therefore be suggested that as participants in the present study are educated alongside a high percentage of children from military families, they have friendships based on shared understanding and acceptance that helps to foster resilience. As a result of such understanding and acceptance, the participants likely did not directly see the unique challenges of a military upbringing impacted their educational experiences as they may have strong, supportive social networks to counteract these challenges. This would help to explain why this theme has come from a deeper level of interpretation as it is not something participants spoke openly about nor made connections between aspects of a military upbringing to their educational experiences.

In further consideration of school demographics, the school's population and location means teachers at the school are likely to have the knowledge and first-hand experience of the unique challenges for children from military families due to the high percentage of this group of children attending the setting. Existing literature highlights that in schools where children from military families form a minority group, teaching staff express lacking confidence in their abilities to support students in managing emotions arising from familial deployment (Arnold et al., 2014) and often did not know the right thing to do or say in this unique situation (Bradshaw et al., 2010). This said, Easterbrooks and colleagues (2013) suggest teachers are best placed to support resilience, with only parents having more impact on young people than teachers. Such a view is supported by Ohye and colleagues (2016) who state the most significant contributor to child resilience are relationships with a responsive parent and other nurturing adults, such as teachers. Given these considerations, it could be argued that because participants in this study are educated at a school with a larger than average number of pupils from military families, there is a common understanding and empathy among students and teachers about the unique challenges of military life, including mobility and deployment. These nurturing, empathetic relationships can help to build resilience among this group of children (Henderson & Milstein, 1996). As a result of such resilience, the participants may be better able to manage adversity, such as their father being deployed or a family relocation and thrive from this experience. This may be demonstrated in the present study by participants' apparent acceptance of their fathers' absence and sense of normalcy they portrayed throughout their interviews when speaking about unique challenges of a military lifestyle.

To summarise, participants were able to identify some unique challenges of growing up within a military family such as parental deployment, and school and house moves. For this group of participants, being educated alongside many children from military families who have experienced the same unique challenges may have acted as a protective factor for resilience and led to lower levels of anxiety and negative effects on emotional presentations in school, as existing literature highlights. As linked to the previous theme of "It's like the same like every kid': sameness of school experience", and that the present theme required a deeper level of interpretation of the effects of the unique military lifestyle challenges on educational experience, it can perhaps be suggested this sense of similarity to the school population meant participants were unaware of how their upbringing within a military family may affect educational experiences. It is further hypothesised the demographics of the school population and teachers' experiences of supporting children from military families may have improved the participants' adaptation and resilience.

#### 5.4. Leaving, being left and feeling left out

The literature reviewed for the present study posited that parents, teachers, and CYP from military families perceived leaving friends behind and developing new friendships to be one of the biggest stressors for children from military families (Mmari et al., 2010; Arnold et al., 2014; Bradshaw et al., 2010). Literature highlights children find interruptions to their friendships difficult to cope with and find it particularly hard to make friends when they move partway through the academic year (Ofsted, 2011). Such a view was reflected by some participants in the present study as illustrated by Arlo: *“the only bad thing I can think of is you have to... you have to say bye bye to your friends and I will be really sad”*.

A finding from this study which does not appear to be evident in previously reviewed literature is the sense of being left out or bullied upon school transition. Most participants spoke of their anxiety surrounding being bullied or a bully joining the school. This said, following a further search of the literature, it seems there is evidence of children from military families speaking of their concerns and/or experiences of being bullied (Gilreath et al., 2012; Astor et al., 2013; Reed et al., 2011; Atuel et al., 2014). Such studies however were conducted with children from military families in public schools in America whereby the children formed a minority group within the school population. Hence, findings from the present study are likely to be different as research was conducted in a school in which the participants were within the majority population: literature highlights this may have helped the participants to feel welcomed and cared for due to a potentially supportive, military-friendly school climate (De Pedro et al., 2011).

In the present study, although participants shared some concerns surrounding bullying and feeling left out, some participants also discussed how they had not been bullied and felt safe from bullies at the present school. One consideration for this comes from research discussed in the literature review (De Pedro et al., 2016) which suggests attending a school with a higher percentage of students from military families may contribute to lower levels of physical and non-physical peer victimisation due to a shared understanding and empathy of the unique challenges of a military upbringing. Attending a school with a higher percentage of students from military families may mean there is membership and belonging to a group containing a larger number of people. With this can come feelings of superiority when socially comparing one's group to another, particularly when one's group forms a majority group, and increased self-esteem that comes with this, as understood through Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

Another consideration for this sense of safety from bullies for the participants in the present study can also be viewed through the psychological concept of belonging. Belonging is understood to be the psychological desire to be part of a group (Ostermann, 2000) and as highlighted by Maslow (1943), belonging is a basic need that motivates human behaviour. Although the concept of belonging for children from military families has not yet been explored in any real depth in literature, research with other populations of children has considered this concept and will be discussed. In Nette and Hayden's (2007) research of globally mobile children's sense of belonging, they found that development of friendships and familiarity with, and time in, the environment were crucial in facilitating a sense of belonging. Participants in the present study spoke of a sense of responsibility from themselves and the school community in preventing bullying in school, as well as the school having an active role to reduce bullying that the participants were aware of, as outlined by Arlo: "*we have this badge called anti-bullying*". Use of the word 'we' suggests a sense of belonging to the school community and a sense of relatedness to others in the school; this is linked to the concept of belonging as the children feel securely connected to others (Greenwood & Kelly, 2019; Ostermann, 2000). Research posits that the frequent relocations children from military families are subject to impacts upon their feelings of connectedness to others (Mmari et al., 2010). To help create feelings of connectedness, children from military families identified they would pursue friendships with other children from military families due to a shared understanding of being the 'new student' at some point in their educational journey (Mmari et al., 2010; Bradshaw et al., 2010). It may therefore be suggested that the school climate, which appeared to proactively promote antibullying as evidenced by Arlo in his interview, supported participants to feel a greater sense of connectedness and belonging. This may have subsequently affected experiences of bullying as it appeared the participants had not experienced bullying at this present school.

Alongside speaking about anxieties of pursuing new friendships and being left out, participants also spoke about the sadness, grief, and frustration they felt towards school relocations. Presently, research does not seem to explicitly discuss the impact of the relocation of children from military families upon their remaining peer group, particularly those from military families themselves. The literature reviewed for the present study speaks of CYP's experiences of making friends upon school transition (Children's Commissioner, 2018), often seeking relationships with other children from military families (Mmari et al., 2010; Bradshaw et al., 2010), and anger towards their parents and the military as a result of the frequency of separating from friends (Bradshaw et al., 2010), but does not reflect on the emotional impact of their friends having to relocate due to military-directed mobility patterns. Participants in the present study spoke of their friends being "*gone and you can't find them*" and used the word

“gone” often to talk about friends who had left the school. Others spoke of feelings of hopelessness of keeping friendships once friends had left the school whereby participants felt they were not in control of maintaining contact with friends or felt the quality of the friendship had changed: *“they just don’t like me anymore and don’t want me to be their friend anymore”*.

Theories of loss and attachment will be explored in relation to transient friendships in relationship to the participant’s comments surrounding loss and grief of friendships. Worden (2018), in his writings on grief, linked the impact of loss and the human behaviour associated with loss to the theory of attachment. He writes that attachment behaviour seeks to sustain an affectional connection; when this connection is threatened, certain specific reactions are elicited (Worden, 2018). Osofsky and Chartrand (2013) summarise that the fear of losing a significant relationship may cause anxiety, while the actual loss of a relationship can cause sorrow. Thus, separating from friends whom children have a close relationship with can result in certain emotional and behavioural responses. This separation can be understood best through use of the word ‘bereavement’.

Although bereavement may be most associated with the event of death, bereavement has been defined as the death (or other ending) of a social bond or relationship (Ribbens McCarthy, 2007), a loss which a person is trying to adapt to (Worden, 2018), and a process which occurs when there is a loss of someone or something deemed important (Ollendick & Schroeder, 2012). Worden (2018) outlines the most common feeling found in the bereaved is sadness and this was a word frequently used by the participants in the present study to describe their feelings towards their own or friends’ relocations. Most participants reflected a sense of understanding that loss of friendships was partly due to their fathers’ military careers, with Faye and Arlo responding that a negative of being within a military family was moving away from friends. For Charlie however, she shared a view that she had a lack of control over her friendships for further reasons: *“my mummy and her mummy agreed that once we moved we’d never talk again”*. Here the sense of loss is exacerbated for Charlie as not only has she moved away from her friend due to her father’s career in the Army but has also had her autonomy removed in being able to keep in contact which has solidified the ending of this friendship.

Although theories of loss and attachment may be helpful in understanding participants’ feelings around friendships, it seems that in literature such theories have not yet been applied to friendships. Feelings of loss have been explored in relation to parental deployment (Huebner et al., 2007; O’Neal et al., 2021; Potts, 2021) but not more broadly to other changing relationships that children from military families may experience. This said, one of the unique

features of a child from an Army families' lifestyle is that this branch of the Armed Forces is more likely to move as part of a regiment or unit deployment where multiple Army personnel and their families move to the same location (Ofsted, 2011; Yarwood et al., 2021). It could therefore be suggested children from Army families specifically may experience less loss and have a higher likelihood of reconnecting with peers. This is evidenced by Arlo in his interview where he reflected on his feelings about returning back to the present school which he had previously attended: *"I was excited to see my old friends from a long time ago I guess from the past"*.

In summary, although the literature reviewed for the present study recognises the emotive nature of school relocations and subsequent anxieties surrounding making new friends, it seems literature does not explore how children from military families experience their friends from military families relocating and moving schools and highlights the uniqueness of the present study and sample population. Participants shared feelings of being left behind by friends who are likely to have been subject to military mobility due to their education in a school with a higher-than-average percentage of children from military families. In line with the likely high turnover of children in their classes due to their military upbringing, participants also shared concerns around bullies or "bad friends" joining their school. Although participants seemed to feel a sense of belonging and had formed secure friendships (or attachments with peers), they implied anxieties around how new starters may impact their sense of safety and connectedness. Participants felt anxiety towards making new friends and being left out, as well as sadness, grief and frustration towards leaving their friends, their friends leaving them, and having to relocate schools.

### 5.5. Seeking and securing connection: the positives of school relocation

This finding was different to more common findings from literature relating to fears and difficulties surrounding school relocations and making friendships (e.g., Mmari et al., 2010; Bradshaw et al., 2010; Children's Commissioner, 2018), anger directed towards parents in the military due to the frequency of separating from friends (Bradshaw et al., 2010), and feelings of connectedness to others being impacted by frequent school relocations (Mmari et al., 2010). In contrast to such existing literature, findings from the present study evidence how all participants spoke positively of the differing aspects of school relocations which included connection and kindness from staff, feeling welcomed and accepted by peers, and the positive aspect of making new friends. This positiveness towards relocations is partly evidenced in the Ofsted review (2011) whereby children educated in 'Service Children's Education schools' (schools in Cyprus and Germany), or in schools with a large population of children from military

families, shared they favoured the military environment as they received moral support from their peers at times of difficulty and support from schools when there were upcoming relocations or deployments. Related to this, other literature highlights that CYP's interactions with teachers and peers in school impact their sense of school belonging (Corso et al., 2013; Uslu & Gizir, 2016) and thus the psychological concept of belonging will be explored in relation to the present research findings.

When speaking about their educational experiences in a broad sense, many participants in the present study spoke about important adults at school and how they were influential to a positive schooling experience, both at their present school and previous schools. Participants spoke of 'nice' and 'kind' teachers at their present school and the importance of these relationships can be understood through the psychological concept of belonging. Belonging in school is defined as the extent to which pupils feel accepted, valued, included and supported by others – particularly teachers and other adults (Goodenow & Grady, 1993). It has been proposed that before expecting pupils to feel a sense of belonging to the larger school community, an attachment to the teacher must first be developed (Wentzel, 1999) and that teacher-student relationship is the most important predictive variable of a sense of school belonging (Uslu & Gizir, 2016).

