

EXPERIENCES AFFECTING MILITARY CHILDREN'S PERFORMANCE IN SCHOOL: A  
HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGY

by

Christopher Casely

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

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APPROVED BY:

Dr. Meredith Park, EdD, Committee Chair

Dr. Breck Perry, PhD, Committee Member

### **Abstract**

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to understand how attachment and loss associated with deployment affect children's academic performance at Joint Base Lewis McChord. More specifically, the research was centered around a child's attachment to their parent and whether deployment affects that attachment or their academic success. The theory guiding this study was John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth's attachment theory, as it provided a unique framework to examine how the child is affected by the deployment of their parents. The foundational question that drove this study was: What are the experiences of military families, specifically their children's academic performance during deployment? A total of fourteen families participated in the project. From a series of interviews, panels, and journal prompts, the research discovered three key themes and nine sub-themes. The themes were continuity and stability, separation and adjustment, and educational challenges and support. The findings indicated that deployment did not impact children's academic performance in that there was at least one securely attached relationship within the family. The results from these questions, theories, themes, and recommendations can help to expand internal and external stakeholders' understanding of military life so that they can better support the military family.

*Keywords:* education, success, military, attachment theory, children

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## **Dedication**

I dedicate this dissertation to God, my creator, from whom all good things flow!  
From Him, I have my amazing wife, kids, and family. Without them, I would not be where I am today.

My wife is my hero and the love of my life. I wish words could express what she means to me, but I have yet to find the right ones.

My children are the joys of my life.

Morgan is my first. She is intelligent, sweet, and talented, and she has the unique ability to persevere through any obstacle.

Greger is my only son. He is kind, creative, and set in his ways. When he puts in the effort, he can become anything he wishes.

Zala is my youngest and so full of vitality and potential. She is passionate, gracious, and knows her purpose. She will do tremendous things.

Thank you for the love and support from my mother, stepfather, brothers, in-laws, cousins, aunts, uncles, and all who are connected to me. I am truly blessed.

### **Acknowledgments**

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### Overview

Military life is rich with dedication, experience, and hardship. The supporting family and the army members reap the benefits and sacrifices of service to the country. Within the family, children have an increased vulnerability and can be affected more by the fluctuations of military life. Through a nomadic lifestyle and long stressful hours to deployments, military members and their families face many sacrifices. Conversely, global travel, expanded experiences, and increased exposure to diverse cultures are some benefits families in the military receive. Regardless of benefit or risk, a military career is one of courage and dedication. The consequences, both positive and negative, must be highlighted. Therefore, children within a family that serves live in an environment that is more volatile and sensitive than many traditional households. This increased risk is present when dislocation and deployment are experienced. The risk of heightened stress events, such as deployments, creates an intensified risk of myriad issues within the family unit (Bello-Utu & Desocio, 2015; Boulos & Fikretoglu, 2018; Forrest et al., 2018).

Current research has shown a need for an amplified understanding of how families cope with the stresses of military life. To this end, the focus of this exploration is to understand the effects of deployment on the children within the family as it relates to education and how connected the child is to the deploying member (Gewirtz et al., 2018; Pexton et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2020). Chapter One introduces the topic and discusses the problem, purpose, significance, and core research questions. Understanding the importance of the topic, combined with current research, is important and discussed in chapter one. In addition, an explanation of terms related to the research will be presented to eliminate ambiguity throughout the paper. The intended

audience for this analysis is tailored to the education professional, social worker, counselor, parent, or civil service agent wishing to understand the unique dynamics of the military family.

### **Background**

Since the dawn of civilizations, war has been at the forefront of human evolution. Because of this constant and consistent unrest, the need for a ready and mobile military force is essential to the sovereignty of a nation (Cabrera et al., 2018). The all-volunteer military is the foundation of armed strength in the United States. Therefore, individuals voluntarily choose a career in the armed forces versus having a required obligation to serve. This choice aids in forming and nurturing the family unit and thus involves a commitment from the family. The family's health is crucial for a robust and encouraging family environment (Bello-Utu & Desocio, 2015). One exception to these statements stands out: the children. Children are dependent on their families for their safety and well-being. Thus, the children are the most vulnerable to fluctuations in the stability of the home. Studies show that the resiliency and health of children are of crucial concern for healthcare, educators, and the community at large (Conover, 2020). When children face multiple heightened stressors, their performance in school can be affected.

### **Historical Context**

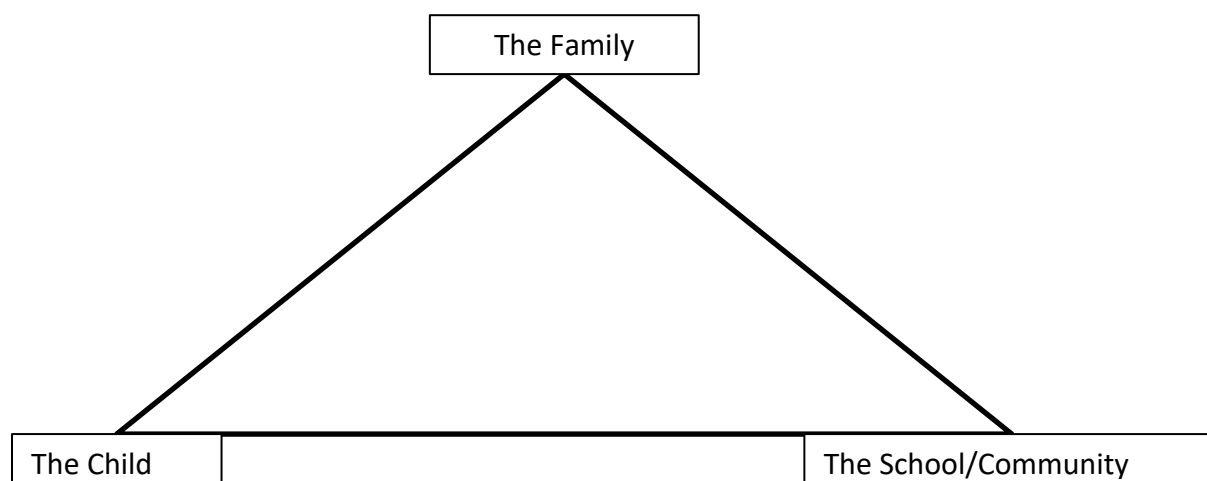
Current research has concluded the need for further exploration into children's coping strategies and the effects of military life on children. Over the past decade, over 2.1 million service members have been deployed; of those persons deployed, approximately 44% were parents (Defense, 2010). Before the war in Iraq and Afghanistan, America experienced a period of limited global unrest, and it was not until the onset of Iraq and Afghanistan that frequent and repeated deployments entered the scene (Sherbert, 2018). Since then, the world has been in a

political and social disarray cycle, creating an environment where deployments are more regular than occasional. Families within the military context are vulnerable to loss and increased stress levels concerning their military service. Therefore, identification, management, and intervention of stress mechanisms are paramount to the health and success of children within the home, society, and school.

Resilience is one's ability to circumvent and absorb stressful events in healthy and productive ways (Sandoz et al., 2015). This ability to be resilient, coupled with intrinsic motivation and self-efficacy, is the impetus for children to be genuinely successful in school. To experience genuine success, one must assimilate, store, recall, and reinvent the material learned (Ortlieb & Schatz, 2020). Resilience must be cultivated within a child's life, and the home is where an environment is created that is conducive or restrictive to proper coping mechanisms. The house is also where parents thrive or fall. It becomes a public interest to cultivate healthy environments within society and in school so parents and children alike can experience the support and enrichment they need. Each family mitigates stress differently at various points throughout the military deployment lifecycle (Strane et al., 2017). It is essential to the nation's strength that its citizens adequately understand the unique dynamics related to military life.

### **Social Context**

Many variables that affect the family, military, society, and world at large are far too many to mention in the limitation of this account. However, research defines key variables as areas of interest when assessing the military family's context. These notable themes include the family, child, and community/school.

**Figure 1***Levels of Effect*

The tri-environmental model, *Levels of Effect*, provides a comprehensive view of the environment in which the child can thrive or fail. In the home, parents and children are interdependent, and each contributes to a portion of the health and well-being of the family (Cafferky et al., 2022; Kentli, 2008; O’Neal et al., 2018). Soldiers, spouses, and children are supported or aggravated in this environment. The changes or fluctuations within the home can profoundly affect student development (Cabrera et al., 2018; Conover, 2020; Posada et al., 2015). In response, the United States government put forth significant effort in the availability and adoption of programs aimed at the family (Feinberg et al., 2020; Welsh et al., 2015). The government knew a strong and resilient family would lead to a stout and spirited child supporting a powerful and robust military force. When the home is brittle, the family's foundation crumbles and cascades into second and third-order ripples within the community through its members. These effects can lead to positive or negative reactions in the family and the community, having lasting effects.

Communities are the chief support system for the family, providing activities, friendships, services, and other vital assets the family needs to succeed. Local and national



communities have enacted many supportive programs for military-connected families to help them manage the impacts of military life on the family (Cabrera et al., 2018; Feinberg et al., 2020; Welsh et al., 2015). Community support is vital for military families because they are often separated from their loved ones. In this sense, community support can help them cope with the loneliness and sadness caused by being away from their loved ones. Also, military families need to be supported by the community because it can help them feel like they belong and are not alone through challenging times.

A supportive and caring school environment is equally important to the family and community. Friends, activities, teachers, counselors, and many other influences aid in children's accomplishments. Without services, programs, and support professionals, children exposed to military deployments may not overcome the challenges associated with service. Moreover, behavior support services tend to increase during deployment versus peaceful periods (Pugh et al., 2019; Wooten et al., 2019). These trends inform decision-makers and support staff in communities and schools to make provisions for the family and the child. Teachers and counselors become front-line warriors where a need must be identified and addressed. If the environment within the school is not conducive to the support and development of the child, a cascade of secondary effects can lead to immeasurable and often unavoidable after-effects later in life (Cabrera et al., 2018; Kaeppler & Lucier-Greer, 2020).

Lastly, but most importantly, there is the internal environment of the child. The internal environment within the child refers to the mental and emotional health of the child. Mental health is the key to a child's development. It impacts their emotional, physical, and mental well-being. Mental health is not just about feeling good; it also includes dealing with stress, anxiety, depression, or other mental illnesses. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines mental

health as “a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her potential and lives a meaningful life” (World Health Organization, 2022, p.1). The WHO has also identified ten key factors contributing to mental health: “1. positive relationships, 2. self-esteem, 3. sense of mastery over life's challenges, 4. secure attachment to others, 5. autonomy over one's life, 6. a sense of purpose, 7. personal growth, 8. managing one's emotions, 9. resilience, 10. hope for the future” (World Health Organization, 2022, p.1). Children must have healthy minds because they are still developing their personalities and learning to handle emotions appropriately.

Societal, educational, and familial environments play a massive role in a child's overall health and performance, but they do not define it (Georganda, 2019). Many stories of individuals overcoming adversity against all odds have been shown to support the importance of a healthy environment. Thus, the environment can be a significant component of success within the military home.

Military children are often more resilient to stressors and are globally knowledgeable than civilian children who are their counterparts (Lester et al., 2016; Long, 2022). Thus, being exposed to stress in a way that promotes growth through support and community can be seen as desirable. Conversely, stress left unchecked and not managed correctly should be avoided. The children's perception of their circumstances as good or bad dictates their handling of external influences and requirements (Conover, 2020; Owen & Combs, 2017). Internal beliefs and visions of the world create the reality in which the child lives, and their view of the world may or may not be congruent with actuality. This distorted view of the world can cause a dissonance between what is perceived as accurate and what is not (Cramm et al., 2019).

### **Theoretical Context**

Before attachment theory, scientists described the relationship between child and parent

as a connection through necessity and familiarity (Van Der Horst, 2011). Children and parents connect to survive and learn to rely on each other through feeding and development needs. Bowlby and Ainsworth attempted to further the ideas posited by Freud and other foreword thinkers (Bowlby, 1969). Through attachment theory, Bowlby and Ainsworth established their theory called attachment theory.

John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth founded the attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969). This theory highlights the unique relationship between a child and their parent or caregiver. Bowlby and Ainsworth's work has impacted many fields, including education, helping key decision-makers better support children on their learning journey. The foundation of attachment theory is the relationship between the child and their parent, where constant positive interactions are required to develop correctly (Bowlby, 1969; Van Der Horst, 2011). Through this relationship, children can build their sense of security. Attachment theory plays a critical role in the lives of military families as they live a lifestyle quite different from that of traditional civilians.

Military life has many unique facets, including frequent moves, job requirements, and deployments. Of these requirements, deployments often place the family in stressful positions. Deployments require planning, thought, and care to execute. Given the instance of a deployment, current research suggests that deployments of any length threaten the family's health and well-being (Nunes et al., 2022). More specifically, the children of a deployed military member are the most vulnerable. Children may experience performance issues in school or society. Families also change the current structure due to the absence of military members. The effects of these fluctuations can be compounded by how connected the military members are to their children and families. If children are more connected to their deployed family members, they must mitigate the impacts differently than those disconnected.

## **Problem Statement**

The problem is that military families experience stressors unique to their lifestyle, such as deployments, which affect their dependents. Additionally, the children in the family may see their academic performance suffer depending on how connected the deployed member is to their children. Military service is essential to the safety and sovereignty of the country; however, it occasionally may come at a cost. Often, military members are put in harm's way to defend the country and its allies (Pugh et al., 2019; Yablonsky et al., 2016). The research on how these deployments affect the family is varied; however, one factor stands as constant: the health and well-being of the parents are directly correlated with the outcomes of the children (Bóia et al., 2018; McGuire et al., 2016; Ohye et al., 2020; Pugh et al., 2019). Frequent and prolonged deployments create an environment where the homeostatic balance becomes hypersensitive to the slightest shift (Long, 2022; Pugh et al., 2019; Yablonsky et al., 2016). This vulnerability can potentially become a liability toward the overall mission of the family and the nation. The absence of a family member creates emotional and relational distance, in addition to the physical relationship between the member and the family at home (Kaepler & Lucier-Greer, 2020; O'Neal et al., 2018; Yablonsky et al., 2016).

Children within a military family are especially susceptible to the volatile dynamic of service to one's country. Both positive and negative outcomes arise when children are exposed to the unique lifestyle within the military. Children usually adapt well to short-lived stressors, but long-term ones can lead to emotional and behavioral difficulties in school that affect their overall functioning (Ohye et al., 2016; Ohye et al., 2020). Without the support structure in the home, schools become the supportive and vital force. Teachers and counselors find that if left alone, these children will have a decreased chance of successfully reaching their

potential in school. Moreover, when children battle disorders at home and within, there is an increased likelihood of at-risk behaviors, such as poor performance, lower grades, fighting, anxiety, alcohol, and drug use (Barbee et al., 2016; Nunes et al., 2022).

The health and well-being of the parents play a crucial role in the child's outcomes. Not all consequences end in calamity, and many students thrive. What are the factors that cause success or failure? The current research lays a strong foundation for further exploration of the dynamics of a military family. This research attempts to mature the current status quo. Through additional exploration coupled with the focus of the theory, society will start to comprehend that each family, each child, and each situation is unique.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to understand how attachment and loss associated with deployment affect children's academic performance at Joint Base Lewis McChord. At this stage in the research, deployment impacts will be defined as those instances that positively or negatively affect the family due to the active-duty family member's deployment. Due to the increase in deployments over the past decade, many families have experienced deployments where one family member is removed from the home and put in harm's way (Trautmann et al., 2015). These deployment events make children most susceptible to emotional, physical, and social effects (Pexton et al., 2018; Szpak & Białecka-Pikul, 2020). Deployment effects can be seen in the home and public, including schools (Moore et al., 2017).

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is critical because the military consists of approximately 1.3 million active-duty personnel, 1.1 million reservists, and their families (Point2, 2022). The military family is a large population responsible for protecting the nation. Therefore, a rich understanding of the

culture, struggles, and needs within the family is merited. Through research and observation, communities can better assist the children within the military-connected family. Schools and programs become the support structures aiding families to thrive during heightened stress events such as deployments. This research seeks to add to the body of knowledge available and to support new and improved ways to support the military family.

### **Empirical**

Many studies have delved into understanding military life (Boulos & Fikretoglu, 2018; Cafferky et al., 2022; Conover, 2020). An unequal amount has focused on how military children are affected in school. More studies need to be conducted to build on the current knowledge base. The research shows a correlation between stress and children's well-being (Ohye et al., 2020). Increasing the number of studies will increase the diversity of perspectives of experiences (Hathaway et al., 2018; Thandi et al., 2017). A deeper understanding of how military children are affected by deployment allows government and non-government agencies to create more robust programs designed to support the military family.

### **Practical**

Understanding the family dynamic, how children are affected, and coping mechanisms will help teachers and schools better serve their constituents. It is essential to study the variability between parenting styles and how children respond in times of deployment to help teachers and administrators best cater to the unique needs of the children (Julian et al., 2018). Current accounts of how military families interact and mitigate the stresses of deployment are needed (Bóia et al., 2018). To understand the effects of deployments on children properly, the connection between the deploying member and the child must be accurately identified (Trautmann et al., 2018).

## **Theoretical**

The theoretical framework driving this study will be based on the attachment and loss theory by John Bowlby (Bowlby, 1969). Through this perspective, Bowlby posited that early events in life have a lasting effect throughout the individual's life. This phenomenon is the core purpose of the study. The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to understand how attachment and loss associated with deployment affect children's academic performance at Joint Base Lewis McChord. Children are attached to their families somehow. Depending on how they are connected to the military member, the child will respond to the deployment event differently, according to their attachment levels.

## **Research Questions**

Lived experiences were the foundation for analysis through frequent interview questions, focus groups, and guided journaling. Many military families reported levels of distress that affect parent-child interactions (Julian et al., 2018). Because families are stressed due to military service, this called for further investigation through qualitative means. Therefore, the research question was tailored to encompass how children and families are affected by a parent's deployment.

### **Central Research Question**

What are the experiences of military families, specifically their children's academic performance during deployment?

### **Sub-Question One**

How does the connection between the parents and the child affect the home environment?

## Sub-Question Two

How do the societal/academic environment and the connections children make support the family and the child during a deployment?

### Definitions

1. *Deployment Cycle* – The accumulation of the events leading up to, during, and following a military member's deployment that creates unique opportunities/challenges for the family. Three components comprise the deployment cycle: pre-deployment, deployment, and reintegration (Flittner O'Grady et al., 2018).
2. *Resilience* – One's ability to circumvent and absorb stressful events in healthy and productive ways to experience success in each situation (Sandoz et al., 2015).

### Summary

It is essential to realize the effects of deployments on the family to understand, provide for, and mitigate the stressors associated with the military lifestyle. The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to understand how attachment and loss associated with deployment affect children's academic performance at Joint Base Lewis McChord. This question has not been responded to quickly, but it can be better understood using the qualitative research method. In this approach, the picture is created through the lived experiences of those involved (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Deployments arise when the nation requests its military assets to dislocate into strategic areas to protect interests. This deployment event removes the member from their family for some time, causing an increased potential for stressors in the household. Losing a family member is associated with family structure, communication, dynamics, and general functioning (Lester et al., 2016).



The dynamics of how children perform in school are complex and multifaceted. Those invested in the population will be better prepared to address the needs of military families. Being well-educated and primed is essential to the strength of the nation's military force. A strong, supportive family is critical to a soldier's strength and is crucial to the family's well-being and the child's health (Feinberg et al., 2020; Whiteman et al., 2020). Methodically looking at the family and the school environment creates an environment for the success of this study.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Overview

This exploration tries to understand the effects of deployment on military children in the home and academically. The research falls into the perspectives of the child, parent, and the school/community from the pre-deployment through deployment into the redeployment cycles. The consensus from all research supports the indication that military deployment stresses the family and poses unique risks to the children of military soldiers. These risks can set the stage for success or failure. The family's health is the leading predictor of the overall health and performance of the child. For this research, a deployment is comprised of three periods: the pre-deployment (before) period, the deployment (during) period, and the redeployment (after) period. During each of these cycles, military members and families experience a metamorphosis from their regular events, routines, procedures, and emotions proportional to the deployment cycle. This deployment process is an out-of-the-ordinary lifestyle for the traditional family unit, where both parents maintain the household. Children are exceptionally susceptible to changes within the family. Although every family member is affected by a deployment, children show their experience in ways adults cannot and vice versa. The consensus argues that the loss of a parent during military deployments causes stress on the family, including children of any age (Alfano et al., 2016; Williamson et al., 2018). This review of the literature examines the effects of deployments on the family. More specifically, the purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to understand how attachment and loss associated with deployment affect children's academic performance at Joint Base Lewis McChord.

Attachment theory is a psychological concept that John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth developed (Bowlby, 1969). Attachment theory delineates the importance of a child's and parent's

bond. The research has benefited many fields, including education, the military, and child development (Van Der Horst, 2011). By studying attachment theory, researchers and educators can better assist and support children and their families. This idea has been used to highlight and explain the importance of the connection between children and their parents. A core concept behind attachment theory explains that as a child grows, they need to be attached and connected to someone to develop and grow optimally. A proper bond between a child and parent must have consistent positive interactions over extended periods (Bowlby, 1969; Van Der Horst, 2011).

Bowlby described four types of attachment: secure, anxious-avoidant, anxious-resistant, and disorganized attachment (Bowlby, 1969). The first type, secure attachment, is characterized by a strong sense of self and a positive view of others (Van Der Horst, 2011). This conduct is expressed through an organized pattern of behavior, thoughts, and feelings that provide safety and security (Bowlby, 1969). Securely attached people are characterized by their ability to develop, maintain, and restore robust and nurturing relationships. The development of secure attachment is fostered through sensitive and responsive parenting. Parents play an essential role in helping their children to have a sense of security and create a safe environment. Secure attachment results from having a solid bond with a parent where the child is encouraged to be themselves and does not fear experimentation (Bowlby, 1969; Van Der Horst, 2011).

The second type of attachment, anxious-avoidant attachment, is described as a pattern of behavior in which an individual shows an unusually high level of anxious preoccupation with or avoidance of their mother or father (Bowlby, 1969). This pattern is associated with a history of neglect or abuse and leads to an unhealthy internal environment within the child. Without the proper self-regulation skills, children experience more significant fluctuations in their social and professional success and failure rates (Bosmans, 2016; Bowlby, 1969). The anxiously attached

individual wants to be close to their attachment figure. The children's desire for connection creates room for resentment and hostility, which can be inconsistent in their feelings and behaviors. The child will often be very angry or frustrated because they do not know how to express their feelings (Bowlby, 1969; Van Der Horst, 2011). The children feel they need to be distanced from others and will feel very lonely. The parent may have less constancy and security of discipline, resulting in feelings of unlovingness in the child. The remedy must come from the ability to regulate the child's feelings and abilities (Bowlby, 1969). It makes a difference when an individual believes they can manage their emotions. Adults can learn how to help and encourage children through strong and concerned leadership and good decision-making skills. The child must know somebody cares, and they will gravitate toward that (Bosmans, 2016).

The third attachment type of Bowlby's theory, anxious resistant attachment, is when the person avoids attachment but simultaneously seeks it out (Bowlby, 1969). These people are prone to feeling nervous and may resist closeness and intimacy but are drawn to these things (Bowlby, 1969; Van Der Horst, 2011). Anxious resistant attachment styles are characterized by a high degree of ambivalence, or uncertainty, about the availability and responsiveness of the parent (Van Der Horst, 2011).

In contrast to the fearful-avoidant style, the anxiously attached individual wants to be close to their attachment figure (Bowlby, 1969). This desire creates room for resentment and hostility, which can be inconsistent in their feelings and behaviors. They will often be very angry or frustrated because they do not know how to express their feelings (Bowlby, 1969; Van Der Horst, 2011). They feel like they need to be distanced from others and will feel very lonely.

While observing anxious-avoidant and anxious-resistant attachment styles, the prior is characterized by a potentially self-deprecating need to be accepted while the result is not entirely

satisfactory, which usually leads to worsening feelings (Bowlby, 1969; Van Der Horst, 2011). As for the latter, the anxiety results from not being able to trust the parent will be present to fulfill their need (Bowlby, 1969). Many marriage failures are a result of this. Many career defaults occur because of this (Keller, 2013). Honesty and continued work are the best policy to help these children for their future. Some children require additional attention to overcome their feelings and can be supported with care and thoughtfulness (Ewhiffen & Kerr, 2005).

Finally, the fourth type of attachment discussed is disorganized attachment. A core component of disorganized attachment is the inability to meaningfully organize thoughts, memories, and feelings about the caregiver (Bowlby, 1969). This behavior results from the child's failure to regulate arousal. Behavioral analysis of disorganized attachment can be based on an insecure attachment (disorganization) when a child becomes upset, withdraws, or overreacts in response to interactions with a parent (Bowlby, 1969; Van Der Horst, 2011). The child cannot regulate their arousal levels, and the parent does not know how to respond. Disorganized attachment often leads to parental over-protectiveness, leading to an even more troubled relationship with their children (Bowlby, 1969). Children with disorganized attachments are usually described as clingy and overly dependent on the caregiver (MacNeill & DiTommaso, 2022). Therapy and constancy can help these children by consistently teaching them step by step until they can do things themselves without much emotional instability (Long, 2022). Children find it hard to trust without a model or solid foundation for their confidence in another adult. Clingy children should be encouraged to attempt activities to be reassured of their abilities. Lack of drama and calmness helps to eliminate distractions from learning to manage one's feelings (Long, 2022).

Attachment theory provides a unique lens through which one can view the closeness of the family. Moreover, with a phenomenological research approach, one can better understand how children are affected by their connection with their parents to intensify or dampen the effects of deployments. An opportunity to understand what family members do to support the deployment event through additional research is needed. While this study does not consider the direct child's perspective, it does investigate the parental and educational view of impact and how they understand the child's behavior.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Attachment theory is a psychological concept that John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth developed (Bowlby, 1969). Attachment theory delineates the importance of a child's and parent's bond. The research has benefited many fields, including education, the military, and child development (Van Der Horst, 2011). By studying attachment theory, researchers and educators can better assist and support children and their families. This idea has been used to highlight and explain the importance of the connection between children and their parents. A core concept behind attachment theory explains that as a child grows, they need to be attached and connected to someone to develop and grow optimally. A proper bond between a child and parent must have consistent positive interactions over extended periods (Bowlby, 1969; Van Der Horst, 2011).

Bowlby described four types of attachment: secure, anxious-avoidant, anxious-resistant, and disorganized attachment (Bowlby, 1969). The first type, secure attachment, is characterized by a strong sense of self and a positive view of others (Van Der Horst, 2011). This conduct is expressed through an organized pattern of behavior, thoughts, and feelings that provide safety and security (Bowlby, 1969). Securely attached people are characterized by their ability to develop, maintain, and restore robust and nurturing relationships. The development of secure

attachment is fostered through sensitive and responsive parenting. Parents play an essential role in helping their children to have a sense of security and create a safe environment. Secure attachment results from having a solid bond with a parent where the child is encouraged to be themselves and does not fear experimentation (Bowlby, 1969; Van Der Horst, 2011).

The second type of attachment, anxious-avoidant attachment, is described as a pattern of behavior in which an individual shows an unusually high level of anxious preoccupation with or avoidance of their mother or father (Bowlby, 1969). This pattern is associated with a history of neglect or abuse and leads to an unhealthy internal environment within the child. Without the proper self-regulation skills, children experience more significant fluctuations in their social and professional success and failure rates (Bosmans, 2016; Bowlby, 1969). The anxiously attached individual wants to be close to their attachment figure. The children's desire for connection creates room for resentment and hostility, which can be inconsistent in their feelings and behaviors. The child will often be very angry or frustrated because they do not know how to express their feelings (Bowlby, 1969; Van Der Horst, 2011). The children feel they need to be distanced from others and will feel very lonely. The parent may have less constancy and security of discipline, resulting in feelings of unlovingness in the child. The remedy must come from the ability to regulate the child's feelings and abilities (Bowlby, 1969). It makes a difference when an individual believes they can manage their emotions. Adults can learn how to help and encourage children through strong and concerned leadership and good decision-making skills. The child must know somebody cares, and they will gravitate toward that (Bosmans, 2016).

The third attachment type of Bowlby's theory, anxious resistant attachment, is when the person avoids attachment but simultaneously seeks it out (Bowlby, 1969). These people are prone to feeling nervous and may resist closeness and intimacy but are drawn to these things (Bowlby,

1969; Van Der Horst, 2011). Anxious resistant attachment styles are characterized by a high degree of ambivalence, or uncertainty, about the availability and responsiveness of the parent (Van Der Horst, 2011).

In contrast to the fearful-avoidant style, the anxiously attached individual wants to be close to their attachment figure (Bowlby, 1969). This desire creates room for resentment and hostility, which can be inconsistent in their feelings and behaviors. They will often be very angry or frustrated because they do not know how to express their feelings (Bowlby, 1969; Van Der Horst, 2011). They feel like they need to be distanced from others and will feel very lonely.

While observing anxious-avoidant and anxious-resistant attachment styles, the prior is characterized by a potentially self-deprecating need to be accepted while the result is not entirely satisfactory, which usually leads to worsening feelings (Bowlby, 1969; Van Der Horst, 2011). As for the latter, the anxiety results from not being able to trust the parent will be present to fulfill their need (Bowlby, 1969). Many marriage failures are a result of this. Many career defaults occur because of this (Keller, 2013). Honesty and continued work are the best policy to help these children for their future. Some children require additional attention to overcome their feelings and can be supported with care and thoughtfulness (Ewhiffen & Kerr, 2005).

Finally, the fourth type of attachment discussed is disorganized attachment. A core component of disorganized attachment is the inability to meaningfully organize thoughts, memories, and feelings about the caregiver (Bowlby, 1969). This behavior results from the child's failure to regulate arousal. Behavioral analysis of disorganized attachment can be based on an insecure attachment (disorganization) when a child becomes upset, withdraws, or overreacts in response to interactions with a parent (Bowlby, 1969; Van Der Horst, 2011). The child cannot regulate their arousal levels, and the parent does not know how to respond. Disorganized



attachment often leads to parental over-protectiveness, leading to an even more troubled relationship with their children (Bowlby, 1969). Children with disorganized attachments are usually described as clingy and overly dependent on the caregiver (MacNeill & DiTommaso, 2022). Therapy and constancy can help these children by consistently teaching them step by step until they can do things themselves without much emotional instability (Long, 2022). Children find it easier to trust a model or solid foundation for their confidence in another adult. Clingy children should be encouraged to attempt activities to be reassured of their abilities. Lack of drama and calmness helps to eliminate distractions from learning to manage one's feelings (Long, 2022).

Attachment theory provides a unique lens through which one can view the closeness of the family. Moreover, with a phenomenological research approach, one can better understand how children are affected by their connection with their parents to intensify or dampen the effects of deployments. An opportunity to understand what family members do to support the deployment event through additional research is needed. While this study does not consider the direct child's perspective, it does investigate the parental and educational view of impact and how they understand the child's behavior.

### **Related Literature**

Over the past two decades, the United States has been at war, one of the most extended historical phases where America has been actively involved in global military maneuvers (Diab et al., 2018). As a result, during most of this time, families and soldiers have undergone many unique challenges associated with wartime operations, including frequent moves, long and stressful work requirements, and deployments. This literature review highlights the areas relating to the deployment of military members in a family with children in the household. The topics

prevailing in the research focus specifically on how deployments affect the family, the child, and the school/community environment.

War is a part of our human evolution. Nations have been built, destroyed, and strengthened by the military and political influence countries enforce. Military might be contingent upon the quality and quantity of the people who fight for national sovereignty. The quality of a nation's force is determined by the strength of the support system on which soldiers rely, especially preventative measures before deployment (Julian et al., 2018). This idea supports a flourishing and robust family unit. The deployment cycle upsets the rhythm of the family, causing each member stress and unrest. Only when there is an understanding of this deviation will the emergence of support systems arise to mitigate the detournement from the safety and support of the family. The emotions associated with distance and stress are relative to how the deployment event is viewed and are seen by the individual members of the family differently (Knobloch et al., 2018).