Positive relationships have been consistently connected with resilience and emotional wellbeing within research (Lowther, 2022; Masten, 2015; Roffey, 2019; King, 2016). Masten (2021) highlights social connectedness and a sense of belonging are protective factors for resilience and other resilience literature explains that such connection with school staff and peers acts as a protective factor against negative emotional outcomes and is crucial for both overall wellbeing and academic success (Lowther, 2022). Thus, there is a relationship between belonging in school and resilience.

Although the present study highlights the positive implications of teacher-student relationship upon school relocation and a sense of belonging and as a 'resilience resource' (Lowther, 2022) or protective factor (Masten, 2021), existing literature surrounding children from military families and school transition does not make such an explicit link. Literature highlights the importance of teachers taking a role in fostering peer relationships between children from military families and civilian peers (Arnold et al., 2014) and that school staff's interaction with children from military families can buffer or exacerbate the stress they are experiencing during transition (Bradshaw et al., 2010). Such literature does not however speak of how influential these teacher relationships are for fostering a sense of school belonging nor how much children from military families value these positive relationships upon school transition. This



said, there was a weak association highlighted in findings by De Pedro and colleagues (2016) between caring relationships from teachers and lower levels of physical and non-physical peer victimisation. It is worth noting the above study and present study were both conducted in schools with a greater percentage of children from military families which resultantly may have meant staff members felt more knowledgeable of the unique challenges of a military lifestyle. Previous literature has suggested young people, parents, and school staff hold a view that educational professionals do not fully understand the experiences of children from military families particularly in settings where this group of children are in the minority (e.g., Garner et al., 2014; Ruff & Keim, 2014; Culler et al., 2019; Brady et al., 2013; Yarwood et al., 2021). It may therefore be suggested participants in the study feel more accepted, respected, included, and supported by school staff at their present school potentially due to staff understanding of a military upbringing and how to support these children in school.

Besides teacher-student relationships, peer acceptance and support also have importance in a child's sense of school belonging (Ostermann, 2000; Uslu & Gizir, 2016) which significantly relates to the sub-theme 'Feeling welcomed and accepted' in this present study. All participants spoke of the welcoming nature of the children at school, and it was inferred that friendships were an important part of school life and experience. Most participants reflected on their first breaktime and how other children approached them to engage in play which highlights the social acceptance of peers was important to participants. It is identified in literature that children from military families tended to be the most forthcoming (Bradshaw et al., 2010) to other children from military families due to a sense of a shared understanding and experience of being the 'new student' at one point in their life (Mmari et al., 2010). In concurrence with such research, Charlie made the comparison in her interview that children at her present school were '*nicer*' than those at her previous school which supports the speculation that children from military families can appear more accepting and welcoming to new students. This is further supported by a finding from Bradshaw and colleagues' study (2010) whereby parent and staff participants identified students attending schools with a higher percentage of children from military families tended to experience less stress compared to those attending schools with fewer peers from military families. This can be further supported by a snippet of Faye's interview transcript in which she explains she has the opportunity to be herself and connect with her peers more authentically: "*I had to show them who I really am. In my old school people ummm...only my friends used to say I'm rich and I like that about you and people would want to be my friends because they knew I had a mansion and wanted to be my friend because of my money but I actually didn't have money so yeah*".

Although research highlights changes in the peer group structure can lead to lower levels of school belonging (Ryan, 2001), most participants in the present study reflected a positive of relocating school was being able to create new friendships and described this process as ‘good’, ‘exciting’ and ‘fun’. Such a finding relates to Hayllar’s (2018) doctoral thesis where participants spoke about developing friendships as a conscious coping strategy for when they arrived at a new school. Linking back to the previously discussed psychological concept of belonging, it seems that children from military families actively seek friendships to foster a sense of belonging upon their school transition, and this is closely related to Tajfel and Turner’s Social Identity Theory (1996) in which this group of children might be seeking friends from a group in which they share a social identity with. For the participants in this present study, the opportunity to make new friends was viewed positively and was deemed to be a positive aspect of relocating. Most participants spoke of the newest students supported them during their transition. This links to previously discussed literature whereby CYP identified adult-directed ‘buddy systems’ were one of the best strategies to help them to integrate into their new school (Mmari et al., 2010). It could be that the newest children were chosen by teachers as they could empathise with recently being the new student.

To summarise, the theme “Seeking and securing connection: the positives of school relocation” reflects that warm and accepting relationships with staff and peers are influential to a positive educational experience and concurs with existing literature (Uslu & Gizir, 2016). Participants in the present study appeared to have developed positive relationships with both staff members in school and other children and explained that such new relationships could be viewed as a positive aspect of relocation. This said however, this finding may be reflective of a group of children from Army families who have made successful friendships upon their school transition and thus have a sense of belonging with friends and within the school community. For children from military families who do not have a secure sense of belonging in school or perception of secure friendships, seeking new friendships upon transition may not be framed as a positive for them. Regardless of this limitation, literature is yet to explore the perceived positiveness of growing up within a military family and the strengths of this group of children.

## 5.6. Critiquing the research

As with any study, it is necessary to critique the study in order to evaluate the quality of the study methodology, the subsequent findings and the conclusions derived from those findings. In the following section, I will evaluate the methodology of the study, the sample selection and

the data collection process, as well as consider the main strengths and weaknesses of the study.

#### 5.6.1. Methodology and research question

As highlighted in the literature review section of this thesis, there is a dearth of literature that directly gathers the voices of children from military families and there is a call for research to be conducted from child perspectives (Skomorovsky & Bullock, 2017). I therefore feel a significant strength of my research is its illumination of the voice of children from Army families and particularly children in the UK. Research with children from military families is dominated by US-based researchers gathering the views of adults, such as school staff and parents, who work alongside this group of children, typically of a secondary school age (e.g., De Pedro et al., 2014a, 2014b; Arnold et al., 2014; Aronson & Perkins, 2013; Berkowitz et al., 2014; Chandra et al., 2010b). The lack of research with children from military families, particularly those based in the UK, was noted in the literature review, with the few published resources tending to be 'grey literature' (e.g., Ofsted, 2011; The Royal British Legion, 2018; Children's Commissioner, 2018), or doctoral theses which researched closely related areas (e.g., Hayllar, 2018; Potts, 2021; Clifton, 2007). With this in mind, my research has made an original contribution to knowledge by exploring primary-aged children from Army families' experiences of education in the UK.

Additionally, a further strength of this research was the use of IPA as a methodology as it provided an idiographic focus on participants' lived experiences (Smith et al., 2009) and allowed for a detailed examination of how people make sense of their lived experiences (Smith, 2011). This links closely to the above strength that this research has made an original contribution to knowledge, particularly by using an IPA methodology to capture children's lived experience. When exploring themes, I considered how the theme was represented across the sample by incorporating quotes from multiple participants (Nizza et al., 2021) which helped to show how participants shared higher order qualities without losing sight of the individual participant's idiosyncratic characteristics (Smith et al., 2009; Nizza et al., 2021). I also intentionally decided to not use a participant quote within the title for this research to avoid misrepresentation of the wider qualitative dataset as I wanted to reflect the individual experiences and accounts of educational experiences for the participants (Parkin & Kimergård, 2022), standing true to the fundamentals of IPA research.

However, despite its popularity in many disciplines (Tuffour, 2017), IPA's limitations are well-documented, notably its lack of uniformity and its capacity to be open to multiple interpretations

(Giorgi, 2010). As mentioned in the methodology chapter (Chapter 3), IPA also recognises the interpretative role of researchers who seek to understand the experiences and meaning making of their participants through the process of hermeneutics (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Due to IPA's emphasis on the interpretation of the researcher, it is probable another researcher would interpret the same data differently when presented with it. To overcome this potential limitation, I have endeavoured to be transparent about my position as a researcher, as well as the phases of the research procedure, in the concluding section of the thesis (section 6.4).

Arguably a limitation of this study is its single research question as it has been suggested use of one overarching research question without small sub-questions highlights the research topic is too broad (Agee, 2009). However, as highlighted by Haynes (2006), the purpose of having one overarching research question was to ensure the research was not overly complex and could be answered in one study. My decision to only use one research question stemmed from my review of existing literature as this highlighted there was a scarcity of literature which explored children from UK military families' experiences of education. Thus, by broadly exploring this group of children's educational experiences, a springboard is provided for future research with a more narrowed exploration of this topic area.

#### 5.6.2. Homogeneity

A further strength of the present study is the homogeneity of the participants. Participants were recruited through purposive sampling from one school within one local authority and with each of their fathers currently serving in the British Army. Such homogeneity is understood to gauge a more comprehensive understanding of the participants' lived experiences (Alase, 2017) as participants should have a similar lived experience of the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2016).

In terms of the sample, it should be noted the school involved in the research was one with a higher-than-average percentage of children from military families in attendance due to its location nearby to a military base. This therefore resulted in a sample of participants who were considering their educational experiences in the context of being educated alongside other children from military families. The literature reviewed for this research does not appear to have participants who were educated alongside such a large proportion of other children from Army/military families and thus this research has shared unique findings because of this. Additionally, although Smith (2004), and Larkin and colleagues (2006) identify that a small number of participants is typical for IPA studies, these findings cannot be generalised for the population of children from Army families and those from other forces families. Furthermore,

it is worth noting the literature reviewed for this present study includes participants from the broader group of children from military families, rather than a specific focus of children from Army families and thus such literature may not be wholly relevant to children from Army families.

### 5.6.3. Data collection

I implemented steps in the data collection to facilitate rapport building, such as the pilot interview. The pilot interview provided me with an opportunity to identify ways to enhance rapport with participants, as well as to reflect on my role in data collection and identify what needs to be altered in order to generate robust data in interview (Malmqvist et al., 2019). In recognition of both rapport building and of the limitations of semi-structured interviews (Brocki & Wearden, 2006), particularly those conducted with children (Fargas-Malet et al., 2010), I used additional props to facilitate the interview process, as recommended in literature (Smith & Dunworth, 2003). The props that I took to the interviews were: an octopus toy which communicated 'happy' and 'sad' for participants to communicate whether they wanted to continue or cease the interview; the 'Blob Tree' to promote discussion around feelings of school experiences; and the 'Bear Cards' to compliment the 'Blob Tree' when discussing feelings. Although these props helped to prompt discussion between myself and the participants, I feel the participants would have been able to have expressed their views verbally without such additional resources.

A limitation regarding data collected for this study centres around one of the interview questions: *Does having a parent in the Army mean school looks different for some children? How?* Such a question sits uncomfortably within an IPA methodology which is concerned with the unique lived experiences of individuals. This question does not fit with the aim of the study to consider the individuality of experience as it asks for a comparison between experiences. Although the data gathered from participants in response to this interview question has been interpreted and analysed for the present study, it has been considered through the lens of Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1996). This allowed me to consider the participants' experiences in relation to the high percentage of other children from military families present at the school in which the data was collected, not through making a comparison between differing groups of children as this was not the aim of the study. Furthermore, the theme "It's the same like every kid": sameness of school experience' was not devised from this one interview question and is representative of the participant data gathered throughout the entirety of the interviews.

One limitation to the data collection of this study is that only one interview was conducted per participant, which represents a fixed point in the participant's lives. If more time were available, additional interviews could have been conducted as the participants moved through the academic year to determine how, or not, their perceptions changed with additional time in the current year cohort or with potential future stressors, such as parental deployment or Army-related mobility and relocation. Linked to this, it is not possible to ascertain as to why the parents of the four children in the study, who acted as gate keepers, were the ones to reply to the recruitment email and not the approximately 100 other parents who were contacted for the study. It could be speculated that the parents who gave consent may have felt assured that their child was enjoying school and thus was going to be able to access the interview.

## 5.7. Quality of qualitative research

In this following section, I will evaluate the quality of this research in accordance with quality markers of qualitative research (as in Yardley, 2000) and IPA studies (as in Nizza et al., 2021). This section will expand upon section 3.4.6 'Ensuring quality of research' found in the methodology chapter of this thesis.