The family must be an essential support structure for children to grow and navigate the complex web of life effectively and successfully (Bello-Utu & Desocio, 2015; Bowlby, 1969; Cafferky et al., 2022). Parents are the first educators children have and are uniquely positioned to be the most influential people in a child's life (Johnson et al., 2018). The home environment is where the foundation of a child's core being is developed and cultivated. Household disruptions, such as relocation and deployment, have long-lasting effects on the attachments within the family and the children's academic success within the household (Engel et al., 2010). Not only do these events influence educational success, but they also impact the health and well-being of the whole family. Military youth tend to suffer from mental health issues directly stemming from the requirements imposed on the military household (De Pedro et al., 2018). The military is one

of the largest employers in the country, with about 1.3 million active-duty personnel, 1.1 million reservists, and their families (Point2, 2022). This large population of military personnel means that many military-connected students in schools nationwide need support to succeed academically and socially.

The contending conclusions indicate that military deployments have considerable effects on the health and well-being of all the family members in the home. How the family is positioned to mitigate the stresses of military life plays a crucial role in the child's environmental health. The resiliency of children and families of military members is of the utmost concern to the community (Conover, 2020; Zhang et al., 2020). Moreover, depending on how connected the child is to the family member, being deployed dampens or compounds the family's stress and detachment levels (Nunes et al., 2022; Zurlinden et al., 2021).

Deployments of any length are stressful to the family structure and, in most cases, completely change the family dynamic. The structure within the family is the foundation on which children survive and thrive. It is where fundamental life skills are learned. Military families often face frequent moves and deployments that create heightened stressful conditions. Thus, fluctuations within the familial structure from deployments stress the family and child and influence their performance in social and school-based activities. Increased instability and anxiety from the military lifestyle can lead to emotional and psychological problems within the household. Instability in the home can result in family restructuring, such as divorce, separation, gaining new stepparents, moving in with other relatives, and more.

In the past, military deployment has been seen as an obstacle to children's education. However, it has become a necessary part of military service in recent years. Children are now more likely to grow up with a parent who is in the military than not (MacDermid Wadsworth et

al., 2017; Pye & Simpson, 2017). As a result, some scholars argue in favor of innovative approaches for policies on how military deployment affects children's education (Tupper et al., 2018). In the United States, military deployments of a parent range for an average of 34 days, potentially disrupting the children's education (Cafferky et al., 2022). More extended deployment periods have led to wide-reaching consequences for children, including increased behavioral and academic problems (Set, 2021). In the United States, there are four types of typical deployments: 1) deployment, where one parent leaves for a month or more at a time; 2) deployment, where one parent leaves for less than a month; 3) deployment, where one parent is employed to work overseas or remotely; 4) deployment of both parents for any given time (Cafferky et al., 2022). Founded on attachment theory, the continued discussion of the three stages of the deployment cycle and the three areas of effect creates the framework for this phenomenological study.

### ***Stages of Deployment: Pre-Deployment***

Military deployments have three stages. These include the pre-deployment, deployment, and post-deployment stages. With each step carrying unique responsibilities and challenges, deployments not only place stress upon the family, but the children within the family become vulnerable to the deployment's impact. Children may show their disease in many ways, including fluctuations in their academic performance. In addition to academic performance, a complex social and family dynamic can become unstable. To cope with their angst about deployments, children may struggle with their attachment levels to their deployed parent and the parent in the rear (Nunes et al., 2022; Zurlinden et al., 2021). To mitigate such issues, many activities can help support the family before the transition, including planning, relationship strengthening, and routine building (Pye & Simpson, 2017).

The pre-deployment stage is the planning and building phase of the deployment. In the weeks and months before deployment, families typically spend more time together and often use that time to strengthen family bonds (Pye & Simpson, 2017). Parents and children attempt to capture as many memories as possible before the separation through quality time and special events, such as trips, events, and outings together. Fathers and children attempt to strengthen their bond, hoping it will last throughout the deployment event. Spending time together is essential, but routine building is equally beneficial for the children of the family and the other members.

During the pre-deployment stage, the family prepares emotionally for the separation in many ways (Zhang et al., 2018). Some ways the family must prepare include plans to strengthen or start to separate from the deploying member. They tend to participate in activities that connect or retract (Cafferky et al., 2022). When families connect, they use every opportunity to share, spend time together, and proactively create opportunities to strengthen the bond between members in anticipation of the upcoming departure. Children often spend more time with their parents, and spouses spend time together.

Conversely, those who practice retracting tend to preemptively detach themselves from the family member about to deploy (Barbee et al., 2016; Spencer et al., 2020). The family starts to develop their routine, hoping to lessen the stress related to the departure. The family staying home starts bringing the deploying family members closer or separate from them. These preparation tactics focus on softening the emotional burden separation takes on the family, hoping it will soften the stress related to the departure (Barbee et al., 2016).

During this time, families must prepare themselves for the deployment by gathering resources, such as financial information, and making necessary changes to daily living (Pye &

Simpson, 2017). Many families have financial responsibilities that the deploying member covers when at home and must be handed off to the spouse who remains at home. Once secured with both parents, routines must be restructured for one family member. Some families bring relatives to help with the daily responsibilities, while others may relocate closer to support during deployment. Also, the service members must ensure that all financial and crucial time-sensitive information, usually the deploying member's responsibility, is planned and accounted for (Collins et al., 2017). In addition to these preparations, the soldier must conduct a series of qualifications, health screenings, and pre-deployment checklists before the deployment event (Pye & Simpson, 2017). Although much of the planning efforts focus on the departure, one significant aspect of the process is left. Military leave is when the deployed member receives a break from the normal deployment operations to rest and relax, if possible (Cafferky et al., 2022).

Parents must maintain regular routines as much as possible for the children's and the family's mental health (Zurlinden et al., 2021). Routine formation before deployment can be as simple as building Storytime readings with children and regular communication sessions with spouses. Changes to the family are many before the deployment, as the family must prepare to learn how to live without their family member. By adopting regular routines and planning activities, families can successfully mitigate the distance they anticipate (Williamson et al., 2018). Outlining deployment processes regularly and consistently is a huge help to children. Trust is developed by promises that can be kept, while pledges that are not kept can damage the trust a child has in the home. Being honest with children about what to expect can support the younger mind, who does not understand the events as adults do. (Bannister et al., 2018). Although honesty is the best, how this truth is told might make a difference in children's

happiness and behavior. Coupled with regular schedules and consistent patterns of family behavior, children can be supported by the family in transitional times (Bannister et al., 2018; Collins et al., 2017).

### ***Stages of Deployment: Deployment***

The second stage of a deployment event occurs when the military member enters the field, heightening the risks of the service member being harmed. When a family member is in harm's way, there is an added stress opportunity in the household and the field. Significant events often happen during deployment, heightening the risk of emotional distance between the family at home and the soldier in the field. If either party experiences traumatic events during the deployment, it can compound any hardship for the family (Bannister et al., 2018). Deployments can often occur for short periods, such as in the Navy, where sailors have frequented short time frames at sea to longer, less iterative deployments, as seen in the Army. Some Army deployments can reach twelve to fourteen months at a time (Cafferky et al., 2022).

During the deployments, responsibilities may be added to the military member and the family at home because of being in the field alone or without a partner. From the military member's perspective, additional requirements may be duty requirements, local social support, and family-at-home needs. The deployed member may have to engage in fighting or other operational activities that require much resilience. Because of the duty requirements, military members often form close-knit bonds with their fellow members or isolate (Bannister et al., 2018). Forming bonds with peers allows for extended family-type relations within the unit the member is a part of. Conversely, the home team in the rear needs communication and connection from the deployed member. Depending on the channels to connect, deployed members may not be able to communicate at home often.

These added responsibilities for the spouse at home could include financial, social, familial, and emotional requirements (Szpak & Bialecka-Pikul, 2020). Financial responsibilities include managing expenses and helping to control the monetary health of the family. Social responsibilities include communication with extended family and support groups aimed at staying active through the deployment. Emotional responsibilities may come in the form of added support to the military members or the remaining household members. Emotional responsibilities also include attending to one's mental and emotional health through the deployment, which can be a significant accomplishment (Szpak & Bialecka-Pikul, 2020).

Many families create a network of support from their direct family or their fellow peers deployed to help lessen the stress of the deployment. Work and wage-earning activities at home can be difficult, as the child often needs substantial attention from the other parent. Knowing how much active and full attention a parent can give their child (De Pedro et al., 2018) is essential. But it is often difficult with a full work schedule. From the perspective of the deployed member, connecting to the home becomes difficult and can result in a lack of understanding and support. Several siblings or the events of new children may cause even more need for attention. Knowing the needs and being unable to provide is another stressor for the parent (Cafferky et al., 2022). When a parent is stressed, their ability to communicate and think of coping strategies is often affected (Veri et al., 2021).

Provided the deployment is successful and uneventful, the family and military members only have the distance and connection to manage (De Pedro et al., 2018). If there happens to be a traumatic event during the deployment period, either at home or in the field, the stress and potential disconnection can be compounded (Veri et al., 2021). Moreover, if people die, duty forces one to kill, or family members experience tragedy, the distance and lack of



communication can increase the dissonance between the deployed member and the family at home. Many major life events can be missed due to deployment. Children can be born, family members can pass, and children have games, concerts, and the like. Therefore, it is imperative to solicit frequent and meaningful connections between the family and the military members (Ohye et al., 2020).

### ***Stages of Deployment: Redeployment***

All the preparation, waiting, and execution leads to the return of the deployed family member who has been deployed, provided everyone is alive and healthy (Alfano et al., 2016). Both the military members and the family welcome this time. However, reintegrating the family is deceptively complex (Dos Santos et al., 2022). Whether the family is together, people grow and evolve over deployment. This evolution can potentially leave the family in various places versus when they first left. Children grow and experience life's trials with the family at home, while military members often feel alienated when introduced back into the unit (McClellan et al., 2021). The presence of turmoil creates further hardships and stressors to mitigate. From the soldier's account, there are traumatic events, injuries, or deaths that have happened to the self or peers during the deployment, which may result in emotional strife for the military member (Conover, 2020; Dos Santos et al., 2022; Ross et al., 2021). These events can lead to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), where it becomes harder to manage one's emotions. PTSD is a condition in which military members are plagued with the memories of a traumatic event they were involved in or experienced themselves (McClellan et al., 2021). Families with PTSD in their households tend to have increased difficulties reintegrating with one another. Military members often have problems that the family at home cannot understand, leading to increased stress levels.

Depending on how dangerous the deployment is, there is always the possibility of injury or even death. With this high-risk level comes the added stress that families experience. But when an injury happens, it is often coupled with PTSD, which has the compounded effect of complicating things upon return (Bóia et al., 2018). Usually, medical responsibilities accompany returning military members for a period or even the rest of their lives. Dealing with and accepting these medical requirements often adds to the complexity of reintegrating into the family. In the extreme case of death, families must now cope with the loss of their loved one and, despite best efforts, will never be the same.

Conversely, from the family in the rear's perspective, positive and negative events happen without the soldier's presence. Babies are born, children graduate, family members die, health issues arise, and many other life events create heightened risk factors at home (Bannister et al., 2018). Without the discombobulated family's direct connection and communication, parents and children experience diverse ways in which they are positively and negatively affected (Cafferky et al., 2022). An increased risk of harboring hidden emotions and a lack of openness towards the event and family members can arise (Bannister et al., 2018). Children are sensitive and notice hidden feelings and hide their feelings or emotions. Openness and expressive environments are essential when dealing with separation and loss. Many parents and children believe in holding back emotions and thoughts. Blame and other dysfunctional patterns of thought occur within the family. Children may blame themselves or their parents for the deployment problems (Bannister et al., 2018; Bosmans, 2016). Specific targets of blame within the family must be addressed and discussed.

On the other hand, an overly loud expression is counterproductive. Too much drama is unsuitable for stability and is not conducive to honesty or calm thinking (Bannister et al., 2018).

So, a balance must be maintained in the home throughout the deployment but more in the redeployment stage. Many programs are present to help families and soldiers in all phases of deployment (Piehler et al., 2018). The question is how such programs will be utilized and the willingness of different family members to deal with such therapy. The use of predictable and safely well-organized help for the family is essential for help to be obtained.

The discussion thus far sets the stage for the deployment and how the phases progress over time. The discourse highlights how each phase has the potential to impact the family in ways that could create heightened stressful environments without proper care and planning. Continuing to the areas of effect, the following information will be centered around the areas in which the deployment effects are seen, including in the family, school, and society.

### ***Deployment Effects on the Family***

The most crucial foundation within the home is the family's health during stress. A correlation between parent's mental health and their children's mental health exists (Flittner O'Grady et al., 2018). Specific troublesome displays of emotions lead to changes in childhood behavior. These include changes in parental warmth, lack of connection, shortness, insecurity, and depression. When parents begin to display changes in their mental health and warmth toward their children, adjusting to the deployment event's already challenging requirements can lead to difficulties. Even if the child does not externalize their unease, they harbor internal struggles that will eventually externalize without proper care. The same is valid for parents and service members. Hardships extend past the deployment into the redeployment stage, suggesting that symptoms continue past the family reunion. Children can see and feel troubles within the household despite the efforts of the parents to hide their stresses. They know when the family is experiencing friction, and they often respond in two ways: staying silent (eventually expressing

their feelings inappropriately) or having loud and expressive outbursts.

During each deployment stage, the requirements vary tremendously and call for different management styles. During the pre-deployment stage, parents plan and prepare for the upcoming change (Kritikos & Devoe, 2010; Ross et al., 2021). Considerable angst and worry are leading up to deployment and must be dealt with early to set the foundation for the other phases and their impending struggles. During the deployment, parents and children focus on the adjustment process and settle into a temporary support routine. They often plan for the reunion and foster hope and excitement for the future. Upon return, reality usually sets in. Parents and children realize the gravity of the changes. The mended family must understand and adapt to personality and relationship fluctuations resulting from deployment. Each stage offers distinctive dilemmas for the family, and these issues can be overcome with the aid of community and support systems.

Parents are the first and most prominent leaders within the household. They are the core providers of care for children and instill essential life skills, such as trust, agency, responsibility, self-esteem, self-efficacy, team and group skills, and creativity, among many other skills (Harlow, 2021). In the quest to develop the child, parents and children share a relationship that resembles that of the outside world. This relationship is a breeding ground for developing the skills needed to contribute to society. Through the lens of attachment theory, the intensity of these connections between parent and child can provide support during stress, such as deployments (Bosmans, 2016; Harlow, 2021). Conversely, the absence of connection can create an environment that is viewed as unsafe for the child to return to (Bowlby, 1969).

Historically, military service has been heavily weighted toward male service members rather than females. Many challenges are present and unique to female service members that their male counterparts need to experience. The challenges women face compared to men are

vast, ranging from healthcare to inter-military safety, psychological needs, and many more (Dos Santos et al., 2022; Mankowski & Everett, 2016). In the military, there are more female service members with increased levels of responsibility than in the past. Coupled with the increased success, women experience increased stress levels as they juggle the many expected requirements. Sometimes, women do not always express their needs; some may put themselves last and not let others know the severity of their struggle (Dos Santos et al., 2022). In a male-focused profession, women experience some of the same symptoms their male counterparts do.

Stressful requirements and events require particular care and handling regardless of sex. The family experiences stress when deployed, and the service member experiences unique stressors (Colledani et al., 2021). These stresses are also dealt with per the individual's management style. Situational and emotional needs differ vastly across different scenarios and situations and must be addressed. The service member must juggle multiple identities demanded from the work and the home environment (Mankowski & Everett, 2016). Regardless of sex, deployments place challenges on the family. These challenges can be overcome with proper identification and diagnosis between the sexes.

The government and many non-government organizations have implemented a network of support programs to address the needs of the military family. One example proves how interventions and programs support the military family. To support the military family, a program required each of the 336 participants to participate in ADAPT (After Deployment Adaptive Parenting Tools) (Gewirtz et al., 2019; Piehler et al., 2018). This program is a two-week workshop to develop and fortify the family unit after deployment. The results of participation in the ADAPT workshop show vast improvements in the family's ability to adapt to the changes and stressors from deployment. The families experience success by focusing on the

locus of control within the family and strengthening it. Developing a solid center of control aids children in their ability to grapple with the emotional and psychological symptoms stemming from a deployment. This research shows how robust the family foundation is, and it is imperative to strengthen those left behind to foster a healthy home throughout the deployment. Parents learn new skills to manage stressors to become more resilient and supportive (Gewirtz et al., 2018, 2019).

An additional example involving outside intervention comes from a program that used the FOCUS project to aid in alleviating ailments from traumatic events such as deployment (Saltzman, 2016). In collaboration with Harvard University and the United States Military, the FOCUS program attempts to foster better management of traumatic events by expressing beliefs and goals and enhancing techniques when families must deal with stress. The program's backbone is open communication and coping skills. The authors indicated that families only recover from traumatic events through open communication about the feelings associated with the deployment. Shame-based and fear-based withholding of information is very problematic. To solve family members' problems, it is essential to know what is going on. Children often withhold information, such as bullying or school problems, out of fear and shame. Techniques designed to open children emotionally in a safe and loving atmosphere are the goal of programs such as FOCUS. Trust and support from stay-at-home parents are vitally important and must be encouraged. Through programs designed to aid families or community support, families have a greater chance of overcoming problems. The FOCUS project offers an opportunity for at-risk families. Programs such as these empower the family to learn about emotions and coping skills, which better the ability of the family and children to manage stress (Hajal et al., 2020).

Connections not only happen with the children and parents but also with the spouse and soldier. Deployed family members experience a lack of connection just as much as the children. When the spouse of the deployed soldier feels their needs are not being met, they have a heightened instance of depression and anxiety (Olson et al., 2018; Oron et al., 2021; Set, 2021). Spouses who struggle with the emotional burden of anxiety and depression are less able to manage the needs of their children (Set, 2021). In the absence of the spouse, the member in the rear must manage the feelings and emotions of the rest of the family. For many, this added responsibility can become overwhelming and lonesome (Nunes et al., 2022; Set, 2021). Loneliness often sets in, and co-workers or friends try to help in unneeded and counterproductive ways (Bóia et al., 2018; Goodcase et al., 2015). As a result, dysfunctional and manipulative relationships start up. These relationships can be a breeding ground for unfaithfulness and other marital concerns. People often use people perceived as having loneliness or problems to get something for themselves or make themselves the incredible rescue person. People in these relationships feel they can solve all issues by ruling the “deprived” and “unhappy” person in need of help while controlling them often excessively and unhealthily. In the same manner, scams, emotionally and financially, are usually tried and precipitated on the weaker or perceived disadvantaged members of society. Unfortunately, some of these are part of social help systems (Goodcase et al., 2015). Being on the lookout for safety, financially and otherwise, often involves knowledge and confidence from the non-deployed family member that they may not possess (Goodcase et al., 2015).

People have many reasons to be silent about problems and reticent about possible difficulties (Ewhiffen & Kerr, 2005). But without information and help, it is tough to get the right help (Dos Santos et al., 2018). Worry and anxiety additionally create a risk for drug and

alcohol abuse (Ewhiffen & Kerr, 2005). This tendency to worry also creates multiple problems, such as secretive tendencies, issues with destructive behaviors, and problems with the law may occur (Goodcase et al., 2015). Untrustworthy friends and companions can create stressful gossip and talk within communities and families. This gossip creates identity problems and secretiveness due to shame or fear of consequences. Because of all these problems, personal goals and hopes may be crushed or truncated (Dos Santos et al., 2018; Goodcase et al., 2015).

The spouse of a military member is at increased risk for mental and emotional health struggles before, during, and after deployments (Leroux et al., 2016). The spouse's health and well-being help provide the foundation for the children to gain primary support (Tupper et al., 2018). During a deployment, spouses experience increased feelings of depression and loneliness, which distort their ability to provide adequate connections with their children. With the increasing state of global unrest, countries will see more deployments and wartime activities in the future. Communities and support programs are created to target and rally behind those families in need. In addition to the spouse, the presence of anxiety and depression leads to insecurities in the children. The occurrence of deployment can strengthen or erode the family's mental and emotional resilience (Hoopsick et al., 2021)

From the view of the deployed member, the struggles mentioned above can be experienced differently (Bóia et al., 2018). Deployed members often have smaller circles of influence while in the field. Therefore, their connections to their peers help to mitigate the stresses associated with prolonged isolation (Tupper et al., 2018). However, links that skate the line of inappropriate nature are more problematic in the field because they are founded on the need for connection outside the natural world and often do not last far past the deployment event.

The effects of deployment in the family are multifaceted and complex. It is hard to



quantify so many variables associated with the internal structure of the family, but understanding the core principles, such as connection and need, is essential to combat the adverse effects of deployments (Set, 2021). Given that the family is the prime foundation of the strength of the service member, it is in the country's best interest to support the families of the armed forces (Kritikos & Devoe, 2010; Ross et al., 2021). Support for the family can take many forms, such as education, community programs, connected families, and events. Support for the service members should focus on securing their success within the family so they can succeed in the field (Ross et al., 2021).

### ***Deployment Effects on the Child***

Children within the family have a unique placement within society. They are not only children but are directly involved in protecting the United States. In this quest, they experience many benefits and struggles (Fairbank et al., 2018). Their parents often travel, work long hours, or deploy for extended periods (Cafferky et al., 2022). With these deployments, the whole family is influenced and altered by the lifestyles within the military commitment. The family can be strengthened by the family or hindered by the lack of connection between the military member and the child (Dos Santos et al., 2022). Due to the unique challenges required, families can develop methods and practices to foster growth during military service. Families can protect each other from harm and act as a buffer from added stress. Families who foster strength over strife have plans and procedures to help mitigate the different stressors of military life. Family members adapt coping strategies to manage their anxiety and depression.

Military deployment affects the health and well-being of the children in the military household in many ways. Effects can be categorized by age: young children (3-5), school-age children (5-12), and adolescents (13-18) (Alfano et al., 2016). Regardless of age, children

experience many deployment-related stressors (Cunitz et al., 2019). Younger children experience sleep issues, while elder children feel depression and suffer difficulty adapting. The loss of connection and presence associated with deployment is also seen in the pre-deployment and redeployment stages (Alfano et al., 2016). Children experience difficulties during the deployment and have trouble reconnecting with their parents upon return. Many soldiers have Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) after returning from military operations (Alfano et al., 2016; DeGarmo & Gewirtz, 2018; Nissen et al., 2017).

Also, all family members are at a higher risk for emotional distress with multiple deployments (Alfano et al., 2016; Feinberg et al., 2020). Conversely, it can also be argued that the occurrence of deployments has a negligible effect on the family's mental health (Hoopsick et al., 2020). However, families that succeed during deployments have considerable support and coping skills to mitigate the onset of the deployment event (Hoopsick et al., 2021). One consistent outcome is that the deployment heightens stressful activities the family experiences.

In the quest to understand how military families' stresses compare to civilian families' pressures, a recent study found that children fall into the categories of at-risk and typical (Mustillo et al., 2015). For example, community samples can be compared equally to the military models until deployment is factored in. The insertion of deployment from military households placed children at a higher risk for general and separation anxiety. In a sample from a community of military-connected families, children younger than age five experienced minimal complications compared to the elder children of the family. The study found that a child's age significantly relates to the child's stress and coping ability. For each month's increase in age, there is a 3% increase in complications with coping mechanisms. Therefore, it is essential to tailor supportive services for children to age-specific needs to treat stress from military

deployment (A. Flittner O'Grady et al., 2016; Mustillo et al., 2015; O'Neal et al., 2018). The more the family can learn to be vulnerable, the better their ability to manage multiple stressors (O'Neal et al., 2018)

Deployments pose unique pressures on the family. The deployment's most exciting aspect is the reintegration or redeployment process. Families and soldiers await their reunion; in most cases, they find that each party has changed somehow. Suppose the member has suffered an injury such as Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI). In that case, there is a heightened probability they may return from deployment changed in ways that can affect the relationships in the family (Pugh et al., 2019). In addition to this change, they develop anxiety about the roles and responsibilities associated with the reintroduction of one parent back into the equation (Bello-Utu & Desocio, 2015). Three themes became apparent when dealing with the stresses related to deployment. These include the child's age, which influences how they cope with stress; their parent's mental health and resilience; and the child's vulnerability, determined by the culmination of all environmental stressors.

There are many side effects associated with military deployment. Sleep can become a significant variable in the health of the child and the family. Sleep is a vital part of our lives. It is essential for our physical and mental health. Sleep deprivation can lead to many problems, such as obesity, diabetes, depression, and anxiety (Physiology, 2018). Being deployed places stressors on the family that can impair sleep quality and quantity. Without proper sleep, children have an increased risk of anxiety and depression. Although sleep can be a significant variable that can aid or hinder a child, the length of deployment can affect the family's stress level, leading to sleep issues. During stressful times, proper sleep is imperative for the health and well-being of a growing child.

Another issue that is increasingly arising within the military family is child neglect. Fifty percent of all active-duty military members are parents (Strane et al., 2017). According to the research, childhood neglect constitutes the largest epidemic within the military setting. Childhood neglect can take on many forms, including absenteeism and verbal, physical, and emotional abuse. Additionally, alcohol and drug use are the primary culprits for child neglect. The researchers categorize neglect into five main topics: failure to provide physical needs, lack of supervision, emotional neglect, moral-legal neglect, and educational neglect (Cozza et al., 2018). The susceptibility to emotional neglect is lower during deployment, while the moral-legal neglect frequency increases after deployment. The primary cause of neglect occurs when the service member or family member uses drugs and alcohol, which increases the risk of misconduct. The occurrence of deployment increases the risk of drug and alcohol use.

The educational needs of children required to become successful are contained in the home. When the house is in turmoil, children suffer academically and emotionally. Due to deployment, children's performance suffers in the absence of a family member. The results indicate that, while deployed, the math and other standardized test scores of those studied plummeted by 76% (Engel et al., 2010). The duration and frequency of deployment significantly affect performance as the frequency and duration increase. Conversely, the effect lowers as the frequency and duration are reduced. The authors note that the impact of deployment lingers for an unknown period, implying that children and families will recover with time.

Military children in the United States, Great Britain, Israel, Canada, and Africa struggle with some of the same issues and stressors as any military child. In the United States alone, 40% of members have school-aged dependent children (Ohye et al., 2020). The consensus across all countries supports the contention that deployment increases the risks of childhood mental health

issues. The research stated that military affiliation with deployment increases the probability of children's deviant behavior, including possession of weapons at school, use of cigarettes, alcohol, and drugs, suicidal tendencies, and violence and harassment (MacDermid Wadsworth et al., 2017). There is a 10% increased chance of deviant behavior among military youth compared to civilian children across all countries studied. Regular monitoring of the behavior and mental health of the military family will help countries address and deploy services to remedy this epidemic.

Research also demonstrated that children become more vulnerable to complex emotional and psychological distresses as they mature. Looking at the academic performance of over a thousand families from a survey about issues relating to the deployments of family members led to unarguable findings (Nicosia et al., 2017). The results implied that the length of deployment dramatically increases the risk of emotional trauma and poor academic performance. Longer or more iterative deployments tend to have higher instances of problematic behaviors in children. More than performance, teens showed decreased feelings of independence. These feelings foster further implications. The research also found that long deployments carried more implications for boys than girls in the study. The reason postulated by Nicosia et al. stems from the percentage of males deploying. The researchers found that  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the soldiers deploying were male. Given most soldiers are male, this negatively impacts the boys in the family more than the girls. Deployments affect everyone in the family differently; therefore, understanding how children differ is essential.

In the Canadian military deployment cycle, researchers found that military deployments stress the family and the children, increasing the risks of depression and loneliness during times of deployment (Bureau et al., 2018; Skomorovsky & Bullock, 2017;). The deployment event has

potentially harmful effects on the children's mental health. Specific strategies can assist parents in helping their children cope. Learning various coping strategies helps increase bonding at home. Regular and frequent communication with the deployed parent and attending support groups help to sustain the bond from afar (Skomorovsky & Bullock, 2017). Children and family members must understand and communicate with other families and children who experience the same events. The research reports that children experience lower grades during deployment even though research indicates working harder in school to make their parents proud (Skomorovsky & Bullock, 2017; Tupper et al., 2018). This phenomenon happens because there is an increased worry about the deployed soldier's separation and safety.

It is essential to study the effects of military service on younger children. More precisely, children under six have been the focus of studies through meta-analysis (Trautmann et al., 2015). Findings suggest that the stressors children face are magnified by the stress the parent who remains at home is under. As with children, the more frequent and lengthy deployments, the higher the stress levels. Children develop their social and emotional well-being during the first five years of development. Connection is essential to ensure that the family is healthy mentally and physically. Attachments are also fostered during these development years. The research supports that children require the most robust, nutritious, and happiest home possible to grow healthy and strong. Deployments impede this natural growth process.

Since deployments create a potential for adverse consequences, it becomes more important than ever to support military-connected families' children. Deployments of any length are stressful, and depending on how connected the child is to the deployed parent, the child may be impacted differently. If the parent-child connection is strong, the child may be affected more; if their connection is weak, they may seek more connection at home and be less impacted

(Bowlby, 1969; Skomorovsky & Bullock, 2017; Tupper et al., 2018). Regardless of the outcome, it is imperative to understand how the child can best be supported before, during, and after a deployment.

### ***Deployment Effects on the School/Community***

Geographically dispersed families have more difficulty connecting to the support systems that the military and the schools have attempted to implement (Aronson & Perkins, 2013). The military partners with schools to aid families of soldiers and these collaborations hold the promise of helping to alleviate the symptoms of deployments. Although the military family experiences frequent moves and deployments, they are resilient. They can adapt to change quite well despite an increased risk of mental and emotional distress due to higher stressors. The most effective way to address this problem is to contact support services closely and frequently.

School is the largest institution children are exposed to outside of the home. School is where children learn and gain social experience. Given that deployment puts children at risk for mental health problems, the school can serve as a sanctuary for at-risk children (De Pedro et al., 2018). From a sample of some 14,943 children who had a military connection, the school climate was the leading institution that could impair or support the child during military deployment. In addition, schools with increased academic rigor and success, low violence rates, and a robust extra-curricular program supplied the buffer needed for children in high-stress environments to thrive. Schools connected to the military are also more capable of supporting military children by providing support for staff to cater to military children can increase the reach schools have to influence and support the family (Spencer et al., 2020).

The family advocacy network within the community is designed to support and care for children. There is a need to understand further the effect of deployments on families (Veri et al.,

2021). One research attempted to look at a single family's struggle through the challenges of military life (Lemmon & Stafford, 2014). The focus was on a teenage boy named Ben, who experienced issues with a decline in academic performance and mental health. The local school and health professionals discovered that their family had been besieged with trouble and divorce due to his father's military deployment stress. The call for action came within the community and school environment to support the family during stressful times for military-connected youth. The study emphasized that deployment increases the divorce rate by 28%. Ben's story epitomizes the hardships associated with military service and screams for action. School and community support can help alleviate the detriments of war on our nation's families. This story can also decrease the impact of deployment services, such as mental health hospital visits (Wooten et al., 2019).

The greater public community is comprised of military and non-military families. Deployment poses implications for the greater military community. The focus tends to lean on the impact on military children, but non-military children and families are also affected by deployment (De Pedro et al., 2016). Children and spouses of military members participate in the greater community. Therefore, the stressors of the military lifestyle extend into the community primarily through sibling relationships (De Pedro et al., 2016; Szpak, 2020). The strength of military families is a national security issue (Lester & Flake, 2013). Services within the school and community must keep up with the military's and at-risk populations' growing needs. Communities can supply supportive services, including virtual and physical versions, to reach the most significant numbers of people in need. Those in need who are dispersed throughout the nation may need more support services. Web-based and mobile platforms linking physical communities can better reach more people.