### 5.7.1. Sensitivity to context

This research aimed to create as wide an understanding as possible of the complexities of educational experience as a phenomenon for children from Army families, and the subsequent relevance of this topic for teachers and wider professionals such as EPs. I sought to achieve this by being sensitive to contexts in a number of ways. Firstly, the existing literature on this topic was carefully searched at numerous stages to ensure all related research was included. The literature review section of this thesis considered the existing literature through a narrative review. The discussion chapter drew upon additional literature to reflect upon my research findings in relation to relevant literature.

Secondly, I aimed to consider the social context of the relationship between researcher and participant. I aimed to be sensitive towards the participants by presenting findings for the present study with verbatim quotes from participants' interviews (Shinebourne, 2011). In doing this, I thoroughly examined and interpreted the verbatim quoted material within the narrative, and incorporated this into the findings section of this thesis, which ultimately helped to present the data and narrative in a meaningful manner (Nizza et al., 2021).

### 5.7.2. Commitment and rigour

As a child from a military family and an adult with their own military family, I can attest to an in-depth engagement with this research topic. I attempted to reduce the influence of my personal experience by being reflexive of my involvement and influence both through supervision with peers and my supervisor, as well as through my reflexive journal. Furthermore, I demonstrated 'prolonged engagement' with the topic (Yardley, 2000) throughout the interview process. Prolonged engagement with the topic and rigour is evidenced in the time taken during data analysis to immerse oneself in the data and the discussion of findings during supervision with peers and my supervisor. As outlined by Nizza and colleagues (2021), such immersion in the data and close analytic reading of participant quotes demonstrates IPA researchers' commitment to interpretation and idiographic depth.

### 5.7.3. Transparency and coherence

I have been transparent about my research throughout to make the process as clear as possible to the reader. In acknowledgement of such transparency, information inclusive of ethical approval, information sheets, consent forms, the interview schedule, a sample transcript and a table of themes can be found in the appendices alongside a reflexive account of my experiences during the completion of the present study. Through including the sample transcript and table of themes, this offers a level of detail that provides transparency to my interpretative claims as a researcher (Nizza et al., 2021).

Coherence within the present study is evidenced through the upholding of the intentions of the initial aim of the research: to explore the educational experiences of primary-aged children from Army families. The nature of this topic is felt to be consistent with IPA's guiding principles and methods of data collection and analysis. Additionally, I aimed to achieve coherence throughout my findings section by ensuring each theme contributed to the narrative of the overall research findings in an interconnected manner through the carefully selected participant quotes and analytic interpretation which demonstrates the hermeneutic circle and development of the narrative (Nizza et al., 2021).

### 5.7.4. Impact and importance

Yardley's (2000) final principle outlines that it is not enough to produce a piece of research which is thorough and detailed if such research does not tell the reader something interesting, important or useful (Smith et al., 2009). The present study has contributed to a dearth of

research related to children from Army families' experiences of education. Previous studies have researched adult perspectives on children's educational experiences, with very few studies directly gathering the views of young people. Additionally, these few studies which conduct research with CYP are over representative of an American population whose schooling experiences cannot be wholly transferable to those of UK-based children from Army families. The present research gathers the views of this UK-based group of children, who are an underrepresented group in research, and endeavours to consider the wider implications of these findings to school staff and the EP profession.

## 5.8. Chapter summary

This chapter provided a comprehensive analysis of the research findings in relation to the research question and the theoretical perspectives that underpin the present study. Existing literature, as outlined in the literature section of this thesis, as well as additional relevant literature, were taken into account when discussing excerpts from participant interviews.

Findings indicate this group of children from Army families educated alongside a high percentage of children from military families perceive their educational experiences to be the same as other primary-aged children. Additional findings indicate that participants were aware of unique military challenges to growing up in an Army family and how this can be viewed positively, through the excitement towards making new relationships upon school transition, but also negatively when they must leave friendships behind or when friends leave them due their own relocation patterns. Given the limitations associated with selecting IPA as a method, and the fact that participants were enrolled in a school with a higher-than-average percentage of children from military families, it is important to avoid overgeneralising findings to assume that they are representative for all children from Army families or other service families. This said, as highlighted by Noon (2018), the present findings can be seen to relate to similar findings in existing literature and thus more general claims can be made for the population of children from military families.

In the aim of transparency and accountability, I critiqued the strengths and limitations of the present study, and the following chapter provides a reflexive account of my role and influence as a researcher upon the research process. In the final chapter of this thesis, I will revisit the aims of this research and how I plan to disseminate the findings to relevant stakeholders, and finally, I will provide my concluding thoughts on this research project.



## Chapter 6: Conclusion

### 6.1. Introduction to the chapter

This final chapter will provide an overview of the results of this study, as well as its implications for individual, group and organisational practice in the field of educational psychology. It will reflect on my role and impact in the research process, followed by my considerations on how I intend to disseminate the research findings to relevant stakeholders. Finally, I will outline opportunities for future research and then present my concluding thoughts.

### 6.2. Summary of research findings

The summary of the findings of this present study will be considered through the study's unitary research question: How do primary-aged children from Army families experience education?

The findings from this research suggest that children from Army families' educational experiences are impacted by the unique challenges of an Army lifestyle inclusive of relocations in tandem with mobility patterns, and parental deployment. For this group of children, not only do their own family's relocation and deployment impact upon their experiences of education, but educational experiences are also affected by their friends' mobility and new peers transitioning to the school. In this sense, the participants spoke of the sadness, grief and frustration of them and their friends leaving and having to start over. This said, with all participants having experienced at least one school transition in their educational journey, the participants did also speak about the positives of relocating schools such as the opportunity to make new friends and the importance of feeling welcomed and accepted by both their peers and the school staff at the newest setting.

Findings from the present study were considered through the psychological theories of resilience, Social Identity Theory, Bio-ecological Systems Theory, and loss and attachment, and the psychological concept of belonging to explore these children's experiences. Through viewing the findings through these varying psychological lenses, it highlights the opportunity for further work and support from EPs and this will be considered below through the varying levels at the individual, group, and organisational.

### 6.3. Implications for educational psychology practice

EPs are in a unique position to be able to advise how best to support differing groups of children at an individual, group, and organisational level (Scottish Executive, 2002) and across early years settings, schools, and in multi-agency work (Farrell et al., 2006; DfEE, 2000). The findings from the present study highlight children from Army families are a highly mobile group who experience additional levels of stress as a result of their affiliations with the military and across a number of levels and interacting systems. As EPs are advocates for vulnerable and hidden groups of children (Fox, 2015), EPs should consider working with this group of children, particularly in counties where there are a higher number of military bases and thus a higher number of children from military families. Implications for how EPs can support this group of children come directly from my findings and Table 6 below outlines how each theme related to the individual, group and organisational support that EPs can provide.

	<b>Individual Level</b>	<b>Group Level</b>	<b>Organisational Level</b>
<b>“It’s the same like every kid”: sameness of school experience</b>	X	X	
<b>Making sense of unique military lifestyle challenges and their effect on educational experiences</b>	X	X	X
<b>Leaving, left and being left out</b>	X	X	
<b>Seeking and securing connection: the positives of school relocation</b>	X	X	X

*Table 6: Themes related to levels of support*

### Individual

When considering children from Army or military families as individuals, EPs need to be aware of the unique challenges that growing up within a military family brings which not only includes mobility and deployment, but also a more nuanced view of challenges such as the sense of grief and frustration when friendships end as highlighted by participants in this research. EPs should be mindful of the educational history for individual children inclusive of how many school moves they have experienced and whether there is an upcoming military-directed. They should ensure that meetings with SENCOs regarding these individual children should discuss educational journeys and how they have been characterised in terms of number of school moves, parental deployments, percentage of children from military families at previous and current schools, and relationships with others. Through these conversations it is hoped these transient children are known by their SENCO and individualised support can be put in place to support them within their present school. Once these children have been identified, EPs could work with school staff in developing a document to record the curriculum content covered by each child from a military family to transition with them to their next school as research discussed in the literature review outlined that children from military families often repeated or missed key learning topics (Hayllar, 2018; Ofsted, 2011; Clifton, 2007), and this is discussed further in the 'organisational section' of this implications section.

It is also important for EPs to consider the context of the school in which the individual child is educated in, particularly the number of children from military families within the school. Findings from the present study highlight that being educated alongside a higher percentage of children from military families may help to create a shared social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1996) and improve resilience (Lowther, 2022; Henderson & Milstein, 1996) through creating a sense of belonging to a group and increased wellbeing. In these schools, EPs should encourage staff to be mindful of the effects of the high turnover of children due to military-directed mobility patterns and the impact of this upon the remaining children in the class as the present research identified that this leads to feelings of grief and loss in participants. On the other hand, for schools with a smaller percentage of children from military families, EPs can support these schools on an organisational level to understand the unique challenges for this group of children and by highlighting the importance of relationships both with teachers and peers: this will be explored in more depth later in this chapter.

### Group

As the findings highlighted the importance of friendships and support of other children from military families, an intervention could be provided for these children which focuses on group wellbeing. By creating a group intervention this would provide opportunities for children from

military families to share strategies for coping during times of adversity, as highlighted in existing literature (Easterbrooks et al., 2013). Such an intervention could support children's relationship building, particularly in schools where there is a lower percentage of children from military families which may negatively impact children's social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1996), or could be relevant leading up to and following a friend leaving due to their own pattern of military-related mobility.

EPs could also facilitate group SENCo supervision or cluster meetings in which these professionals could share good practice in relation to their use of the SPP and ways in which they support children from military families. EPs could also work alongside school staff to build their confidence in delivering social and emotional support to this group of children: this may be through working with Emotional Literacy Support Assistants (ELSA) who already work with a range of children in developing and supporting their emotional wellbeing in school. In relation to this, supervision with ELSAs could include sessions that discuss parental deployment or supporting children when a classmate leaves the school, as these are areas which the participants mentioned as being challenging for them to navigate.

Additionally, EPs could work alongside school staff in building their confidence in supporting the social and emotional wellbeing of parents within the military or military spouses. This is likely to be most important when a family has newly relocated to the area due to military-directed mobility patterns or during periods of deployment. As highlighted by the present study, participants shared a sense of the family experiencing moving together as a collective and although it is important to support children's emotional needs upon transition, adults will likely be experiencing similar feelings of anxiety and sadness upon a relocation. This may look like termly coffee mornings at school where adults within military families come together to not only meet one another but also to meet key members of school staff such as any pastoral leads or family support workers, and to hear about the support available to them and their children at the school.

### Organisational

As a minimum, children from military families should be a topic of discussion during initial planning meetings between EPs and special educational needs coordinators (SENCOs). If SENCOs are unable to accurately recall the number of children registered as 'Service pupils' at their school, EPs should support SENCOs in developing more robust measures for identifying and recording this group of children. This may include supporting schools in developing their relationships with parents who are serving in the military to help them to

understand the importance of declaring their military occupation for their child to receive the SPP. This may be supported by the coffee mornings outlined above.

On an organisational level, EPs could provide training for schools to support staff in understanding this cohort of children and challenges that their upbringing within a military family can bring. This training should not only focus on the unique challenges for these children and how they impact educational experiences, as demonstrated by the findings from this present study, but EPs should draw upon psychological theories and concepts of resilience, belonging, self-identity, and attachment to emphasise protective factors for children from military families. EPs could also outline to schools how to build their 'resilience resources' as outlined by Lowther (2022) to be able to support children from military families on an individual, group and organisational level. Within this training, the importance of relationships between other pupils and school staff should be highlighted and how such connection can act as a 'resilience resource' to buffer against the negative impacts of frequent relocations and parental deployment.

Following such training, EPs should work with schools to embed an inclusive culture. School staff will be mindful of the unique challenges of growing up within an Armed Forces family but also of the military culture and how this differs between those with experience of the military, and those who do not have this experience. For schools closer to military bases with a higher percentage of children from military families, there is likely to be a greater awareness of the military culture from an 'insider' positioning, and this awareness needs to be shared with staff who do not have such a nuanced understanding. This is achieved partly by having additional training but also in interactions between school and home where an open and honest dialogue is encouraged to understand what life is truly like for those within military families.

As aforementioned, EPs should work with schools in developing a document to record the curriculum content covered by each child to transition with them to their next school. This would also be a piece of influential work which could be developed on a national level to support the educational journeys of all children from military families. EPs could work with the Department for Education (DfE) on developing a template for all schools to complete for their children from military families who are transitioning. However, to be able to do this, the DfE will need to develop a system in which the number of children from military families is accurately recorded across schools. This would ensure that all children from military families are accounted for and therefore schools receive the SPP they are entitled to, and this will resultantly allow schools to identify which children require a document to record curriculum content prior to transitioning schools.

#### 6.4. Reflexive Account

As is the nature of IPA, the researcher is part of the research process as they collect data from participants and interpretatively transform the data to try to make sense of the participant attempting of making sense of what is happening to them (Smith et al., 2022). As the IPA researcher's view of the world is inextricably intertwined with how they interpret participants' experiences (Oxley, 2016), there is a need to check the balance between reflexivity and subjectivity. This involves attending to the interplay between participant voice (subjectivity) and the researcher interpretation of their meaning (reflexivity) (Willig, 2017). Such reflexivity recognises how the researcher's position affects the individuals being studied, the questions asked, the data collected, and the interpretation of such data (Berger, 2015; Fox et al., 2007) which creates an open and transparent research process (Palaganas et al., 2017).

The personal origins of this research meant my experience of being within a military family both as a child and an adult piqued my interest in exploring experiences for children from military families (Malterud, 2001). This said, although having my own parents in the military and a partner in the military meant I could identify and connect with participants and caregivers, I consciously chose a topic that provided some distance between myself as a military child and as a researcher (Lovett, 2022) as I did not share the experience of relocating primary schools or being educated in a school with a higher percentage of children from military families.

In the recruitment stage of my research, I was transparent that I was a child from a military family and have my own military affiliations as an adult: I believe this helped my access to participants as caregivers may have been more willing for their children to partake in the research as they could have perceived me as someone who was sympathetic and understanding to their situations (De Tona, 2006). However, it is essential to consider how to utilise one's own experience, which provides a more intimate familiarity and thus a potential for a deeper comprehension of the phenomenon, while avoiding imposing researcher's experience on participants (Berger, 2015; Pillow, 2003).

Although my experience of primary education is vastly different from this population of Army children, I aimed to increase my awareness of how I was having an influence on and within the research process (Holmes, 2020) by using a reflective journal throughout my thesis journey to record my reflexive considerations, how my experiences may be shaping the data, how the data shapes me, and so forth (please see Appendix M for an extract). It is hoped that through writing this reflective journal, attending supervision, and being mindful of how any

biases and preconceptions may have shared the interpretation of the data (Berger, 2015), the findings from my research accurately represent the multifaceted reality of each participant, while also contributing to their overall experience.

## 6.5. Dissemination of findings

To be able to communicate the findings of this study to relevant professionals and policy makers, I must explore ways to disseminate such findings inclusive of publications and presentations.

### 6.5.1. Dissemination to education professionals

The findings of the present study will first be disseminated to the school in which the research was conducted and subsequent schools who have a percentage of children from military families within their demographics. It is my intention to share this information both verbally and in written communications.

I will produce a research report that summarises the findings of this study and my considerations for joint work with EPs. It is my intention to send this research report to the school in which the research was conducted, and based on their interest in the study, to the families who participated in the research. A draft example of this research report can be seen in Appendix O. This research report is in draft form as I recognise this thesis needs to be reviewed by the examiners and subjected to the viva process before I can produce a research report for dissemination.

Considering the dearth of literature for UK-based children from military families, it is my intention to disseminate the results of this research through publication, ideally on an open-access basis, to make it available to a wider audience. This publication is expected to be a journal article that outlines the results of the research and my considerations in practice, which I intend to publish in a journal for educational professionals.

Finally, regarding verbal dissemination of this research, I will deliver a presentation of my research findings and suggestions of implications for educational psychology practice for the local authority that provided my two-year part-time placement throughout my doctoral training and offer this in the local authority in which I have secured employment. Both these local authorities are within counties which have several military bases and thus schools who have children from military families in attendance. I would present in person to stimulate discussion for potential implementation in the local authority, and will provide a recorded version for

education professionals from other local authorities. I am scheduled to present to my former local authority EP service in a team development day scheduled for November 2023.

#### 6.5.2. Dissemination to Ministry of Defence

The MoD Education Support Fund granted funding in 2019 to the Service Children in State Schools National Executive Advisory Committee (SCISS NEAC) to consult schools to seek their views and experiences of Service pupils' education in England. It would be enlightening to dovetail the findings from the present study with those from the Voice of Schools survey conducted by the SCISS NEAC.

Additionally, the MoD launched a 10-year Families Strategy in January 2022 with one objective centring around Children's Education (objective 4): "Service children's opportunities are maximised through robust research, effective collaboration, and dissemination of best practice. This informs the wider policies and practice that underpins how the MOD and its partners support Service Children" (Ministry of Defence, 2022a, pg.3). Part of the focus for this UK Armed Forces Family Strategy 2022-32 is to provide direction to policy makers and working in partnership with cross-government departments such as the Department for Education, and at a local level with local authorities and public service providers in the field of education (Ministry of Defence, 2022b). It is therefore my intention to make my research report available to both the SCISS NEAC and the Armed Forces Steering Group who own the UK Armed Force Family Strategy 2022-32 and the Strategy's accompanying action plan. It is my hope that my research report will contribute to a national understanding of the educational experiences of a group of service children and thus contribute to future policy and practice.

#### 6.6. Suggestions for future research

The present study focuses on exploring the educational experiences of primary-aged children from Army families from the perspective of the children themselves. Findings from this study can be viewed through the psychological concept of belonging and the participants give insight into how to best foster their sense of belonging upon school transition. To date, the concept of belonging for children from military families has not yet been explored in any real depth and thus highlights an avenue for future research. Such research would be interesting to explore in schools close to a military base and those further away as findings from the present study indicate that the number of children from military families are an influencing factor in establishing a sense of belonging.



Linked to the above, it would be interesting to compare the educational experiences of children from military families educated in schools with greater and fewer children from military families and if there are differences in experiences. Alongside this, it would be interesting to explore how children's sense of belonging is impacted by the educational setting they attend and whether the number of children from military families being educated alongside them impacts their sense of belonging.

Finally, this study highlights a finding not mentioned in existing literature which centres around children from Army families being 'left behind' by their friends when educated in a school with a higher population of children from military families. It would be interesting to explore how children cope with this challenge and how their resilience is fostered to cope with such a challenging situation.

### 6.7. Summary of chapter and concluding comments

Within this study, I sought to understand the educational experiences of Army children, an underrepresented group in research and sometimes an invisible population in schools. I interpreted that for these children who were educated in a school alongside a high percentage of children from military families there was a sense of shared understanding and acceptance which helped to create a sense of normalcy within their educational experiences but also of the unique challenges of growing up within a military family. The participants in the study highlighted the importance of relationships with other children and with school staff and that these were influential within their educational experiences. The opportunity to explore and build new relationships upon relocation and school transition was deemed as a positive for this group of children whilst having to leave their friends, or having their friends leave them due to military directed mobility patterns, aroused feelings of sadness, grief, and frustration within these participants.

This study aims to build upon existing research in this topic area while also providing opportunities for future research to focus on the topic of educational experiences with a more limited scope, such as whether the education alongside greater or fewer children from military families influences belonging. This study also highlights implications for professional EP practice such as the importance of holding conversations with SENCOs about children from military families, upskilling school staffs' confidence in delivering social and emotional support to this group of children, and an avenue for training for schools to support staffs' understanding of the unique challenges of a military upbringing and how they impact upon educational experience. It is my overall hope that this research helps those working with children from

military families to hear their views and adapt their practice to support this group of children throughout their educational journeys.

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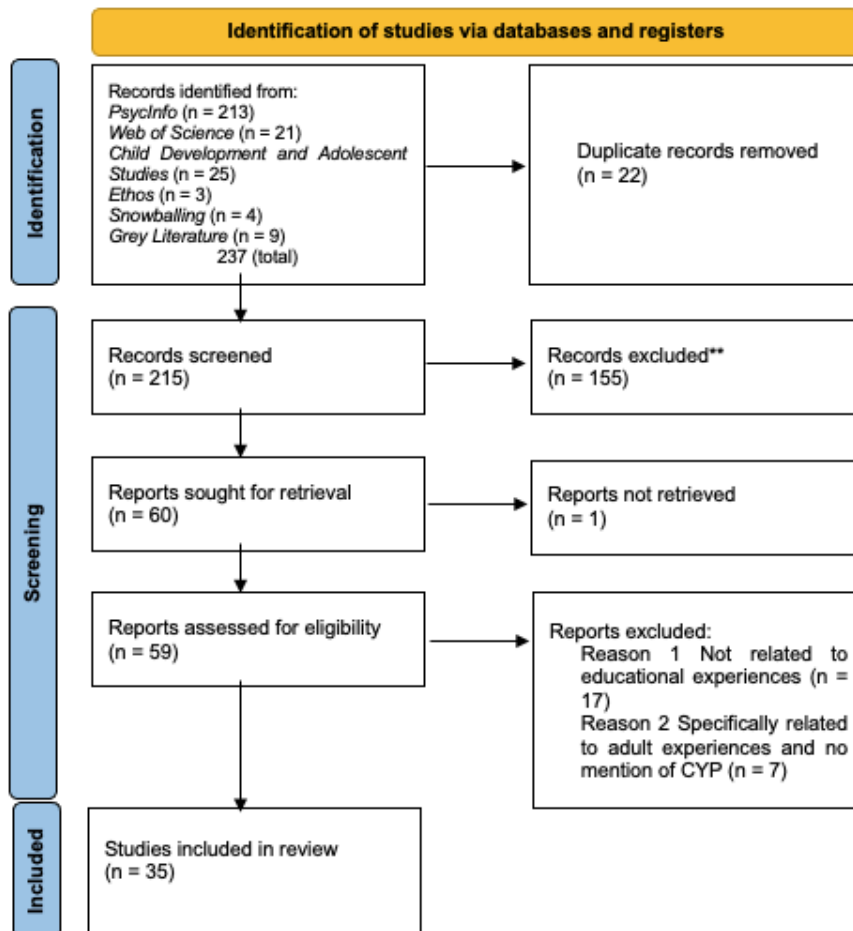
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## Appendices

### Appendix A – Procedure for literature search



From: Page MJ, McKenzie JE, Bossuyt PM, Boutron I, Hoffmann TC, Mulrow CD, et al. The PRISMA 2020 statement: an updated guideline for reporting systematic reviews. *BMJ* 2021;372:n71. doi: 10.1136/bmj.n71

For more information, visit: <http://www.prisma-statement.org/>

Database	Search Terms	Results Found	Refinement	Relevant Number
<b>Pyscnfo</b> All searches refined by years (2010 – current), all journals, peer reviewed journal.	<b>Search term 1</b> "armed force**" OR "armed service**" OR military	12303	Combined with search term 2	
	<b>Search term 2</b> educat* OR school*	1523	Combined with search term 3	
	<b>Search term 3</b> experience* OR view* OR perception*	528	Combined with search term 4	
	<b>Search term 4</b> child* OR adolescen* OR youth OR student* or pupil*	213	Papers remaining after reading title and abstract = 22  Papers remaining after removal of duplicates = 17  Read articles in full = 17	17
	<b>Search term 5</b> united kingdom or uk or britain or scotland or england, or wales or northern ireland.	14	Combined with all above search terms  Papers remaining after reading title and abstract = 0	

Database	Search Terms	Results Found	Refinement	Relevant Number
<b>Web of Science</b> All searches refined by years (2010 – current), title, article	<b>Search term 1</b> "armed force**" OR "armed service**" OR military	28,827	Combined with search term 2	
	<b>Search term 2</b> educat* OR school*	663	Combined with search term 3	
	<b>Search term 3</b> experience* OR view* OR perception*	26	Combined with search term 4	
	<b>Search term 4</b> child* OR adolescen* OR youth OR student* or pupil*	11	Papers remaining after reading title and abstract = 3  Papers remaining after removal of duplicates = 2  Read articles in full = 1	1
	<b>Search term 5</b> united kingdom or uk or britain or scotland or england, or wales or northern ireland.	0	Combined with all above search terms  <i>Yarwood, 2021 is identified as a UK-based piece of research found when combining terms 1-4</i>	