Families in the United Kingdom (UK) experience some of the same complications as families in the United States (Pexton et al., 2018). Military members worldwide must fulfill specific protective duties for their country. The families, in turn, are affected by the responsibilities and requirements of military service. The general contention is that deployed soldiers' families worry about their members' health and well-being at war. This concern creates stress in the family and affects the children's school behavior. Feedback was solicited from 52 teachers and students within UK schools to record the feelings associated with deployment. The conclusion was congruent with similar research findings: deployment causes feelings of anxiousness and depression among military youth. The study also contended that implications continue before, during, and after deployment. Additionally, the research states that, overall, military children report higher levels of self-confidence, resulting in better stress management. Children with deployed family members tend to avoid and minimize the psychological effects (Landers-Potts et al., 2017).

### **Summary**

Prolonged separations from military deployments have monumental effects on the family and sometimes even more significant effects on the children in the home. These issues impact current conditions (Zurlinden et al., 2021). Problems arising from a family member's absence can range from mental health, behavioral health, security, educational, structural, financial, and many other issues relating to the home and the individuals within. During the past decade, there has been an increase in the number of children who receive mental health services (Alfano et al., 2016). Further, Alfano et al. (2016) stressed that the health and well-being of the family members within the military home are as much a national security concern as the soldier and

external forces. A rich support system and programs are needed to aid the families of military members (Ross et al., 2021).

In the classroom, children respond to the stressors at home. Children are much more permeable to the stress of deployment. Students with a family member deployed show more significant struggles adapting to the change. Children are at risk of academic difficulties and even failure. (Nicosia et al., 2017). Lester & Flake (2013) contended that social workers, teachers, parents, and policymakers must work together to mitigate the stress associated with wartime activities (Lester & Flake, 2013). The home and the classroom provide rich grounds for a comprehensive approach to care and prevention (Coffey & Davis, 2019).

Considering the theory of attachment from John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth, how children are affected by the separation of their family members is related to the fluctuations in their performance at home and in the classroom (Bowlby, 1969; Gardenhire et al., 2019). In addition, those who are more connected to their deployed member tend to experience more significant separation anxiety (Guterman & Neuman, 2020). Separation anxiety is a normal reaction to separation from a parent or loved one. Anxiety is most common in young children and can be triggered by the absence of a parent or caregiver, unfamiliar places, sudden changes in routine, or the fear of not being able to return home (Harlow, 2021; Morison et al., 2020).

Children with separation anxiety may have trouble functioning at school or may refuse to attend (Hajal et al., 2020). Children may also have difficulty sleeping and eating when they are away from their parents or caregivers (Bowlby, 1969). Separation anxiety disorder (SAD) is characterized by persistent and excessive worry about being away from one's home or a person's attachment figure (Erman & Härkönen, 2017). SAD may cause significant distress, interfere with daily life, and impact school performance (Erman & Härkönen, 2017; Vukovic et al., 2017;

Cerasoli et al., 2014). Other symptoms of separation anxiety may include restlessness, avoidance of situations that might trigger separation, temper tantrums in which a child cries or yells and prevents leaving the parent, psychosomatic physical symptoms such as headaches, stomachaches, and muscle aches (Bowlby, 1969). Translating into adulthood, Separation Anxiety Disorder due to excessive fear of being away from home or attachment figure as a child may be related to a traumatic separation experience such as divorce, death of a family member, or pet loss (Dos Santos et al., 2018).

## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODS**

### **Overview**

This hermeneutical qualitative study aimed to understand the unique dynamics of military deployments on military-connected students. More specifically, it aimed to grasp the effects of deployment on military youth's school performance. Therefore, this chapter will explore the study's research design, questions, settings, participants, researcher position, epistemological assumptions, procedures, data collection, and ethical concerns. Maximum variation sampling provided the framework for participants to be interviewed, analyzed through focus groups, and asked for targeted journal prompts.

### **Research Design**

This study is critical because it paints a picture of how connection and loss from deployment events from military service affect children's performance in school. After reviewing the various research methodologies and approaches, it was decided that the qualitative approach would be the best design for this project. This qualitative research is founded on the hermeneutical design to address how children are affected in school due to military deployments. This approach is established to explain the meaning of the world in which a child interacts; it is full of meaning and can be interpreted considering the researcher's biases (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Van Manen, 2014). A comprehensive picture of the phenomenon was developed by understanding how the participants view, manage, and navigate their unique experiences. According to Patton (2015), the qualitative approach aims to "interpret the meaning-making process" (p. 39). Oppositely, the qualitative design seeks to quantify relationships, effects, and other means to cognize further the connection to the phenomenon being studied (Leavy, 2017).

This research aimed to define and explain the experiences and effects of military

deployments on a child's perceived performance in school. The study brought to light the successful development of select families' experiences through the qualitative framework. In this way, the hermeneutical inquiry furthered the qualitative review (Van Manen, 2014). The military deployment was the basis for new knowledge and catalyzed further study. The presence of the deployment event validated the selection for qualitative versus other analysis methods. Therefore, this study method acted as the foundation of this account.

### **Research Questions**

Through frequent interview questions, focus groups, and guided journaling, lived experiences were the foundation for analysis. Many families in the military reported levels of distress that affect parent-child interactions (Julian et al., 2018). Because families experienced stressors related to military life, this called for further investigation through qualitative means. Therefore, the research question was tailored to encompass how children and families are affected by a parent's deployment.

#### **Central Research Question**

What are the experiences of military families, specifically their children's academic performance during deployment?

#### **Sub-Question One**

How does the connection between the parents and the child affect the home environment?

#### **Sub-Question Two**

How do the societal/academic environment and the connections children make support the family and the child during a deployment?

## Setting and Participants

This section will define the study's setting and participants. During the study, selected locations and individuals were chosen to participate. At no point were children contacted in any way. Only adult parents who were deployed participated in the study.

### *Setting*

The setting of this research was located at a site where many military families live, including the military base and installations within the Washington State and Washington D.C. area. This site was chosen as an ideal candidate for study because of its relevance to the topic and ease of access. Many military units call this site home and further stage strategic campaigns from this location. The research site is located close to the Pacific and Atlantic and is ideal for operations in Asia, Europe, and the Middle East.

Statistically, there are approximately 295,067 people on the site (Military Installations, 2020). There are 31,164 military personnel, 16,213 civilians, 58,635 dependents, and 39,608 local retirees (Point2, 2022). Just over 49% of the households within the site are family households with children, where the median age is 26, distributed between 52% males and 48% females proportionately. Just over 53% of the population is Caucasian, 11% Black, and 2% Asian (Data, USA). This research required a minimum sample size of twelve families.

The school selected on the site was home to many children of military families. More specifically, the enrollment size was 491 students from kindergarten to sixth grade (Military Installations, 2020). The school's principal was open and receptive to the possibility of involvement in the research project if parents had complete autonomy over whether to participate in the study. The student-to-teacher ratio is 19:1, while the counselor-to-student ratio is 594:1. This location served as a viable and preferred option for the identification of families who have

instances of deployment in their history, as well as serve as a filter to reach households with children. The school setting was used to solicit families for the study only. No other observation or data was collected in or from the school.

### ***Participants***

Military families who had experienced one or more deployments and were living in the vicinity of the site and who had one or more children that were school-aged were used as the target population. School-aged children were of age to start traditional schooling, such as kindergarten through twelfth grade. Families from the site were targeted through an initial soliciting letter explaining the study's purpose, instructions, gravity, and impact. Additionally, the parental participants were administered a brief qualifying questionnaire that provided basic demographic questions, allowing them to opt into the study and whether there was a deployment event in the past. When accepted and volunteered, families chose to participate further toward the completion of the study.

Purposeful and snowball sampling methods created a sufficient cohort of participants and were used as the focus of this account. The site selection was relevant to the population where the successful collection is possible (Patton, 2015). The snowball strategy ensured member referrals found valid participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participants in a military-connected school had enough potential recommendations who qualified for the study. As described in Chapter Three, a minimum of twelve qualified participants was required to proceed with the study. Fourteen were used to collect data in the study.

### **Researcher Positionality**

As a father of a military child and spouse of a military member, I am driven to research how children are affected by deployment toward their educational endeavors. In addition to this

motivation, I am susceptible to the dynamics involved regarding the family and the military members. Our family is exceptionally close, forming the foundation of our support structure. As a result, our child is very connected despite frequent travel, long hours, and unstable environments. This connection is not the only way families mitigate trade stresses. I have personally seen how children are affected by military service and how reliant each member is on the other for support. For many, the soldier's success depends on the family's stability. Family support may take different forms than they do in ours. Therefore, I have chosen to use a qualitative study method.

In this way, each study participant will be given a voice, and the readers will be empowered to delve deep into their lived experiences. Philosophically, I will use the ontological approach to paint the picture from many different perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Using this approach allows the reader to envision the topic to the best of their ability, and, hopefully, they can relate to the participants. The research paradigm that will be employed for this project will be social constructivism. This theory is founded on complex individual views where people develop frameworks through interaction over time. Creating a comprehensive examination of military life will benefit society in ways that are important to everyone. This analysis will further past studies by design and complexity, adding to the ever-growing body of knowledge in the community.

The researcher's role will be that of an informed observer. The researcher will gather as much information as possible throughout the data collection to get closer to each participant's experiences (van Manen, 2014). Through this method of qualitative hermeneutical research, an understanding will be described that will draw the researcher and readers into the target group's world.



My connection to the subject is personal as a military spouse and father. This personal connection creates a space for bias that would not exist otherwise. Given this fact, my role is to attempt to gather information subjectively and determine critical themes and connections between the participants' experiences. It will not be in the interest of the study to interfere with the answers or lead to the questions in any way. Listening and recording have become crucial tasks, and my experience and knowledge will only be practical in interpreting the results of the data analysis after the study is complete. The qualitative research method became the most appropriate way to explain the phenomenon.

### ***Interpretive Framework***

The interpretive framework this study will stand on is the constructivist framework described by Creswell and Poth (2018). The constructivist approach is illustrated through lived experiences and focuses on individual values highlighted by the researcher and participant interactions. Through the constructivist lens, we can pragmatically look at how children are affected by how connected the child is to the deployed parent. The role of the researcher will be to dive into the families' dynamics to understand how the connection between the child and the parent is viewed through the lens of attachment theory.

### ***Philosophical Assumptions***

The philosophical assumptions made during this inquiry are founded on the fact that I am close to the topic because I am a father of a child within a military family. I am the husband of a soldier in the United States Army. Therefore, I believe in the theory that attachment plays a vital role in the health and well-being of the family, especially the children. My goal through this study is to add to the research and help to make the world a better place for military families. I set out to look at the families' experiences constructively and, through my unique placement,

interpret the findings as accurately as possible.

### ***Ontological Assumptions***

The ontological assumptions I made during my research are those of personal reality. Each person can define what they experience through their lens and underlying belief systems (Creswell & Poth, 2018). What one person sees as an opportunity, the other can see as hardship. Therefore, reality is in the eyes of the beholder. More importantly, a person's belief in God is crucial in interpreting their life. I believe that everyone experiences deployments in different ways.

### ***Epistemological Assumption***

Through the epistemological approach, it is believed that truth is subjective, and each experience is unique to the individual perspective (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Although this research is not void of bias, the goal was to account for the phenomenon in as much detail as possible. Considering the connection between myself, a military parent, and the topic, I have a unique perspective and understanding of the connection between the child and the deployed parent. The interaction during the research established the connection between myself and the participant's family.

### ***Axiological Assumptions***

Some of the core values my participants stand on are similar to mine simply because both parties are in the military and share some of the same experiences and coping strategies. Since the research focuses on hermeneutic inquiry, the relevance is founded on my biased interpretation of the phenomenon. However, I planned to keep as much of my bias out of the process as possible (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Understanding the importance of the individual and

the family, I wholeheartedly took each family's experiences into my filter as I interpreted the data.

### ***Researchers Role***

My role in this study was to account for the impact of the connection between the deployed family members from an instance of deployment. Additionally, I sought to understand children's educational performance as a result. Being a parent and husband within a military family gave me a strong passion and interest. At the same time, the qualitative model provided an in-depth understanding of how deployments affect the family. I understand firsthand what is involved and risked for the family due to military deployments.

### **Procedures**

The research process included many steps to complete. The research process commenced with identifying an interest area or topic. Once the topic was accepted, I contacted the proposed member for acceptance. Following the discovery process, I reviewed the literature to gain insight into previous research. The problem or phenomenon was identified after understanding prior research, and the topic was obtained. By understanding the history and previous research, I discovered the gaps or potential advancements in the literature for the study. Once the stage was set for the research project, the next step was to secure procurement of the location or site for analysis. The discovery of methods, procedures, collection, and processing activities were stated, described, and organized into a formal proposal. The proposal creation was then completed, defended, and filed for IRB approval, as seen in Appendix A. The gathering of documents for IRB approval was conducted, as shown in Appendix B, C, and D, once the bid was defended and approved by the dissertation chair. The next step was soliciting participants, which took place within the location of the study (See Appendix A). Following the gathering of required

participants, data collection through interviews, focus groups, and journal prompts was conducted, as shown in Appendix E, F, and G. Processing/analysis of the data collected began from the data obtained in the collection process.

### **Permissions**

I gathered permission from the Institutional Review Board at Liberty University (see Appendix A). No additional approval was required besides the consent forms provided to the participants upon entry into the research program (see Appendix B, C, and D). Given that I am a military parent and have access to the community in which the research took place, no permissions outside of participant consent were required.

### **Recruitment Plan**

The plan to recruit participants started with posting a brief explanatory call to action on the local base's neighborhood Facebook page. Purposeful convenience sampling was used to gather at least twelve participants with specific qualifications needed to participate (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Purposeful snowball sampling was adequate for this research because participation required that participating families be military with an instance of deployment in the past. Once a participant has expressed interest in the study, a detailed explanation with the required commitment was distributed via email and Microsoft forms to gain acceptance. Care was taken to ensure that no incentive or coercion was placed upon the participant and that the study was free from bias as much as possible.

### **Data Collection Plan**

During the research process, the researcher used various methods to collect data. These methods included one-to-one interviews, focus groups, and journaling (see Appendix D, E, and F). Through this triangulated approach, enough information was gathered to gain a

comprehensive perspective of the phenomena.

### **Individual Interviews Data Collection Approach**

Data collection procedures included semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and journaling (See Appendix D, E, and F). Using interviews in a semi-structured way in alignment with Moustakas (1994), Wengraf (2001), and Patton (2015) constituted the primary method of data collection within the current study. Semi-structured interviews provided the framework of critical questions designed to build the framework (Patton, 2015). This method helped to open the aperture so that a better understanding of how deployments affect children in school is linked to the attachment levels in the family.

### **Individual Interview Questions**

Interviews were at the forefront of qualitative inquiry. They created the stage to gain a glimpse into the experiences of the individuals studied (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015; Van Manen, 2014). In the interview process, researchers engaged in a dialogue through which one's life is illuminated without restrictions. The following questions constituted the interview format. These interviews were conducted electronically via Microsoft Teams at a time agreed upon by the researcher and the participant. Additional opportunities to elaborate or explain were needed on a case-by-case basis.

1. Please introduce me to and about each person in your family household. CRQ
2. Describe the relationships between your family members. CRQ
3. What are the roles of each person in the family? CRQ
4. How has your family changed over the years? SQ1
5. Describe the worldview you and your family hold. SQ1
6. How do you feel you impact your child's life and why? SQ1

7. How do you feel you impact each other's life? SQ1
8. Explain your view of the family and what it means to you. CRQ
9. Provide your thoughts on the military lifestyle. SQ2
10. Provide your thoughts on how your child experiences the military lifestyle. SQ2
11. Map the events surrounding the first deployment event your family has experienced.  
CRQ
12. Map the events surrounding the event of the subsequent deployment your family has experienced. CRQ
13. Describe how deployments have affected yourself and your partner. CRQ
14. Paint a picture of how deployment has affected your child. SQ2
15. How have you felt you have changed as a result of military deployments? SQ2
16. How has your spouse changed as a result of military deployment? SQ1
17. How have your children changed as a result of military deployment? SQ2
18. How do you feel military deployments have impacted your child's educational performance (please provide examples)? SQ2

Questions one through four were background questions designed to set the stage for the interview process. They facilitated the development of the foundation on which the family stands. These were opinions in nature, where an understanding of the family's landscape was found (Patton, 2015). These cushioning questions provided information to enlighten the readers about the family structure.