Database	Search Terms	Results Found	Refinement	Relevant Number
<b>Child Development and Adolescent Studies</b> All searches refined by years (2010 – current), title, article	<b>Search term 1</b> "armed force**" OR "armed service**" OR military	311	Combined with search term 2	
	<b>Search term 2</b> educat* OR school*	27	Combined with search term 3	
	<b>Search term 3</b> experience* OR view* OR perception*	4	Combined with search term 4	
	<b>Search term 4</b> child* OR adolescen* OR youth OR student* or pupil*	4	Papers remaining after reading title and abstract = 2  Papers remaining after removal of duplicates = 2  Inaccessible paper = 1  Read articles in full = 1	1
	<b>Search term 5</b> united kingdom or uk or britain or scotland or england or wales or northern ireland.	0	Combined with all above search terms  <i>Rexon, 2018 is identified as a UK-based piece of research found when combining terms 1-4</i>	

## Appendix B – Extract of table of literature

Author	Year	Title	Journal	Methodology	Participants	Nation	Background or main body	Key Points	Implications for Thesis	Critique
Arnold, Garner & Nunnery	2014	Understanding teaching and learning with military students in public school contexts	Children & Schools	Focus groups with 55 elementary school teachers	Teachers	USA		Discussed important of teacher-student and peer connections in the classroom, strategies for a safe and predictable classroom, and consideration to the behavioural context of military students	Link with school connectedness/sense of belonging and the adult role in this; implicatio for EPs = training for school staff	Literature focusing on adult-reports and missing YP voice
Aronson & Perkins	2013	Challenges faced by military families: Perceptions of United States Marine Corps school liaisons	Journal of Child and Family Studies	Telephone survey of 20 school liaisons	School Staff	USA		Most frequent & severe youth problems = school transitions; most frequent & severe family problem = overwhelm.	Negative implications of a military upbringing section of lit review.	S'ls in this study will be involved with military families who require help thus their answers reflect this; adults may overstate the challenges that children face or be biased in terms of what parents choose to disclose
Aronson, K. R., Caldwell, L. L., Perkins, D. F., & Pasch, K. W.	2011	Assisting children and families with military-related disruptions: The United States Marine Corps school liaison program	Psychology in the Schools	Telephone survey of 20 school liaisons	School Staff	USA	DELETE	DELETE	DELETE	DELETE
Astor, R. A., & Benbenishty, R.	2014	Supporting military-connected students: The role of school social work.	Children & Schools	Editorial	Editorial	USA	DELETE	DELETE	DELETE	DELETE
Astor, R. A., De Pedro, K. T., Gilmore, T. D., Edwards, M.		The promotional role of school and community contexts for	Clinical child and family psychology	Overview of theoretical and empirical	Overview of theoretical and empirical			sense of belonging, safety, and respect for a student's family background played		

## CASP example

**Paper for appraisal and reference: Bradshaw, C. P., Sudhinaraset, M., Mmari, K., & Blum, R. W. (2010). School transitions among military adolescents: A qualitative study of stress and coping.**

**Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research? YES**

Bradshaw et al. (2010) asserts their study addresses a gap in the literature: "most of the extant research has been conducted during peacetime, and thus may not generalize to today's mobile military students, whose parents are facing deployment at increasing rates" (p.84). It is important to recognise there may have also been additional underlying motivations for this of research.

**Is a qualitative methodology appropriate? YES**

A qualitative methodology was appropriate as the authors wanted to understand the transition-related stressors experienced by students, what efforts the students employed to help students with stress, and to identify strategies that schools can use to ease the transition process for these students.

**Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research? YES**

Separate focus groups with children, parents and school staff were appropriate to consider the transitional experiences amongst children from military families to gain multiple perspectives on student experience.

**Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research? UNSURE**

Participants were recruited across five states in America by a staff member at each of the military bases who had strong connections with military families. Such a recruitment strategy could have meant this staff member approached particular participants whom they believed would have strong views regarding transitions and thus could have resulted in participant bias.

**Was the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue? YES**

Focus groups were held to provide "a more detailed and in-depth description of the participants opinions and perceptions" (pg. 88). Focus group were chosen over individual interviews due to the study's focus on phenomenology of military-related school transitions from differing perspectives.

**Has the relationships between researcher and participants been adequately considered?**

**UNSURE**

Facilitators and note-takers, who held doctorates or master's degrees in public health or mental health, participated in two-day training sessions to receive advanced training on focus group techniques and rehearse the focus group guide. It is unclear who provided such training, and whether it came from the authors themselves. It is unclear whether these facilitators and note-takers had their own military affiliations or how they registered their interest in being involved within the research study.

**Have ethical issues been taken into consideration? YES**

Additional training provided to note-takers/facilitator to identify and respond to mental health concerns should they arise in interviews.

**Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous? YES**

Qualitative data was analysed using Atlas.ti software and followed a phenomenological approach. Data was coded by graduate research assistants independently and compared between the assistants; this was then reviewed by the lead qualitative investigator.

**Is there a clear statement of findings? YES**

Findings adequately discussed under theme headings and into three sections to address the three aims of the research. Clear evidence of verbatim interview quotes and how they relate to theme names.

**How valuable is the research? YES**

Clear implications sections for EPs (titled: Implications for School Psychologists). Outlined future directions for research based around further qualitative studies with child participants. Contributed to an understanding of views of children from military families and their experiences of school transitions.

Appendix C – Papers included in the literature review

<b>Study</b>	<b>Publication type</b>	<b>Country of investigation</b>	<b>Methodology</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Key Points</b>
Arnold et al., (2014)	Journal article	USA	Focus groups	55 elementary school teachers	Discussed important of teacher-student and peer connections in the classroom, strategies for a safe and predictable classroom, and consideration to the behavioural context of military students
Aronson & Perkins, (2013)	Journal article	USA	Telephone survey	20 school liaisons (school staff)	Most frequent & severe youth problems comes from school transitions; most frequent & severe family problem comes from overwhelm.
Berkowitz et al., (2014)	Journal article	USA	Quantitative – survey	3914 parents	School problems (parents of children from military families saw less than civilian parents); more negative assessment of school climate; feel a need for services; varying satisfaction
Bradshaw et al., (2010)	Journal article	USA	Focus groups	Military students (11-13), parents & school staff	Prevalent stressors: tensions at home, strained relationships with peers, adapting to new school environment, academic challenged, student/teacher relationships, and involvement in extra-curricular activities

Brady et al., (2013)	Report	UK	Web-based questionnaire	1000 Armed Forces personnel and their families	five main issues of concern to respondents. These were around: differences between schools, difficulties with obtaining school places for their children; the emotional and social impact of moving; the decision to send children to private or boarding schools; and a perceived lack of understanding and support from schools.
Chandra et al., (2010a)	Journal article	USA	Telephone interview	Military children (11- 17) and non- deployed caregivers	Difficulties during deployment: older children had a greater number of difficulties, girls report more challenges, military housing was a protective factor, caregiver mental health impacts experiences, older children had more challenges with parental reintegration
Chandra et al., (2010b)	Journal article	USA	Focus groups and semi- structured interviews	Teachers, counsellors, admin staff	Parental deployments affect children functioning at school; students lose resiliency as deployment continues; schools providing SEMH support for children



Children's Commissioner (2018)	Report	UK	Interviews	40 children (8-15)	The report looks at issues related to mobility, deployment & support. Children shared that the most significant life event was relocating schools and the anxiety this brings. However, when experiencing this as a group it was beneficial for children.
Clifton (2007)	Thesis	UK	Observation and interviews	4 Year 8 students	Participants seemed to normalise their frequent house and school moves but commented on having difficulties with curriculum content due to mobility patterns. Students felt that peers did not understand the unique lifestyle of growing up within an Army family,
Culler et al., (2019)	Journal article	USA	Interviews	79 military spouses	Discussed the importance of school climates, from the perception of parents, as being a protective factor for military children; parent did not want their children labelled or isolated through attending school support programs related to parental deployment.
De Pedro et al., (2011)	Overview of literature	USA	Overview of literature	82 peer-reviewed articles	Mental health around deployment, parental separation, stress of left-behind

					family and parent : An analysis of existing research generated research themes that can be categorized into four bodies of literature: mental health, child maltreatment, military-specific life events (deployment, reintegration, and war-related trauma), and the experiences of Reservist and National Guard families.
De Pedro et al., (2014a)	Journal article	USA	Survey	129 school admin staff	Information on how training links to improving school climate & background info on deployment
De Pedro et al., (2014b)	Journal article	USA	Interviews	31 district, school and community stake holders	Good rationale: previous work focused on stress of left-behind parents; shifts in household roles and responsibilities; lack of military-specific social supports for reservists; and impact of mobility and transitions: not the needs of children in school contexts
De Pedro et al., (2016)	Journal article	USA	Survey	14,973 responses from 7 <sup>th</sup> , 9 <sup>th</sup> and 11 <sup>th</sup> grade students	School climate is a protective factor. Caring relationships important. School adult support leads to lower levels of physical and non-physical peer victimisation.

De Pedro et al., (2018)	Journal article	USA	Survey	14,493 responses from 7 <sup>th</sup> , 9 <sup>th</sup> and 11 <sup>th</sup> grade students	A higher degree of meaningful, and caring, relationships leads to high well-being; feeling safe leads to higher likelihood of well-being & lower odds of depressive symptoms and suicidal ideation.
Garner et al., (2014)	Journal article	USA	Focus groups	67 principals, teachers, and school counsellors	Risks for children: academic support, social-emotional support, school records and placement, recognition of culture, multiagency support
Hall et al., (2022)	Overview of literature	UK	Overview of literature	70 papers	Four broad themes from analysis – (i) the impact of deployment of the serving person; (ii) the consequences of family separation; (iii) family mobility; and (iv) organisation of schooling
Hayllar (2018)	Thesis	UK	Semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis	8 children (7-11)	Children from across Army and RAF, described a lack of understanding from peers as their parents were home more often in comparison: feeling they could not relate to peers at times because of this. Children sharing they missed/repeated curriculum content.

Lucier-Green et al., (2015)	Journal article	USA	Surveys	1036 adolescents from military families (11-18)	The importance of relationships as protective factors for YP; recognise this group of children have the same stressors of children of the same age with the additional challenges of growing up within a military family.
Macdonald & Boon (2018)	Journal article	Australia	Semi-structured interviews	15 parents, 17 teachers, 15 defence school transition aides	Summarises studies (De Pedro etc) - information on relationships, school climates, and peer relationships in supporting YP with deployment; Note - Australia & USA have designated staff members to support military children
Masten (2013a)	Afterword from an issue of <i>Future of Children</i>	USA	Afterword	Afterword	A sense of belonging to military culture may play a role in the resilience of children from military families; outlining how this can be impactful for other families; outlines how a resilience framework has advantages for understanding and promoting success in military families and organisations.
Mmari et al., (2010)	Journal article	USA	Focus groups	39 military adolescents (12-18 years old), 24	Impact of moves on peer connections; living on base is positive; being a 'military brat'; friendships sought between children

				parents and 35 school staff	from military families – having a shared sense of experience/understanding
O'Neal et al., (2022)	Journal article	USA	Computer survey	821 military adolescents (11-18)	Relocations not associate with social support (all immediate family members move with the young person so no loss of social support); social support and mental health matter for school success
Ofsted (2011)	Report	UK	Interviews	Children, parents, governors, school staff and associated professionals from military and civilian background	Do not perform as well as civilian peers; susceptible to SEMH disturbance; children from military families told inspectors they do not like frequent school changes & found it hard to make friends
Pexton et al., (2018)	Journal article	UK	Self-completed questionnaires	52 children (8-11 years)	High levels of anxiety accounted for by rating of separation anxiety and somatic symptoms. Children's ratings of anxiety symptoms higher than civilians. Younger children rated higher levels of anxiety than older children (8/9years vs. 10/11 years),
Potts (2021)	Thesis	UK	Semi-structured interviews	7 children (11-16)	Easily relate to other children from military families as felt others did not understand

					their experiences which lead to feelings of frustration.
Richardson et al (2011)	Journal article	USA	Focus groups and interviews	132 Administrators, teachers and counsellors.	Challenges that children face when parents deploy: academic, and psychological and behavioural health. Teachers had little consistent information on which students were within military families.
Royal British Legion (2018)	Report	UK	A guide for those interested in improving the provision of education to Service children in state-maintained schools.		Advice for schools, LAs, service families, government. Outlined the following best practice examples: Military Kids Club (MKC), Reading Force, Girls on a Mission, Veritas Primary Academy (and more)
Ruff & Keim (2014)	Overview of literature	USA	Overview of literature	No outline of procedure for gathering papers	Stressors: transitional barriers; slow transfer of records; difference in curricula; adapting to new environments; making friends; limited access to extracurricular activities; public school staff lack understanding of military culture; tension at home and parental deployment
Skomorovsky & Bullock	Journal article	Canada	Focus groups	86 children (8-13)	Information around deployment: coping mechanisms, feeling sense of difference

(2017)					& pride with a parent in the military; self-identified decreased academic performance
St John & Fenning (2020)	Overview of literature	USA	Overview of literature	No outline of procedure for gathering papers	No outline for procedure for gathering papers; Highlights that schools need to be aware of the deployment cycle, the importance of teachers being educated in military-related issues, the importance of families being included in support
Stites (2016)	Journal article	USA	Survey	63 teachers (Reception to Year 3)	Teachers perceptions: no difference in behaviour between military and civilian children; need support in school, at home, and socially; frequent geographical moves and parental separation had adverse effects
Yarwood et al., (2021)	Journal article	UK	Observation, focus group with children, and semi-structured interviews	15 children (11-18)	Lots on school - children feel needs not fully understood by staff; staff feel more training was needed on the cycle of deployment; children commented they felt different but did not want to be treated differently, particularly in school spaces.

Appendix D -Theming of literature



<b><i>A Distinctive Group</i></b>		
<b><i>Reference</i></b>	<b><i>Sample</i></b>	<b><i>Key Findings</i></b>
Bradshaw et al., 2010	Focus groups with <del>students</del> students from military families, parents, and school staff across eight different military bases in America	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- More adaptable and experience accelerated maturation</li> <li>- Students reported that they felt they were more equipped to handle transitions and other types of challenges compared to nonmilitary students</li> <li>- across all <u>parent</u>, staff, and student focus groups, there was great consensus about the military students' appreciation and acceptance of diversity</li> <li>- It was reported in all <u>parent</u>, staff, and student focus groups that military students were perceived as being more "mature" than civilian students. This suggests that the process of moving and adapting to the new environment may make some military students more self-sufficient or mature.</li> </ul>
Children's Commissioner	Interviews with 40 CYP (aged 8-15)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The all- encompassing character of a military lifestyle means service children can experience 'growing-up' quite differently from their peers</li> <li>- a keen awareness that being part of an Armed Forces family made service children different to other children. A mobile lifestyle and periods of parental deployment meant service children experienced an unusual childhood compared to their non-service peers.</li> </ul> <p><u>Theme: Identity</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The all-encompassing manner of their parent's job meant that many of the service children we spoke to had developed a sense of identity based significantly on their experience in an Armed Forces family.</li> <li>- <u>The majority</u> of children that took part in our research, revealed a remarkable degree of knowledge and awareness about their parent's jobs and position in the Forces. They were well-informed members of the Armed Forces community. This was even true of the very youngest children we spoke to.</li> </ul>
Culler et al., 2019	Interviews with 79 American Military spouses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Spouses acknowledge needs for additional services but also report concerns about stigmatizing or isolating a student based on his or her military connection.</li> </ul>
De Pedro et al., 2014a	Survey of 129 American school admin staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- students from military families should not be viewed as a distinct group</li> <li>- should be evaluated individually and referred to school programs and resources for appropriate and individualised programmes</li> </ul>
De Pedro et al., 2014b	Interviews with 31 American District, <u>school</u> and community stakeholders	<p>Theme #1: Military-Connected Students Have Unique Challenges and Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- participants described the military-connected student population with unique needs, issues, and challenges that are related to military-specific life events</li> <li>- unique stressors differing from their nonmilitary-connected peers</li> <li>- Perceived stigma surrounding help <u>seeking</u>: military-connected students and families do not want to be singled out or feel as if they are dependent on services and/or the assistance from others. Sociocultural norms of military families might, in part, explain their aversion to seeking help</li> </ul>
<del>Hayllar</del> Hayllar, 2018	Thesis – interviews with 8 children aged 7-11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Subthemes 1c, 1d and 1e all relate to notions of settling and stability. The participants yearned for greater stability and security in their home and educational <u>placements, and</u> look forward to a time when their fathers will leave the military and they can settle in one place, suggesting that frequent relocations can threaten a MCC's sense of belonging.</li> </ul>
Potts, 2021	Thesis – interviews with 7 children aged 11- 16	<p>Theme #1: Searching to Belong</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Some participants <u>made reference</u> to how sharing commonalities with other service CYP helped them to feel a sense of belonging at school.</li> </ul>



		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- a new pupil to not wanting to draw attention to herself. This could suggest that Alice feels this social camouflage is a good coping strategy to defend against difficult feelings associated with being a new pupil</li> </ul> <p>Theme #2: Establishing a Sense of Self</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Jack, Tom, George and Ava all reflected upon their experiences of starting a new school and spoke about the need to show others who they are whilst re-establishing their own sense of identity.</li> <li>- Tom highlighted the curiosity of his peers and also implied that he would feel the need to answer questions about who he was and why he had started school in that area. This suggests that Tom would need to reflect upon who he was and why he had moved every time he was questioned.</li> <li>- These participants also spoke of how they view themselves and expressed how they have attributed aspects of who they are to military culture.</li> <li>- Although findings from the current study highlighted the difficulties faced in relation to developing an identity within a new school and as a learner, participants also expressed the positives they associate with being part of a military family. These participants spoke of how they see themselves as service CYP and how the military lifestyle has shaped their sense of self including allowing them to become sociable, adaptable and responsible people.</li> </ul>
Skomorovsky & Bullock, 2017	Focus groups with children aged 8-13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Feeling different. Many children mentioned that they felt different from children whose parents are not in the military. The main sources of this feeling were as follows: (a) other children cannot relate when their parents never leave for long period of time and cannot understand how it makes children feel when a parent is away; (b) other children do not have a good understanding of what the military is or have a skewed perception of it and can be insensitive in asking questions about the military.</li> </ul>
Stites, 2016	Survey of 63 American Teachers of 3- to 8-year-olds	<p>Differences noted between children from military families and general population:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Less stability in home</i></li> <li>- <i>Worldlier</i></li> <li>- <i>More adaptable</i></li> </ul>
Yarwood, 2021	Interviews with 15 CYP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- For the most part, children commented that they felt different because they were in a service family but they did not want to be treated differently, particularly in school spaces.</li> <li>- schools were sites where difference was felt most keenly, with many children saying that staff and other students did not understand their situation.</li> </ul>

## Appendix E – Sample transcript

I: First job is, pick a colour.

F: I'm going to pick my favourite.

I: What's your favourite?

F: Purple.

I: That's my favourite colour too!

F: Everyone's favourite colour is purple! Including my friend.

I: Is it? So I'd like you to use your purple to pick a blob that shows how you feel about school. So you can circle or colour it in. Which one shows how you feel about school?

F: This.

I: Perfect, and why did you pick that one?

F: Because I feel happy when I go to school cos I get to spend time with my friends, get to learn a lot and I get to spend time with my friends that don't live here like my friend [child's name] because he lives in [neighbouring town] so I can't see him that much because I live in [village name].

I: Ahh I see. So do you have some of your friends that live really close to you in [village name]?

F: Yes some of them. I have got a friend who is a school councillor, his name is [child's name] and he lives on my street.

I: Oh so [child's name] lives on your street? So there are some people who live on your street and there are some people who...

F: Live in [town name] and [town name] and stuff.

I: Okay, so there are some people who live on your street and some people who live a bit further away, I see. So what are some of the good things about school because you've picked a really happy one there?

Appendix F – Group, Personal and Experiential Themes

Theme			Participant			
Group Experiential Theme	Personal Experiential Theme	Experiential Statements	Arlo	Charlie	Eden	Faye
"It's like the same like every kid": sameness of school experience		Value of an education	X	X	X	X
		Sameness of educational experience	X	X	X	X
Making sense of unique military lifestyle challenges and their effect on educational experiences	Experiencing moving together as a military family	Knowledge that father's job is the cause of relocation	X	X	X	X
	Going away and coming back eventually: deployment and school-based support	Absence of father	X	X	X	X
		Emotional support in school during deployment		X		X
Leaving, being left and feeling left out	Anxieties of new friendships and being left out	Worried about bullies	X	X		X
		Worried about being different to peers			X	X
		Scared about making new friends	X	X	X	X
	"They've gone and you can't find them": Sadness, grief and frustration at leaving and starting over	Frequency of friends relocating	X			X
		Having to leave friends behind	X		X	X
		Sadness at moving away from friends	X	X	X	X
Seeking and securing connection: the positives of school relocation	Connection and kindness from staff	Importance of kind staff	X			X
	Feeling welcomed and accepted	Friends helping during transition	X	X	X	X
	The positiveness of seeking new friendships	Excitement towards making new friends	X		X	X

## Response from the SPS REC

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Dear Jess

*A qualitative exploration into the educational experiences of primary-aged children from military families (SPSREC2122237)*

Thank you for responding so fully to the SPS REC comments regarding the project above.

The committee has now given ethical approval to your research. Your research can now be conducted in accordance with the application and additional responses the committee has reviewed.

If you require a formal letter of approval, please contact Hannah Blackman.

Please do let me know if your project changes, you may need an amendment to your ethical approval. If this is the case, please email me, via the sps-ethics mailbox, including the following information:

- The title and reference number of your application
- The reason for the amendment
- The proposed change to the methods
- Any ethical considerations related to the proposed change in methods

We hope your research goes really well.

With very best wishes.

Beth Tarleton  
On behalf of the SPS REC

## School for Policy Studies



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Bristol BS8 1TZ  
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[bristol.ac.uk/sps](http://bristol.ac.uk/sps)

16 May 2022

Dear Mrs. XXX

### **Re. Research project on the educational experiences of primary-aged children from military families.**

My name is Jess, and I am in my second year of training on the Educational Psychology Doctorate at the University of Bristol. I am currently completing a two year placement with XXXX Educational Psychology Service. As part of my doctoral training I am conducting a research thesis on the educational experiences of primary-aged children from military families which is due to be completed in September 2023. The project has been approved by The University of Bristol Ethics Committee (School of Policy Studies).

I would like to invite some caregivers and their children from your school to take part in my study through one to one interviews. I would appreciate it if you could take the time to read the information below:

#### **Research Aims and Objectives**

Being a military child myself and with a partner currently serving in the military, I am interested in exploring how the experience of having a caregiver in the military may impact on the school experiences of children from military families. I hope to hear and represent these children's voices and to explore what kind of support they would like to receive in school. Currently, there is a dearth of research exploring the views of children from military families based in the United Kingdom: there is a growing body of research, however, considering the views of military children in the United States and the views of their caregivers and teachers. Much of this literature focuses specifically on military adolescent's experiences of deployment, mobility and separation, with very little published research exploring their educational experiences through collecting children's views directly.

In order to explore this topic, I am looking to speak to four to six pupils in years three to six who have a caregiver currently serving in the military. I hope to interview caregivers of the children first to gain an understanding of their educational journey inclusive of school and house moves. Following this, I would like to interview the pupils for up to 60 minutes.

This research aims to help us to understand military children's experiences of education and how to best support them in their educational journeys.

#### **What will be required of you?**

After reading this information sheet, I will telephone your school next week to discuss this further and answer any questions you may have.