Sories (2015) discussed how the military family created a unique societal subculture (Sories et al., 2015). Therefore, military lifestyle qualities drive fluctuating roles within the family. Children often attach to one or more parental figures and create foundational

relationships deep into the unit's construct (Julian et al., 2018). Connections between the family, the initial representations, and the unit's development sufficed as the foundation for highlighting the development of the home context.

Questions five through eight were opinions in context and helped provide the family's underlying belief systems. They told us about the family's ideals and beliefs about the external and the internal environment (Patton, 2015). These questions were expounded upon as needed for each participant to fully understand the unique dynamics of how nuclear the household is.

Children look to their parents for support and comfort; therefore, having sensitive and responsive parents helps foster healthy emotional environments within the home (Flittner O'Graddy et al., 2018). Furthermore, the negative or positive outcomes of the military's stressors are unknown, and many youths are well-adjusted (Kaeppler & Lucier-Greer, 2020). These questions acted as descriptors in the quest to comprehend the current state of the home's foundation. Questions like numbers five to eight helped to highlight the norms the house is established on.

Questions nine through fourteen were categorized as experience inquiry, aiming to understand the events leading up to, during, and after the phenomenon (Patton, 2015). What was the family experiencing around the deployment, and what steps did they take was the focus? This questioning advanced the research topic and was expounded upon as necessary to understand the events clearly.

Military children are exposed to stressors unique to the military lifestyle, including frequent moves, parental separations, and many other challenges (Cunitz et al., 2019; Gewirtz et al., 2018; Wooten et al., 2019). Family stressors have increased and significantly escalated over the past decade since the onset of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars (Gewirtz et al., 2018).

Therefore, the circumstances behind the family's participation in military campaigns created a rich understanding of their conditions.

Finally, questions fifteen through eighteen created the emotion of the set. Their attention allows them to express feelings in a way that brings the picture of human life alive (Patton, 2015). As a reflection, the questions provided ample room to highlight the effects experienced. The inquiries were elaborated further as additional information was needed from each participant.

Zamir et al. (2017) highlighted how important mindfully tending to emotions is by stating that it aids in how individuals process and contextualize events. Given that some form of parental absence has occurred post-deployment, children can and often are influenced in myriad ways (Balderrama-Durbin et al., 2015; Moeller et al., 2015). Qualitative questioning created detailed descriptions of experiences and brought a unique perspective not expressed in quantitative measures.

### **Interview Questions Data Analysis Plan**

The study followed the modified Van Kaam Method to analyze the data gathered from various data sources. Moustakas (1994) purported the phenomenological process generates knowledge through an in-depth understanding of the meanings and essences of the participants' lived experiences. To this end, this research used three data collection methods: interviews, focus groups, and journaling—each data set provided rich information that was reduced to themes for analysis. The stages in the process were as follows: listing and grouping, reduction and elimination, cluster and thematization, irrelevant elimination, and using relevant themes to describe and variate the information. Finally, to be concise and accurate, fact-checking was used to ensure the data's most precise transcription and processing.



For the listing and preliminary grouping stage one, each representation of the experience was logged (van Manen, 2014). Interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams so that automated conversation transcription could be utilized. The preliminary data and point extraction were applied to the raw information, listing the responses in a table for each question. Following the listing process, in stage two, individual Coding was executed by tagging the topics from each response. The coding procedure was inductive and consisted of two rounds. During the first round, affective coding methods were used as they allowed for emotions and more to be the focus of the categorization (Saldana, 2016). The second stage of coding methods consisted of pattern coding to identify similarities within the data sets. Following Saldana's coding methods, along with Moustakas (1994), the next steps in step three were to cluster and thematize the data. The data was then categorized by code as a preliminary preparation for the thematizing process. The categorized codes were further identified as themes during the theme building and supported by direct participant quotes. After identification, every data set was tested for two criteria: 1. Is it an understandable moment? 2. Can the moment or instance be labeled? Following this filtering, I clustered the data into themes for validation (Moustakas, 1994).

### **Focus Groups**

Using focus groups allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of the themes associated with the topic (Van Manen, 2014). Additionally, focus groups created an environment where views need to be understood in the interview process. Aside from interviews, focus groups were used to gain a consensus about how the group of parents feels about military deployments. The focus groups comprised parents among the study participants and took place via online meetings through Microsoft Teams at an agreed-upon time. Focus groups helped gain a higher-level view of the problem and aided in the development of the theory (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Once enlisted, parents' focus groups helped frame other questions and follow-ups overlooked during the interview. This research sought to include all available participants in panel discussions where family members were free to speak about any issue related to the deployment they would like to make public, including effects, struggles, successes, needs, and many other topics that were helpful and are less personal than the interviews themselves.

Understanding how families as a whole group view the event allowed the researcher to look at the facets of members' deployments in common (Bóia et al., 2018; Forrest et al., 2018). Many families experienced anxiety throughout the events surrounding the deployment (Crow et al., 2016; Moeller et al., 2015). Additionally, many support groups are available and utilized by families in need, which helps mitigate the associated stressors (Richardson et al., 2016). These programs can help many families and are one of the structures that can be highlighted in the focus group format.

### ***Focus Group Questions***

Four questions will drive the focus groups. These are:

1. How has military life benefited your family? (CRQ)
2. What struggles have you and your family experienced most when confronted with deployments? (CRQ)
3. How have deployments affected your child(ren) academically? (SQ2)
4. How has the connection between the family members deployed affected your child/family? (SQ1)

### ***Focus Group Data Analysis Plan***

Similar to the interview question data analysis, in the listing and preliminary grouping stage one, each representation of the experience was logged (Van Manen, 2014). Interviews were

conducted via Microsoft Teams group call so that automated conversation transcription was utilized. The preliminary data and point extraction were applied to the raw information, listing the responses in a table for each question. Following the listing process, in stage two, individual Coding was executed by tagging the topics from each response. The coding procedure was inductive and consisted of two rounds. During the first round, affective coding methods were used as they allowed for emotions and more to be the focus of the categorization (Saldana, 2016). The second stage of coding methods consisted of pattern coding to identify similarities within the data sets. Following Saldana's coding methods, along with Moustakas (1994), the next steps in step three were to cluster and thematize the data. The data was then categorized by code as a preliminary preparation for the thematizing process. The categorized codes were further identified as themes during the theme building and supported by direct participant quotes. After identification, every data set was tested for two criteria: 1. Is it an understandable moment? 2. Can the moment or instance be labeled? Following this filtering, I clustered the data into themes for validation (Moustakas, 1994).

### **Journal Prompts Data Collection Approach**

Journaling was used as the final form of data that will serve this study. After the interviews and focus groups, parents were given an electronic journal prompt via Microsoft Forms, with the questions listed below to answer. Journaling enabled the participants to reflect and record more thought-out feelings or events that may have been overlooked in the previous methods of collection (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Through journaling, participants had the chance to share the sequence of events in a way that could be recounted without a third party. This method allowed the participants to share their feelings and experiences in the privacy of their homes without anyone else's interruption or influence. Additionally, the practice of journaling

included the testimony of those who might have yet to be able to participate in one or more of the other collection methods.

The journal prompt will be a straightforward question:

1. From your child's point of view, describe how you feel about your parents' deployment and how it has affected you in school, and has your connection to your family member made it better or worse? (CRQ, SQ1, and SQ2)

### ***Journal Prompt Data Analysis***

In the journaling analysis phase, different collection measures were taken. For the listing and preliminary grouping stage one, each representation of the experience was logged (Van Manen, 2014). Interviews were conducted via Microsoft Forms. Fact-checking for this stage was not necessarily due to the participant's actions of filling out the data directly. The preliminary data and point extraction were applied to the raw information, listing the responses in a table for each question. Following the listing process, in stage two, individual Coding was executed by tagging the topics from each response. The coding procedure was inductive and consisted of two rounds. During the first round, affective coding methods were used as they allowed for emotions and more to be the focus of the categorization (Saldana, 2016). The second stage of coding methods consisted of pattern coding to identify similarities within the data sets. Following Saldana's coding methods, along with Moustakas (1994), the next steps in step three were to cluster and thematize the data. The data were then categorized by code as a preliminary preparation for the thematizing process. The categorized codes were further identified as themes during the theme building and supported by direct participant quotes. After identification, every data set was tested for two criteria: 1. Is it an understandable moment? 2. Can the moment or instance be labeled? Following this filtering, I clustered the data into themes for validation

(Moustakas, 1994).

### ***Data Synthesis***

Combining the codes and themes from each data set from the interviews, focus groups, and journal prompts, the data was clustered and themed. In step four, the data was checked for validation. For validation to occur, the themes must have been relevant, compatible, and complete. Finally, the process was completed in step five, when the texture behind the meanings and essence was formulated. During the formulation process, I discussed the themes in contrast and confirmation of the theories, literature, and research questions on which the study was founded. Each input flows through the sequence—modern data programs such as the Delve tool aided in this process.

### **Trustworthiness**

The cornerstone of any research is trustworthiness. Within the context of the trustworthiness of the study, the aim was to be credible, dependable, and traceable. Trustworthiness was essential and must be the foundation of each act. Data, participants, and communications were protected (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015). All efforts were made to protect the safety and privacy of the participants. For the community, triangulation was used as the method by which reliability was established (van Manen, 2014).

### **Credibility**

As depicted, triangulation was used to establish credibility. In triangulation, three data sets were used with each participant to identify the themes used in the data analysis (Patton, 2015). This approach was necessary because it created a solid foundation for categorizing data. Creswell and Poth (2018) stated that having a rich and multifaceted set of data makes a more robust depiction of the trueness of the findings. Additionally, the literature was reviewed from

peer-reviewed sources, which provided a substantial body of knowledge to support the research. Lastly, fact-checking was the primary way of ensuring that the information, interpretation, and synthesis aligned with the truth.

### **Transferability**

Transferability, or external validity, refers to the ability of the research to be used in contexts other than the current study focus (Patton, 2015). This idea can refer to a case of incarceration or family separation for different reasons. Many similarities are present in the problems associated with the imprisonment of a family member and military service. Research findings rank similar to those of the many military family studies presented in this research. Children who experience the loss of a family member due to incarceration or deployment experience heightened risk factors for behavior problems (Pexton et al., 2018; Rodriguez & Margolin, 2015; Yablonski et al., 2016). Therefore, using attachment theory may shed some light on the dynamics of families of incarcerated persons.

### **Dependability**

Through triangulation and participant confirmation, the researcher ensured that the transcripts were accurate and the information gleaned was as true to life as possible. The effect in which the accounts articulate the problems or phenomenon was essential to the study (Patton, 2015). Open-ended questions allow the participants to create a picture of the events around the belief systems in which they build upon their experience. This development of interpretation is the foundation of a qualitative study (van Manen, 2014). Dependability also asks that similar competing researchers can replicate this study with similar results.

## **Ethical Considerations**

The ethical considerations include data storage and confidentiality. The researcher tried to handle all interviews, transcripts, and data appropriately collected. This method included safe and secure storage in properly encrypted online storage services procured through Microsoft. Also, the researcher encoded all names, addresses, and other identifying information to ensure that, given a data breach, information cannot be traced back to the individual. Due to the study's voluntary nature, participants had every right to withdraw during the interviewing process.

## **Summary**

Chapter Three discussed the methods and components of the research process used in this study. Moustakas (1994) served as the foundation for using the phenomenological format best to describe the effect of deployment on military children. To further this qualitative inquiry into the lived experiences of the families studied, interviews, focus groups, and journaling are the primary data collection forms at the site. Using these methods allows for three data collection sets to act as the foundation for triangulation, which aids in the validity and credibility of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015; Van Manen, 2014).

Chapter three also addressed the demographics of the population and location being studied. The population being studied is military families with children involved in a recent deployment. Families from school will be chosen using snowball selection methods to achieve the most effective collection process (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Van Manen, 2014). All measures were taken to protect the safety and security of the participant pool.

Finally, this chapter highlighted the importance of trustworthiness, credibility, and validity in data collection and analysis. According to Moustakas (1994), the Van Kaam method of analysis was the preferred method of this study. It ensured that the data points collected were

categorized as efficiently as possible. The following chapter presented further data collection results.



## **CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS**

### **Overview**

This inquiry aimed to understand the effect of attachment and deployment on children's educational performance in military families. A synthesis of the results from interviews, focus groups, and journal entries depicts a story of the lived experiences of fourteen participants from local military installations. The research questions were designed to explain how the family background, demographics, family dynamics, belief systems, relationships, and events comprise each member's unique experiences while in the military. This chapter presents the data categorized into themes and subthemes that describe how attachment and military deployments affect children's academic performance. Since the study was founded on core research questions, a discussion on how the findings relate to and answer the research questions further the participants' experiences, meanings, and worldviews through phenomenological inquiry. Since the study was founded on core research questions, discussing how the findings relate to the research questions will complete the picture.

### **Participants**

This study consisted of fourteen families who lived, or are still living, the military life. Each family willingly participated in the survey by providing their lived experiences of moving, working, and sacrificing for the safety of the community and country. The participants were all families with one member serving or having previously served in the military, with diverse backgrounds ranging from active duty to retirement from many services. Conveniently, the participants consisted of military members and spouses, creating a robust viewpoint. Of the participants, four were male, ten were female, three were dual military, and eleven were families where only one member of the group served in the military. All members had children of school

age during a deployment event. All participants experienced multiple deployments, moves, and frequent instability during their tenure in service. Seven participants were retired, while the remaining seven were still in service.

The study participants were recruited in the United States from two locations. One was on the east coast in Washington, D.C., and the other location was on the west coast in Tacoma, Washington. These locations provided a population rich with the potential for me to reach various military members from different services. Each family had instances of multiple deployments in the past, ranging from long-term (six months or more) to short-term (two weeks or longer). In addition to the deployments, all families were subject to multiple relocations with job and school disturbances. The description of each participant is summarized below.

### **Amelia**

Amelia is also a stay-at-home mom with three children and a husband of twenty-five years. Amelia is the matriarch of the family and the primary connection to her three children. She is understanding, affectionate, and the family's biggest champion. She and her husband share many years of service but feel the children have sacrificed more than their fair share of the burdens associated with military life. The family has moved many times and experienced drastic fluctuations in their children's schooling. Amelia discusses how transitions caused her daughter to "lose out on a whole year of not doing AP classes." On top of transition difficulties, Amelia believes her husband has PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder), which leads him to become distant between her and the children. Having difficulties transferring from school to school, Amelia's oldest daughter suffered from depression and anxiety, resulting in a struggle to integrate and fit into their environment. Only through sports and Amelia's support could he transcend his distress.

The family's foundation is togetherness and support. No matter what they are experiencing, Amelia and her family members attempt to support each other. They feel the military lifestyle was something they participated in and are stronger for it but are ready to transition into something else. Throughout the family's journey, their children maintained high performance in school because of Amelia's dedication to supporting and modeling for her children during tumultuous events. The family now feels more resilient and cultured than if they experienced something other than the military lifestyle.

### **Ava**

Ava is the wife of a military soldier who serves in the Army and is a stay-at-home mom. Their family consists of mom, dad, and three children (two male and one female). The husband is a career military and has taken part in several military deployments and relocations. They have been married for 13 years, all in military service. The oldest is in middle school and is involved in many activities. He serves as the role model for the other two children. The middle child is also involved in many activities, while the youngest is now reaching school age.

Ava is the primary attachment person to the middle and oldest children. The father has little connection with the older two children but is still connected with the youngest due to a period of stability and low deployment. Before that, Ava's husband had been deployed and displaced multiple times, leading to the estrangement of the relationship between him and the older children. He was away during the birth of the two older children, resulting in the children feeling disconnected despite many attempts to bridge the connection. The frequency of deployment instances has interfered with the reconnection between the husband and two older children.