If you feel you have a population of military children who would be suitable for this research, and you would be willing, I would kindly ask for information to be shared with their caregivers. I will send information packs to the school for caregivers in the military/with a military spouse which contains information sheets for caregivers and children, consent forms and pre-addressed and stamped envelopes for the return of the consent forms to myself. Contact will

remain between myself and the caregivers until the time of child interview where you and I would need to liaise to find a mutually convenient time to conduct these interviews within the school building. One child from year groups three to six, whose caregivers have consented to the study, will be selected to participate in the research.

**What will the participants be expected to do?**

I will have met with the caregivers prior to my involvement with the child participants and we will have discussed the child's educational journey inclusive of any change of schooling, if relevant. The child participants will be asked to meet with me for up to 60 minutes. I will plan a number of child-friendly activities, informed by caregiver's knowledge of their child's interests, in order to gather the children's views in an enjoyable way such as colouring, drawing, playing games and visuals.

**Can participants withdraw from the study?**

Participation in this research is completely voluntary and participants will have the right to withdraw their involvement and their data at any time without having to give a reason. Caregivers will have my contact details to be able to remove themselves and their child from my data. However, once the data has been anonymised and pseudonyms have been applied to the data, it may not be possible to withdraw the participant data. The data will be anonymised by December 2022. The children's well-being and ongoing consent will be monitored through their responses and body language. I will check regularly whether the child wishes to continue the interview and they will be provided with a visual cue to stop the interview should they so wish.

**How will the information collected be kept safe and confidential?**

Participants will be given pseudonyms and these will be used throughout the research to ensure anonymity. If given during the interview, names of schools and military bases will be given pseudonyms to ensure anonymity. The interviews will be recorded using an encrypted device, saved to a secure server and transcribed by the researcher before all recordings are deleted. All data collected will be treated with confidentiality, however, information which pupils disclose which puts themselves or others at risk of harm will be shared with the school's designated safeguarding lead in line with your safeguarding policy. With caregiver permission, data will be archived anonymously for 20 years.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information. If you have any further questions or would like to express your interest please do not hesitate to contact me via email: [jess.lovett@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:jess.lovett@bristol.ac.uk)

If you wish to ask further questions about the research to someone other than the researcher herself, or you would like to make a complaint, please contact the research supervisor, Sandra Dowling: [s.dowling@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:s.dowling@bristol.ac.uk)

Yours Sincerely,

Jess Lovett  
Educational Psychologist in training

## Research study re. educational experiences of primary-aged military children

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Research study re. educational experiences of primary-aged military children

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Dear parents and carers,

My name is Jess and I am studying an Educational Psychology Doctorate at the University of Bristol. I am completing a research project titled **the educational experiences of primary-aged military children from military families**. I would like to speak to children in key stage two and their parents.

I will interview parents to discuss their child's educational journey and key events during these times, and complete some activities with the child in school to explore their experiences of education. As the research with children won't begin until the new academic year, this email has been sent to parents in Years 2 – 5.

If you would like to register your interest in this study, please email me ([jess.lovett@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:jess.lovett@bristol.ac.uk)) with your name and your child's current year group by **Friday 17<sup>th</sup> June**. I will then be in touch with more information on the study.

Many thanks for taking the time to read this information,

Jess Lovett  
[jess.lovett@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:jess.lovett@bristol.ac.uk)



## **School for Policy Studies**

8 Priory Road  
Bristol BS8 1TZ  
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[bristol.ac.uk/sps](http://bristol.ac.uk/sps)

20 June 2022

Dear Parent/Carer,

### **Re. Research project on the educational experiences of primary-aged children from military families.**

My name is Jess, and I am in my second year of training on the Educational Psychology Doctorate at the University of Bristol. I am currently completing a two year placement with XXXX Educational Psychology Service. As part of my doctoral training I am conducting a research thesis which is due to be completed in September 2023. This research has been approved by The University Bristol Ethics Committee (SPS REC) and I have an enhanced DBB check that allows me to work with children and young people.

You are receiving this letter because you have emailed me and registered your interest in the study. I would appreciate it if you would take the time to read the information below regarding the research and yourself and your child's potential involvement.

#### **Purpose of research and potential benefits**

Being a military child myself and having a partner within the military, I am interested in finding out how the experience of having a parent in the military impacts on the school experiences of children from military families. I hope to hear and represent these children's voices and to explore what kind of support they would like to receive in school as currently there is a lack of research exploring the views of children from military families based in the UK.

This research aims to help us to understand military children's experiences of education and how to best support them in their educational journeys.



**What will be required of you if you agree to take part?**

This study would require a one to one telephone interview lasting for up to an hour between yourself as a parent and myself in which we would discuss your child's educational journey and key events during these times. Following this, if your child wants to take part and gives their assent, I would meet with your child in school to complete some activities with them to explore their experiences of their education.

If you express interest in taking part in this study, please complete the consent form found within this information pack, and ask your child to complete the child consent form. These forms can be returned to myself by posting the pre-addressed and stamped envelope containing the consent forms. Yours and your child's consent will also be verbally checked and gained at the start of the interview. You have also been sent an electronic copy of this information with a link to an online consent form: <https://forms.office.com/r/vZSEJYs2mv>

Following gaining consent, I would like to arrange a telephone call with yourself to discuss your child's experiences of schooling including change of schools and/or location. We would create a timeline together which I would take with me when meeting with your child to support our work together. Your child would be asked to take part in a face-to-face interview with myself at school for up to 60 minutes. As well as taking our co-constructed timeline to meet with your child, I will ask you about your child's interests and channel these in my work with your child by using a number of child-friendly activities in order to gather your child's views in an enjoyable way during our meeting.

**How will the information collected be kept safe and confidential?**

The children, and yourself, will be given pseudonyms and these will be used throughout the research to ensure anonymity. The interviews will be recorded, saved to a secure server and transcribed by the myself and then all recordings will be deleted. All data collected will be treated with confidentiality, unless someone is at risk of serious harm. Such information will be shared with the school's designated safeguarding lead in line with their safeguarding policy. With your permission, data will be archived anonymously for 20 years.

**Withdrawal from this study**

Participation in this research is completely voluntary and yourself and your child have the right to withdraw your involvement and your data without having to give a reason. However, once

the data has been anonymised and pseudonyms have been applied to the data, it may not be possible to withdraw the participant data. The data will be anonymised by December 2022.

**What do I do now?**

Thank you for taking the time to read through this information. If you are happy for child to take part in the study, please can I ask that you share the accompanying information sheet with them and ask if they would be happy to help me in my research. If they are willing, please complete the two consent forms within this information pack and post

(using the pre-addressed and stamped envelope, or the online form: <https://forms.office.com/r/vZSEJYs2m/>) by **4<sup>th</sup> July 2022**.

If you are selected for this study, I will be in touch by **8<sup>th</sup> July 2022** to arrange a telephone call with yourself to create a shared timeline and answer any questions you may have.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information. If you have any further questions or would like to express your interest please do not hesitate to contact me via email: [jess.lovett@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:jess.lovett@bristol.ac.uk)

If you wish to ask further questions about the research to someone other than the researcher herself, or you would like to make a complaint, please contact the research supervisor, Sandra Dowling: [s.dowling@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:s.dowling@bristol.ac.uk)

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Kind Regards

Jess Lovett  
Educational Psychologist in training

## Informed Consent for 'The educational experiences of primary-aged children from military families'.

Research being carried out by Jess Lovett, University of Bristol.

Please return this form, and the child consent form, by placing them in the addressed and stamped envelope and posting them. Please return by **July 4<sup>th</sup> 2022**. For more information please contact myself: Jess Lovett [jess.lovett@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:jess.lovett@bristol.ac.uk) My research supervisor can also be contacted for more information, or to make a complaint: Dr Sandra Dowling [s.dowling@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:s.dowling@bristol.ac.uk)

Please tick the appropriate boxes

Yes No

### 1. Taking part in the study

I have read and understood the study information dated **20/06/2022**, or it has been read to me. I have been able to ask questions about the study and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.  Yes  No

I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study and understand that I can refuse to answer questions and I can withdraw from the study at any time, without having to give a reason.  Yes  No

I understand that taking part in the study involves a telephone interview for up to one hour between myself as a parent and the research to discuss my child's educational journey and key events during this time. Following this, if my child is willing to participate, the researcher will meet with them in school completing some activities with them to explore their experiences of their education. This work with my child will be recorded, transcribed and anonymised for use in the research project.  Yes  No

### 2. Use of the information in the study

I understand that information I provide will be used for the research project.  Yes  No

I understand that personal information collected about me that can identify me, such as my name or where I live, will not be shared beyond the researcher.  Yes  No

I agree that my information can be quoted in research outputs. This information will be anonymised so that I will not be made identifiable.  Yes  No

**1. Future use and reuse of the information by others**

I give permission for the telephone interview data about my child's educational experiences that I provide to be deposited in [data.bris](http://data.bris). There will be closed access to this data so that it cannot be used in future by other researchers.

**2. Signatures**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of participant [IN CAPITALS]      Signature      Date

I have accurately read out the information sheet to the potential participant and, to the best of my ability, ensured that the participant understands to what they are freely consenting.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of participant [IN CAPITALS]      Signature      Date

**3. Study contact details for further information**

Please provide contact details for me to contact you to arrange a telephone interview

\_\_\_\_\_  
Telephone number      Email address

Please provide the name of your child/ren below for their participation in this research study.

Name of child	Year group	Date of birth	Gender
---------------	------------	---------------	--------



Name of child	Year group	Date of birth	Gender
---------------	------------	---------------	--------

Name of child	Year group	Date of birth	Gender
---------------	------------	---------------	--------

Name of child	Year group	Date of birth	Gender
---------------	------------	---------------	--------

**Child consent form**

<b>My Name</b>	
<b>My Year Group</b>	
<b>Today's Date</b>	

	<b>Please tick one</b>	
		
I have read the information sheet (or it has been read to me).		
I know it is my choice to take part and I can change my mind if I want to. If I change my mind after talking to Jess, I can ask her to get rid of my information.		
I understand that everything I say to Jess is safe. If I share something which Jess thinks is unsafe, she will tell an adult.		
I am happy to talk with Jess and be recorded.		
I understand that Jess will not use my name in her reports.		

## Child information sheet



Hi!



My name is Jess, I am a student researcher.



If you are happy to, I would like to talk with you and do some activities on your views of school. You can stop our chat if you want to.



When we meet, I will record our chat.



I also might write down some notes.



If you agree to chat, I will keep what you say safe.



I will not use your name unless you say something that I think makes you unsafe and then I might need to share what you have said with someone at school.



If you change your mind and do not want me to keep your information, you can say. However, as I will be making the information top secret, I might not be able to tell which information is yours to get rid of.



I look forward to meeting you soon!



Jess  
|

### **Interview Schedule**

1. Problem-free talk about self/school/family e.g. what's your favourite colour, what pets do you have, what is your favourite thing to do etc.
2. Tell me 3 important things about yourself.
3. Tell me about what school is like for you.
  - a. What are the best parts about school?
  - b. What does your school do to help you?
  - c. Is there anything that school could do to help you more?
4. Have you ever moved school? Tell me about that.
  - a. What was that like for you?
  - b. How did you feel?
  - c. Are there good things about moving schools? What are they?
  - d. Are there bad things about moving schools? What are they?
  - e. Tell me about your friends at X [previous] school
  - f. Was there anyone at the new school who helped you? What did they do?
  - g. How was it making friends at the new school? Did you know anybody at this school?
  - h. Were these schools different? How?
5. Tell me what it is like having a parent in the military
  - a. Good things?
  - b. Bad things? Does your school help you with any of these?
  - c. Have you ever been to a school on a military base? What was that like?
6. Does having a parent in the military mean school looks different for some children? How?
7. Is there anything else that we haven't spoken about to do with your school experiences that you would like to talk about?



**Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2022**

Today was the first interview that I held with Eden (pseudonym) for my thesis. I was pleased with my setting up surrounding the interview whereby I emailed Eden's mum earlier in the week to let her know that I would be going in to meet with Eden, in case she wanted to prepare her for my visit or if Eden came home with any questions. I felt this was important as although I am interested in hearing the lived experiences of Eden's educational experiences, her mum acted as a gatekeeper within the recruitment process and thus I felt it ethical to send her an email.