Throughout the years, the family has been singularly focused on connection using modern technology, where Skype and email have been the primary forms of communication during separation. Ava and her family love the military lifestyle, mentioning that they found many opportunities and experiences they would otherwise not have had. However, they also struggle with the loss of their father, who had deployed. Recently, the family has experienced more excellent stability, adding additional opportunities. Considering this increased connection is not viewed as usual, the members often feel out of place when all family members interact in a traditional fashion, where both the mother and father share in the household activities. Ava noted, “We joke in within our family that our third child is my husband's first newborn because he was at home to for all the milestones and all the transitions.”

### **Charlotte**

Charlotte and her husband are dual military career soldiers. They met, were married while serving in the military, and were fortunate to have Charlotte’s mother live with them. Having two children and being dual military made it hard to manage without Charlotte’s mother’s help. So, for the better part of their careers and their children’s lives, the grandmother was the primary attachment individual for the children until recently, when Charlotte retired from the military. She and her husband share a love and respect for each other and an equal regard for God.

The children are attached to grandma but are migrating to their mother as she becomes more available. Charlotte talks about how her son had behavioral issues when she was deployed. “I had to write a note to his teacher just to let him know his behavior might be off while I’m gone.” Charlotte is affectionate and loves to create moments for the family to connect now they have more time. They participate in outdoor activities and spend quality time together when her

husband is not in the field. The children are not as close to their father but look up to him as a role model. The family experiences the military lifestyle happily and views their service as necessary for the security of their nation and God.

### **Emma**

Emma is a stay-at-home mom of three children. She and her husband have been married for over twenty years, all of which her husband has served as a military officer. Their three children are a mixture of adoption and blood. Two of the children were adopted when the couple was stationed in Poland. Of those two, one does not live in the house due to behavioral issues that were not mentioned. The other child and the natural-born adolescent are thriving in the family. Emma's family has experienced many short and five-long deployments in their military career.

Emma is the primary person in her household who is connected to her husband, who is still attached to their middle daughter, who is in a therapeutic boarding school. Emma is affectionate with her children but looks to her husband to even out the connections as much as possible. They view the military as an opportunity and experience. The amount of sacrifice the family has made is viewed through the lens of pride and necessity. Emma and her family are very close and look to each other for support and connection.

The children are raised to foster healthy and happy adults. Emma talks about her son: "So we've helped him build trust, build stability, you know, be able to speak his mind." Emma's family is unified in the military role and plays a significant part in the decision-making when selecting assignments and possible relation sites. Collectively, the family shows each other support during times of trial.

**Ethan**

Ethan is a special operations officer who has served most of his adult life in the military. He is married and has one stepdaughter. Ethan and his wife met while he was in service, and his wife was employed but a single mother. Ethan's role in the family has been challenged because of multiple deployments. Ethan and his wife have been displaced numerous times for required moves, resulting in his wife abandoning her career to follow and support her husband.

Family is essential to Ethan and his family. They take pride in their uniformity and camaraderie. Ethan feels his military units are his family, and his experience with them is the foundation of his decision to stay in the military despite having a tumultuous journey. His daughter is essential to him; however, his relationship with her shows signs of strain. The family is close, and Ethan's wife is the lead person connecting with their daughter. Ethan and his wife have a rocky relationship and are working to strengthen their bond.

Due to Ethan's disdain for the military lifestyle, the family has a pessimistic view of the military lifestyle. Ethan described the toll the military placed on him. "I was living in this state of fight or flight all the time." His family saw the sacrifice as more than one family could endure and was happier that Ethan retired. Years of uncertainty, misunderstanding, and neglect within the relationship structure of the family are starting to come to the surface as they address their feelings about their past.

**Harper**

Harper is the wife of a career military officer who boasts about her four children. Harper is no stranger to the military lifestyle, as she met her husband in a military institution. She and her husband share a complicated relationship. They toggle with responsibility for the household's supporting functions, but Harper leads the children with her semi-affectionate style.

She and her children are very close, yet they tend to co-regulate each other in various ways. The family holds the military lifestyle with pride and a sense of patriotism.

Sports play a primary role in the children's lives with the support of both parents; however, Harper's husband has experienced many deployments that spanned many meaningful life experiences for the family, including one of Harper's pregnancies. Harper and her children relied on each other for support and viewed the world from a uniquely resilient perspective. Harper battled loneliness and emotional hardships through alcohol but has found solace after entering and experiencing success chasing her career. At one point in her husband's military career, she mentioned, "I have not been diagnosed, but I'm convinced I have PTSD, and I've picked up a drinking problem."

### **Isabella**

Isabella is a retired military officer who is married to her active-duty husband. Their family consists of three children, one still living in the house while the other two are grown up and living independently. Support and respect are the core facets of Isabella's relationship with her husband. While he still serves in the military, Isabella has a unique understanding of what it is like to be a military soldier based on her military service experience. They actively attempt to keep their children connected to each other and their grandparents. Isabella is the primary caregiver to their youngest, and they are almost inseparable. "I'm the person in our family that he spends the most time with." The older two children see Isabella as the family's primary caregiver and connective tissue; however, because of her previous military service, the older two are not as close to her as the youngest.

All the family members participate in multiple community, social, athletic, and educational activities. Their father is admired, but Isabella serves as the intermediary. Raising

responsible adults is the mantra within the household, impacting the children equally. During the younger years of the children's lives, Isabella's husband was deployed for most of their significant moments. They prioritized fostering connection by creating moments dedicated to intentional connection independently between each child and their father.

Isabella and her family regard the military as an opportunity and sacrifice. They are avid lifestyle proponents and understand the importance of creating and maintaining relationships between family members. Isabella may function as the matriarch; however, she delegates her responsibilities as the relationships between the children, her husband, and her mother fluctuate.

### **Lilly**

Lilly is a small business owner and mother of three children, two older and one still in high school. Lilly's husband is a retired military member working as a government civilian. Lilly is the prime attachment person within her family, but the rest are close to each other. The children have unique relationships with Lilly's husband and siblings. They all enjoy spending time with each other through family gatherings and events. The family understands the challenges associated with military service but realizes that it is a choice they have made to support the country. They are happy with the decision they have made to serve the nation.

Religion is low on Lilly's and her family's priority list. They express their love of God within the family without the restraints of the church culture. Sports and social activities helped the children stay connected and prosperous in school. The children relied on Lilly to be the support structure with whom they admire to this day. Lilly admits the only objective evidence of difficulties in school came when her children would get hyper-anxious about assignments and homework during and around deployments. "Whatever she was doing fine in school, but she



was, she would get very. Umm worked up about like assignments and everything.” Her affection and encouragement helped to guide her children during those times of increased stress.

### **Lucas**

Lucas and his wife are proud parents of three boys. The family has selflessly served their country for many years and anxiously awaits retirement. Lucas and his wife have a close relationship, managing to escort their children through their schooling successfully. Lucas’s wife is the leader in the home and is attached to her boys. Lucas is a role model and supports their boys’ educational and athletic aspirations. The family views education seriously and places all efforts toward their children’s success. Lucas boasts about how strong and resilient his wife is during Lucas’s times of absence, and their children’s success is a direct result of her enduring love. He also mentions how she managed the children during deployment. “My wife would tell you they were definitely needy and demanding while I was gone, but I think there are times when they tempered that a little bit because they understood that, you know, it’s only her.”

The family rightly believes in Christ and views the world as inherently just. Lucas and his family have traveled the globe, experiencing cultures and attractions that have expanded their worldview. As a tight-knit family, Lucas and his clan impact each other through rich family discussions over meals when they have the time. They aid each other as they work through the good experiences and manage the bad. Deployment was typical for Lucas, but his career only required a few relocations.

### **Mia**

Mia is a stay-at-home mother with grown young adults who reside outside the house. She and her husband are currently in an active-duty household. They share a connected relationship with their children, each with their unique way of staying linked. One may call home, while the

others share movie-watching events. Mia is the primary caregiver; however, her husband loves to share the responsibilities. The children feel safe and are encouraged to communicate in a risk-free, open household space.

Military life has strengthened the family and made Mia more independent in her activities and responsibilities. When the family is healthy, Mia and her family view the military lifestyle as rich and opportunistic. When the family is struggling, they treat the family as a place to fall apart and rebuild themselves. Affection and trust are the pillars of health within the family. Mia tends to be the most significant contributor of affection, but each family member uniquely shows their connection.

On the one hand, Mia is optimistic about her family and their experience with military life but also mentions that “the military lifestyle overall can either make you or break you.” She describes the military as being emotionless when it comes to the mission. The children report experiencing loneliness and depression early in life but later in life feeling grateful for the experience.

### **Morgan**

Morgan is a vibrant mother of five who has recently celebrated her husband’s retirement from military service. The family loves to serve their country and understand their sacrifice for the cause. Morgan is the leader of their household and the primary attachment to all five children. The children are fun-loving admirers of their father’s commitment but greatly miss his presence for significant life events. Morgan is affectionate with her children and leads them through their struggles with anxiety and difficulties fitting in at school. Programs and support services have benefited the family as they have weathered multiple deployments. However, the family has experienced many challenges moving from one school district to another.

Morgan's children have experienced success in their schooling to date, and they are genuinely grateful for their experiences in the military. The family has a positive view of the world and understands why their father was absent at times. Each deployment has made the family a bit stronger. Routine has aided Morgan through transient times, allowing her to maintain a sense of normality in the home. This routine kept the children excited and engaged as they moved from location to location and through deployments. Morgan shared, "Our children have just discovered through these deployments that even though Dad might be gone, even though our family dynamics may not be the same right now, things are still going to remain as normal as possible."

### **Nathan**

Nathan and his wife are both military retirees with three children. Nathan spent a substantial portion of his career deploying, causing him various health and emotional ailments. His wife, in turn, experienced many deployments throughout her tenure in the military. Their three children are more attached to their mother than their father; they share a healthy connection with Nathan. The family enjoyed the military experiences but found it strengthened their resolve. Nathan's children gained support from their friends and activities they were part of and from family trips.

Nathan and his wife's children have always enjoyed education, and the family encouraged them to pursue their inspirations, allowing them to stay motivated during tough times. When Nathan and his wife were deployed, the children relied heavily on family and friends to fill the attachment void. He mentions how hard it was for the family to connect after deployments. "When I came back from deployment, I suffered from PTSD and some other things. So, the family walked on eggshells around me." Military life has strengthened Nathan

and his wife, forcing them to collaborate and integrate in ways they would not have if they were a single military family.

### **Oliver**

Oliver and his bride have been married for over twenty years and have served in the military all those years. Their two children are grown and reside outside of the home now, but they are active in staying connected to their parents. Oliver's wife serves as a homemaker and matriarch of the family. She is the primary connection to her children and is the foundation for her husband's successful military career. They are a Christian family who view the world as opportunistic and are optimistic that it is inherently good. Oliver states, "We have a fair amount of empathy for people, you know, having been in the army."

Oliver has served many missions throughout his service, leading to severed connections between him and his family. They are close and loving; however, Oliver misses the times he could have and should have been presented to witness certain life events. Oliver is a passionate soldier who dedicates his heart and soul to his work. His wife does the same with the children. The children are more attached to their mother than their father, but Oliver and his children love to joke and play games together. Oliver mentions that his wife is affectionate, and he tends to be more practical. Oliver mentions that his wife is the affectionate one to the children and receives love and wisdom equally when navigating the world around them. The family has always held ambitious standards for academic work, emulating their father's and mother's work ethic.

### **Sophia**

Sophia is a stay-at-home mom who is married to an active-duty military member. She is currently unemployed due to the most recent move their family has experienced; however, she is actively seeking employment in her field of expertise. Five members make up the family,

including two adults and three children. Sophia and her husband share a strong relationship and actively seek to show affection in front of their children. Sophia herself is not the affectionate type, and the children primarily feel connected to Sophia but receive the most affection from their father. Their father, however, has been absent for the better part of their lives due to military deployments and activities, causing the children and their father hardship while attempting to stay connected. The children are all involved in many activities, including scouting, sports, and outdoor recreation.

As the primary caregiver to the children, Sophia views the family as a safe place for love, devotion, error, and growth. The family believes in Christ and actively attends church with an active community base wherever they are living. School transitions have been frequent in their military career, forcing the family to rely on each other for support and social networks. They are also close to their extended family, who help foster stability through family trips and activities as they move from town to town. Sophia's priority is keeping connected to the family and her husband, as is helping the children maintain whatever connection they have with their father when deployed.

The family spends time together as much as possible through the deployment event to aid in the transition. The family also regards the military lifestyle as brutal but feels a powerful sense of pride that they can protect and support their country. They are proud of their military members and feel they collectively sacrifice and succeed with their soldiers. Sophia stated, "We feel like we have a duty as citizens of the world to make an impact in our community, and we do that through community service, which often involves scouting projects."

Below is the participant demographic table showing the duty status, number of children, sex, and branch of the military for each participant:

**Figure 2***Parent Participants*

<b>Parent Participant</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Branch of Military</b>	<b>Number of Children</b>	<b>Active Duty</b>
<b>Amelia</b>	F	Army	3	Y
<b>Ava</b>	F	Army	3	Y
<b>Charlotte</b>	F	Navy	2	Y
<b>Emma</b>	F	Army	3	Y
<b>Ethan</b>	M	Army	1	N
<b>Harper</b>	F	Army	3	Y
<b>Isabella</b>	F	Army	3	Y
<b>Lilly</b>	F	Army	3	N
<b>Lucas</b>	M	Marines	3	N
<b>Mia</b>	F	Army	3	Y
<b>Morgan</b>	F	Army	3	N
<b>Nathan</b>	M	Army	3	Y
<b>Oliver</b>	M	Army	2	N
<b>Sophia</b>	F	Army	2	Y

**Results**

This investigation sought to understand the experiences of military families and their experiences when deployment required a family member to be absent for extended periods. In addition, the aim was to look at the educational performance based on how connected the children were to their parents who deployed. The research indicated no proof that military deployments affect children's academic performance. Given this information, some pertinent themes emerged from the data. The core themes include Continuity and Stability, Separation and Adjustment, and Educational Challenges and Support. Also, nine sub-themes surfaced, which

helped describe the effects of deployment on the children's environment. A discussion summarizing these themes and a table depicting them with their associated sub-themes follows.

### Figure 3

#### *List of Themes and Sub-Themes*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Sub-Theme</b>
1. Continuity and Stability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Quality and Quantity of connection</li> <li>b. Importance of Routine</li> <li>c. Activities and Support</li> </ul>
2. Separation and Adjustment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Emotional Coping and Adjustment</li> <li>b. Changes in Behavior and Motivation</li> <li>c. Social Isolation or Inclusion</li> </ul>
3. Educational Challenges and Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Disruption in Environment</li> <li>b. Resilience and Coping Mechanisms</li> <li>c. Extracurricular Activities and Outside Support</li> </ul>

### **Continuity and Stability**

Continuity and Stability were the most prominent themes derived from the participant interviews. This theme highlighted the transient nature of the military lifestyle and was experienced by all fourteen participants. Continuity and Stability involved deployment events, training exercises, temporary duty assignments, military-sanctioned moves, and long stressful workdays. Because of these fluctuations within the household, education was, in all cases, disrupted. Many families had to leave sports teams, friends, activities, and programs in which they were involved. Children often need help finding reciprocal replacements due to various requirements and capabilities. Three sub-themes emerged from this theme: Quality and Quantity of Connection, Importance of Routine, and Activities and Support.

#### *Quality and Quantity of Connections*

The Quality and Quantity of Connections subtheme is critical in this group due to the complexities required for healthy relationships with key individuals. Interactions with military members are vital to establishing and maintaining a secure connection between soldiers and children. Establishing and maintaining a secure connection between the soldier and the children is essential. Every participant in the study reported that the quality and quantity of interactions with their military family members were affected by military deployments. Ava mentioned that her spouse was absent for most of the children's lives. Ava remembers, "I unexpectedly got pregnant, and he left when I was five months pregnant." Isabella recounted having to initiate discussions with her husband and children so they could begin to repair broken connections. "You guys have to figure out how to talk to each other." All parents who stayed home reported being the household's primary connection person, and having one person of connection at home served as the thread that allowed children to succeed in the educational environment, especially with frequent moves and family changes.