Eden was out for PE when I arrived for the interview and the informal chat from the playground to the library was good for rapport building and allowed me to hear about Eden's pets at home. I also felt that playing Dobble, which I brought along with me, helped to build a relationship with Eden and support our interview. My reflection on using the Blob Tree and Bear Cards is that I think it helped to make the interview less daunting for Eden as it involved child-friendly tools to support voice elicitation (much like we do in our roles as T/EPs). Eden enjoyed picking her own three bear cards to represent a range of emotions from good to bad, and having the autonomy to choose the colour for the Blob Tree Activity.

For Eden, I feel that the tools outlined above were very important in supporting Eden with her answers to my questions. I felt that she was answering my questions with one word answers and needed support and further questioning to explore her responses in more depth. I feel that if there were no activities planned for rapport building, no problem-free talk questions, and no additional resources (in this case the Blob Tree and Bear Cards), this interview would have been very different and I may have got less information and insight from Eden because of this.

Being the first interview, I printed the questions off for use with Eden but my reflection from the pilot interview was that I wanted to be more present for this interview instead of following a page of questions. This allowed me to explore Eden's answers more authentically and follow her trail on conversation rather than being directed by the questions. A reflection of this however is that I need to be mindful within future interviews of the key information that I do want to hear about from the participants, and ensure this is asked about within our conversations. From Eden's interview, I wonder whether the other participants will talk about similar school-based situations such as having children in class to help on the first day, the focus on the first breaktime and the feelings surrounding leaving behind previous friendships.

What was worth noting in this interview with Eden was how she would nod to questions when they touched on topics she must have found difficult – for example, moving school. I ensured

## Appendix M – Extract of reflexive journal

For this reflexive entry, I pull on my Unit 7 assignment from the beginning of third year (September 2022) to consider my role as a researcher.

### Who am I within this research?

In my assignment I recognise myself to occupy the space between the 'insider-researcher' and 'outsider-researcher' dichotomy (Breen, 2007; Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). I identify as partly being an insider-researcher due to my own military affiliations as a child, and being a child from a Navy family, and as an adult as having a fiancé in the Royal Air Force, and such military affiliations prompted by interest in choosing this population for my thesis (Malterud, 2001). This said, I acknowledge that I do hold membership to the group of children from military families, this does not denote complete sameness (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009) as my primary educational experiences are different to my participants as I was educated in one primary school which had no other children from military families aside from myself and my younger brother. I further distanced myself from the population of participants by approaching a school within close proximity to an Army training base, which is one branch of the Armed Forces that I do not have association with.

### How have I accounted for my research position?

By choosing a population who have a different primary school educational experience to my own, and being part of an Army family and not a Naval/Royal Air Force family, I hope that this difference in our primary schooling experiences will alleviate confusion between the role of the researcher and insider (Asselin, 2003; Del yser, 2001; Gerrish, 1997; Kanuha, 2000). To be able to distance myself from the research, whilst also being part of the research through my interpretations as is a key part of IPA, I have had discussions with Dan and Sandra around what I may discover within this thesis. Such supervision allowed us to unpick how my preconceptions, biases and personal beliefs may shape the research (Berger, 2015) and thus to ensure my interview schedule is comprised of open questions to avoid skewing the data I gather. Moreover, I decided to complete a pilot interview to explore whether these questions were open and underpinned by hearing the lived experience of the participants, and not underpinned by my potential biases/preconceptions.

### How have I influenced the data?

I was open within the information sheets in the recruitment stage of the research of my links to the military. One of my reflections is that I feel this created an 'insider' narrative whereby parents felt I could empathise with them and the unique challenges of a military lifestyle and upbringing. Research supports such a reflection as it seems caregivers may have been more willing to discuss their child's experiences as they may have perceived me as being

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sympathetic and understanding to their situations (De Tona, 2006). By having an insight into the caregivers' experiences of being a military spouse, I shared an understanding of their culture and could relate to them on a level in which an 'outsider' researcher may not be able to do (Berger, 2015; Bonner & Tolhurst, 2002) which can create an 'us vs. them' narrative (Dwyer & Buckle, 2002).

When thinking about my specific role in the data analysis, I acknowledge that the double hermeneutic nature of IPA has meant that I have influenced the data. When reflecting upon the interviews with the four participants after some space from data collection, the younger participants (Eden and Charlie) used less language when conversing and partaking in the semi-structured interviews. It is likely that as a result of this sometimes sparse language I have had a deeper level of interpretation of the participants' experiences. I recognise that I have based my interpretations of their experiences through considering the entirety of their transcribed interview, whereas for the older participants (Arlo and Faye), there is evidence of more linguistical-based analysis.

For the younger participants who used less descriptive language when talking about their experiences, much of my interpretation came from what they said about their schooling experience across their interview and helped me to better understand what education was like for them. For Eden for example, because she was answering questions about school relocation with short one-word answers or through gesticulation, I interpreted that this was not a positive experience for her: this interpretation of Eden's experience was further supported by Eden talking about being 'mad' about leaving her best friend behind. On the other hand, the older participants were more vocal in describing what their transitional experience was like and thus I was able to analyse their responses more semantically to allow me to understand their experience. I do recognise however that the more linguistical analysis of responses may be considered as too detailed and perceived as a deeper level of interpretation from myself as the researcher. To counteract this, I have ensured that I have commented and reflected upon where key words/phrases that I identified remained consistent throughout the interview or were flitted between, as is the case for Arlo when talking about his perceptions of bullies.

It is important to recognise my interpretative role as the researcher and that through the hermeneutic circle the original data is interpretatively transformed by myself as the researcher (Davies & Hughes, 2014); this is however a key characteristic of IPA research. I acknowledge that my interpretations may be different to others who would be presented with the same data and acknowledge that this is also partly influenced by my 'insider' positioning with the research. However, by accounting for this and being transparent about my influence upon data analysis, it shows a level of reflexivity which creates an open and transparent research process.

Appendix N – Table of Personal Experiential Themes

<b><u>Arlo's Personal Experiential Themes</u></b>
"It's the same like every kid": Sameness of school focus and experience
'My dad got a message': Army-directed mobility at short notice
'Maybe a bully would come'
A collective goodbye from the class: being left by friends
Hopefulness towards reconnecting with old friends
Frustration towards cyclical nature of relocating
Sadness at leaving friends behind
Nervous towards moving schools
Excitement towards making new friends: feeling welcomed and supported
Kind teachers are central to a positive school experience
Redirecting sadness into optimism: new friendships are a positive of relocating
Conflicting emotions towards military lifestyle
Empathetic towards others experiencing school transitions – a shared understanding

<b><u>Charlie's Personal Experiential Themes</u></b>
School characterised by learning and friendships
Versatility of friendships
Sense of loss but seeking connection during deployment
Scared about moving schools and making friends
Sadness towards leaving a friend behind
Change in relationships: no autonomy
Anger towards parents when relocating
Importance of adult support during transition
Feeling accepted on the first day

<b><u>Eden's Personal Experiential Themes</u></b>
School provides solely, valuable academic support
Dad's job: we have to move
Fear of standing out from peers and of being unable to make new friends
Fluidity of classmates
Conflicting emotions towards transition
Friends are the best part of school
'They're a little bit nicer here' – more accepting peers
Transitioned helped by having peer support
Making new friends is a positive

<b><u>Faye's Personal Experiential Themes</u></b>
Sameness of school focus – a value on receiving an education and making friends
Exasperation towards the frequency of relocating
Relocating alongside peers
'He will come back eventually' – parental deployment
Concerns about bullies/bad friends
'They've gone and you can't find them' – sadness at leaving friends behind
Everchanging friends because of frequent relocation
Teachers supporting emotional wellbeing throughout transition
Kind teachers are central to a positive school experience
Transition support from peers and adults
Feeling accepted by peers on the first day
Surprisingly fun making new friends
Being more myself
Seeking acceptance and belonging



## Hearing the educational experiences of primary-aged children from Army families: an interpretative phenomenological analysis.

Research Briefing, October 2023

Jess Lovett

### About the Research

Research and legislation highlight [that children](#) from military families are a vulnerable group who face many unique challenges, most notably high levels of mobility, inclusive of school transitions, and parental deployments which can lead to negative social, emotional and academic outcomes for these children. However, gaps in the literature remain.

[In particular, we](#) know very little about the direct lived experiences of children from military families in UK schools broadly. Although schools are in receipt of the SPP to mitigate against the negative effects of deployment and mobility on these children's education, there is little clarity about the needs of this group and how to support these needs. Educational experiences for this group of children have been explored to some extent in US-based literature, although this typically involved gaining the perspectives of school staff and parents, with few studies researching children's perspectives. Although the adult perspectives of schooling for this group of young people provides a valuable insight, there is a scarcity of research which directly explores young people's experiences. There is a particular lack of qualitative UK-based research on the school experiences for children from military families both from an adult and child perspective.

My study explored how primary-aged children from Army families experience education and contributes to the current evidence base and understanding of educational experiences for this population of children.

### Considerations of the Research

The research suggests considerations for schools and Educational Psychologists (EPs).

#### Knowledge of Individual Children

- For children, their school experiences had been categorised by frequent house moves which resulted in school transitions.
- EPs and SENCOs could discuss each child's educational journey [in regard to](#) the number of school moves, parental deployments, percentage of children from military families at present and previous schools, and relationships with others.

#### Wellbeing Intervention

- Children placed great importance of friendships and research shows that children from military families can share strategies for coping during times of adversity (Easterbrooks et al., 2013).
- EPs could work alongside school staff to build their confidence in delivering social and emotional support to these children; create SENCO supervision/cluster meetings for these professionals to share good practice in relation to their use of the SPP.

#### Training for Staff

- EPs could provide training on the unique challenges of an upbringing in a military family and their impact on educational experiences drawing on psychological theories and concepts of resilience, belonging, self-identity and attachment.

DEdPsy Educational Psychology



## Research Design

Four children in Key Stage Two were interviewed to gain an in-depth understanding of their experiences of education.

One primary school was emailed for participation in the study. The school office sent an email in June 2022 to parents of children in Years 2 to 5 so that their child would be in Key Stage Two in September 2022. Three parents consented to their child partaking in the research.

Telephone calls were held with parents in July 2022 to discuss their child's educational journey and key events during their schooling years.

I met with the children informally in October 2022 to introduce myself and check their consent for the study. Individual interviews with children were held in November 2022 and lasted between 30 and 40 minutes. I asked participants about their experiences of education. Each interview was recorded and transcribed.

Children's experiences were analysed through Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) which is a methodology grounded in the detailed examination of lived experiences and how people make sense of such experiences (Smith, 2011). Four themes were identified:

- 'It's the same like every kid': Sameness of School Experience
- Making Sense of Unique Military Lifestyle Challenges and their Effect on Educational Experience
- Leaving, Being Left and Feeling Left Out
- Seeking and Securing Connection: the Positives of School Relocation

## What I Found

Children placed importance on the academic focus and support they received in school for their learning. By understanding school to centre around receiving an education, the children felt that their educational experiences were the same as other primary-aged children.

Children spoke of the unique challenges of an upbringing in an Army family recognising that house moves were dictated by the Army. Children shared that relocations and deployments were experienced as a family unit, and that deployments produced an all-encompassing emotional impact felt both in school and at home.

Children expressed feelings of nervousness when discussing emotions related to moving schools. Children were worried that they would not make friends and shared concerns about feeling left out or even bullied. These children also discussed feelings of frustration and sadness towards leaving friends and friends leaving them due to military-directed mobility patterns.

Thinking about relocation more broadly, participants viewed this mostly through a positive lens. Children felt excited to make new friends and spoke of key adults and children who made them feel welcomed at their present school. It seemed a sense of connection to adults and children appeared to be central to a positive school experience.

### Key references

Easterbrooks, M. A., Ginsburg, K., & Lerner, R. M. (2013). Resilience among military youth. The future of children, 99-120.

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