For the military family, relocations, deployments, and long work requirements were commonplace. Therefore, to mitigate the stressors related to such activities, connections with parents and siblings were the foundational rock the children have to achieve stability. Military families work tirelessly toward stability within the family to support the children as they progress through their schooling and childhood. The families who struggle with maintaining connections often have difficulties surrounding the many facets of military life. Ethan mentioned, "I think if I, if I could name it to just one and it was really just the struggle of the, the power dynamic and just coming back to the home and reintegrating and then just to get ripped out to do it all over again was probably the biggest challenge for us."

### ***Importance of Routine***



The routine became an influential subtheme within the study. The participants used Routine to provide stability in times of instability. Different requirements and needs are expected from deployments versus relocations; however, the one activity that can temper the sting of military life is to have a solid routine. All participants talked about having routines where they would initiate communication and the nature of the activities the family had control over. Mia mentioned having movie nights with the family to create a sense of camaraderie. Isabella encouraged family trips around pivotal moments within the family's military lifecycle.

For children, routine helps them have something they can hold on to when unsure of what will happen in the future. Academically, every family highlighted how routine helped to foster success. Harper described her family's excitement when entering turbulent times and correlated that with the family's importance on routine. Morgan's family loved to find activities outdoors to keep the family in tune with nature and their environment. Morgan mentions, "I think we would try and create some schedules, some routines to help integrate the husband or the soldier, our husband, my dad, into our routines, even though he's going to be gone." Routines regularly change in the military due to location and supply, but all families benefit from adopting some form of routine around the changing atmosphere.

### ***Activities and Support***

The subtheme of Activities and Support became an important topic. Having activities and community services as a connection platform for the families of military-connected youth, sports, scouts, clubs, community programs, and extended family all serve as avenues for children to plug into their passions. These programs are different everywhere; however, some programs are available everywhere. Whether overseas or in the country, community is the key to success.

No one in this study neglected to mention how activities and community were pivotal toward the success of their children, their families, and themselves.

### **Separation and Adjustment**

Separation and Adjustment became the second most important of the themes that arose out of this study. Every family experienced the separation of their family member from deployment, duties, or relocations. Due to this separation, each participant had to change to adapt to new social dynamics. Before the separation, families had to plan, strategize, and establish systems and goals so the event would maintain the normalcy of their lives. Lucas and Charlotte mentioned going to great lengths to ensure they had a routine connection with their military member who would be away. They bought special items and toys and facilitated routines to keep the family close.

Families learned to manage daily tasks independently during the separation, whereas their spouses would be responsible. Lily and Oliver (talking about his wife) discussed becoming more robust and more independent because of the forceful reliance on oneself to accomplish tasks unknown to them. Lily boasts, "I've done things that I probably never thought I would do, but also, at the same time, I'm proud of that." In addition to the added responsibility, their children learned to rely on the parent left behind for all their needs rather than distributing them between two parents. This reliance caused connections with the parents at home that would not have happened with both mother and father present.

Amelia, Harper, and Lilly recounted that they had difficulty adjusting to the return of their deployed member when they returned because they were so used to doing things on their own and in a certain way that they could not accept another variable into the equation. Harper mentions how her husband, "I don't feel like an equal member of the house, so they want to find

spaces where they can fill back in but not completely disrupt the flow.” In all cases, this dynamic led to the reintegration struggles all the studied military members faced after being displaced. The other themes will discuss more on severed and reconnection, but connection dissonance became a core issue in the families studied.

### ***Emotional Coping and Adjustment***

As with any significant life event, emotions will arise, and one must learn to assimilate the new status quo. Deployment has the potential to be stressful and frightening for all parties involved. Sometimes, children become worried about their deployed members and can experience anxiety and depression as a result. In all cases presented here, the children and the parents had to face their emotions and learn to cope. Harper found herself looking to substance abuse, as she could not cope with the demands placed upon her. Ethan experienced anger issues that led to engagements with the law.

Many families used programs in the military and outside of the military to help find healthy coping mechanisms. The children of most study participants, in tandem, sought the help of counselors and therapists. The topics of connection, community, and routine were so profound that they helped to cushion the effects of emotional struggles within the family. Oliver, Morgan, and Emma stated that their family, friends, and the programs they accessed were still helping them adjust to healthier coping methods. Emma mentions how her daughter embraced moving in her senior year of high school, “I’m ready to go and be on better, on a better swim team, on a better polo team.”

### ***Changes in Behavior and Motivation***

Fluctuations with behavior and motivation rose as a key subtheme in this study due to the sensitive nature of military life with a family. Many changes were needed through various events

in the families of the study journey. With such changes, modifications in behavior and motivation were realized, both intended and unintended. Every parent and child in the study was targeted to have experienced some form of behavioral abnormality that resulted in changes in their performance, either in school or socially.

The majority of the participants in the study noticed changes in behavior both in their children and in the other family members. These behavior modifications came from places of friendship, social activities, and general mental and emotional health expressions. Lucas and Oliver found their children isolated and emoting their anxiety struggles in ways that often led to temporary unrest. "I would say that it definitely has caused some anxiety and uneasiness at school." Husbands and wives, as in Harpers' case, behaved in ways they might not have if the family were completely present. Regardless of any fluctuation in behavior, the family members became the catalysts for their survival. They used their connections to overcome the obstacles they faced.

### ***Social Isolation or Inclusion***

Social Isolation or Inclusion means that once a change in the home is experienced via move or deployment, the social community either includes the child or excludes them from their needs. As with any change, the community helps soften the transition's effects. The change of moving is more outward, and inclusion or isolation is visible. However, with a deployment, the change may be hidden. Regardless of the type of change, children want to feel included and a part of something bigger than themselves. School is a wonderful environment for this but can be a breeding ground for isolation. New students often need time to integrate into the social web. Military families are familiar with transition and generally take less time to integrate and make new friends.

Emma, Lilly, and Morgan reported their children were so used to moving and being the new students in the class that they experienced difficulty feeling like they were entirely accepted. Emma described how her daughter started exhibiting behavioral issues. “I think one of the things that weighed on her was that when he was coming back from being gone, we were moving.” Many families found that activities and sports helped introduce the children into the community quickly and helped them feel like they fit in. Ethan and Lucas found themselves in one place for unusually long rotations, making the children feel more attached to their location. Although some families experienced stints of stability, others did not.

### **Educational Challenges and Support**

Educational Challenges and Support is an essential theme in the research. From moving to deploying, education can hinder the family's ability to cope, but with support and connection, children can succeed. Every family in the study used the support of many programs and services available to them. In addition, the primary attachment parent was directly responsible for maintaining their children's higher performance levels in school. These successes did not come with trouble. Families who moved around a great deal found that school systems were not equally transferring credits, classes, and test results from district to district.

Communication between schools and programs was highlighted as an area of interest when living the military commitment. Course credits and information were often lost or misrepresented, leading the children to retake or fail tests, courses, and other requirements. Given the location barriers, many families were able to take advantage of the available help, allowing them to prosper and eventually thrive through the transitions.

### ***Disruptions in Environment***

Disruptions in the Environment highlights how military families mitigate the fluctuations and uncertainty related to military service. Deployments and frequent moves are commonplace among military families. With their commitment to their parents, children are subject to unique challenges—the families' location changes often, which leads to social and emotional difficulties. Parents might have to deploy within the family, causing further disarray within the home environment. Schooling and activities often differ across boundaries, so the supply and scale of programs may change depending on location. Environmental fluctuations can be incredibly stressful for the family and children.

As environments change, families look to activities and routines to mitigate the effects of change. Amelia and Sophia attested to how their children benefited from keeping a steady routine and plunging into activities and clubs when they experienced transition. Amelia and Sophia credit the efforts of the family to attempt to resemble some form of stability, allowing the children to feel more at ease. Sophia recounts that after deployment, “We all settle back into our routines, and tasks get divided, and you kind of forget that feeling of being grateful.”

### ***Resilience and Coping Mechanisms***

Resilience and Coping Mechanisms became a subtheme of the study. Families connected to the military have a unique ability to withstand extreme amounts of uncertainty and stress. They are exposed to environments, situations, and events that most civilian families do not. Being in a military family teaches one to cope with one's lifestyle, resulting in increased resiliency. Children can adapt to almost any situation with the help of their parents, who teach them to channel their emotions healthily.

Emma expressed that her husband thought he would help the family by requesting to stay at a duty station so that his daughter could finish her senior year. Still, his daughter already

prepared herself to move and opted to attend a brand-new school for her last year of high school. Lilly struggled with her daughter when the father was deployed. Lilly mentioned she had to limit her daughter's exposure to the media to help her cope with her dad's absence. Lilly remembered, "Not knowing, but also aware of what could happen? Umm, I think that the news outlet didn't help any. Just because it would sensationalize the violence that was out there." The tools the family uses to help build resilience and create coping mechanisms help prepare the family for change.

### ***Extracurricular Activities and Outside Support***

Extracurricular Activities and Outside Support were mentioned as factors that influence military families. Support for the military family is vast. There are multiple programs to aid a family as they transition, deploy, separate, deal with loss, and more. When taken advantage of, these programs can be of excellent use, but if the family does not utilize the programs available to them, they may not be successful. Sports, church, scouts, music, and many other activities help the families of military members and their children by creating community and activity.

Only some families who participated in the study said they did not benefit from activities and or programs available to them. Lucas and Harper found baseball and soccer to help their children nurture their talent and foster connections when they moved from place to place. Nathan and Morgan talked about how photography and camps played a critical role in helping their children cope with their parent's absence. Activities and support programs are vital to the success of a military family. Oliver states, "I think from a good perspective, they've just learned to enjoy, you know, company when you can, and you kind of not just live in the moment because I think they have some long-term perspective."

## **Outlier Data and Findings**

This study did not have any outliers per se; however, a couple of cases did stand out. One was the case of dual-military families. These dual-military families were Isabella, Charlotte, and Nathan. These families often had to rely on family to help support their children. They also had to mitigate being stationed in the same place simultaneously. Often, some families had to remain separated for long periods while not deployed. Nathan mentioned having to travel by car to see his family, who were just a few hours away by car.

### ***Outlier Charlotte***

In one case, Charlotte's mother had to move in with them, placing herself as a primary connection and caregiver. This dynamic changed drastically once Charlotte retired from the military, leaving her mother with drastically evolving roles. Charlotte enjoyed the newly acquired time with her children, but there was adjustment within the entire family. The mother was also transitioning into becoming a grandmother instead of the primary caregiver, which can cause friction within the home.

### ***Outlier Mia***

In another case, Mia found her children struggling in school. They came from a Department of Defense-sanctioned school overseas to a local community-based school in the United States. This transition, along with a deployment event, caused significant levels of anxiety and worry in her children, resulting in behavioral and performance declines. The family used routine, community, and connection to help mitigate the troubled young ones; however, the family experienced a difficult time adjusting and adapting to the new environment.



## **Research Question Responses**

This inquiry aimed to explore the connections between military family members. I wanted to curate a story on what makes children successful or unsuccessful in school based on the experiences of military families. Connections and experiences with families and communities are the cornerstones of growth and serve as the foundation for how one shows up in their involvement in life. Therefore, to comprehend the dynamics of one's life, an examination of how their family supports or hinders them is needed. Appreciation must be evident in how they grow, see, and connect to the world around them instead of relying on other means to measure success.

The data collection process yielded three themes that served as support to answer the preliminary research questions: Continuity and Stability, Separation and Adjustment, and Emotional Changes and Adjustments. In addition to the primary themes, nine subthemes provided a more granular depiction of the study requirements. Below is a presentation of the study's results relating to the research questions.

### **Central Research Question**

The research question that drove the study was: What are the experiences of military families, specifically their children's academic performance during deployment? The themes of Continuity and Stability, Activities and Support, Quality and Quantity of Connections, changes in behavior and motivation, and disruptions in the environment help to understand the experiences of military families and help to view how the children's academic performance might be affected. All participants contributed to the central research question. Their lived understandings of their lives show how children can be impacted. As Olivar articulated: "We did not connect our kids' education, educational experience, or educational performance to the army too much or deployments. It was always just an expectation that, like, hey, you're gonna get a lot

out of school.” Continuity and Stability became the main topic of the interviews, and all participants found themselves living a very nomadic and unpredictable lifestyle. Through the military profession, the families within the study experienced frequent moves, long work commitments, deployments, and many other disruptions to the traditional civilian lifestyle. They softened the effects of the uncertainty with certainty through routine and intentional connection. All participants supported the theme.

Quality and Quantity of Connection became the most popular subtheme due to the importance of family, community, and social connections in personal and academic success. This subtheme also supported the theory behind the study, highlighting that attachments play a role in the quality of children’s experiences later in life (Bowlby, 1969). All participants reported disruptions in the connections or attachments with their military family members. To replace those connections, spouses, siblings, and relatives became the primary connection person(s) to the children in the military-connected household. At least one secure connection allowed for a higher level of security despite losing another.

Changes in Behavior and Disruptions in the Environment served to attest that military life is unique and requires finesse while participating. Children often show signs of behavior change through interactions or lack thereof with their peers. Many participants described their children’s interactions with their friends and immediate family. Lilly, Lucas, and Harper shared that their children were reluctant to make new friends when transitioning from one location to another. However, once the children became acclimated, their interactions became more vivid. Lilly, Lucas, and Harper also highlighted that their children looked to their primary connection person for guidance and safety during disruptions, such as deployments and moves. The families all reported experiencing multiple fluctuations in the core environment, which led to increased

instability and uncertainty. Morgan recounts how her family helps maintain normality through deployments. “Our children have just discovered through these deployments that even though dad might be gone, even though our family dynamics may not be the same right now, things are still going to remain as normal as possible.”

### **Sub-Question One**

Sub-question one focused on the connections between family members and posed the question: How do the societal/academic environment and the connections children make support the family and the child during a deployment? The subthemes supporting this research sub-question were quality and Quantity of Connections, Extracurricular Activities and Outside Support, and Social Isolation and Inclusion. The entire participant population experienced social interactions that helped their transitions or hurt their experience.

The Quality and Quantity of Connections children had in and out of the home determined how much difficulty they would have with their school performance and overall mental and emotional health. Morgan, Ava, and Sophia discussed prioritizing intentional family time with their children. They made calculated efforts to connect to their deployed members to ensure the children knew that connection and interaction were significant. Isabella, Emma, and Charlotte also valued their community and extended family and rallied them together when needed. Isabella took family trips: “Beach trips in the summer might not be like the day after the deployment, but we, you made that, that effort to take those vacations and do this and the things that we all enjoyed.” Taking the time and effort to reach out to those who are close to the family helps to support the community, as well as the children in the house, succeed.

Ensuring the family is active in the community through Extracurricular Activities and Activities and Support is a positive way to establish, nurture, and grow connections. Children

develop a sense of involvement outside the home through extracurricular activities such as sports, scouts, special interest groups, church, etc. Activities in the community are imperative to foster connection, teamwork, and creativity. Ethan supported his daughter in all her sports activities, prioritizing them through each move and deployment. Ethan talks about how “sports is something that she was, you know, she's been blessed with.” Nathan encouraged his children to get involved in computers and photography to aid them in their times of need. All participants found that activities were vital for success within the household.

Finally, Isolation and Inclusion became a subtheme to note, accenting the truth behind human interaction. Not all endeavors ended fruitfully; some activities and transitions left children feeling alone and excluded, while others welcomed them with open arms. Many families thought they transitioned well during certain times. Other times, they boded more hurtful for the children. Amelia recalled her children having difficulty fitting in with their peers after a recent move. Her son became very depressed and had extreme difficulties interacting with his peers. Lucas mentioned that his children inserted themselves and created opportunities and new friendships where none had previously existed. “The social aspect of school and doing other things aside from school or what's more important to her than just doing school.” As with any change, adapting to a new environment is complex, and one will often experience isolation and inclusion.

### **Sub-Question Two**

The second sub-question the study attempted to query is: How do the societal/academic environment and the connections children make support the family and the child during a deployment? Thematically, there were a variety of subthemes that addressed this question: Educational Challenges, Support and Resilience, and Coping Mechanisms. These subthemes

were vital in the child's societal and academic support system. Every child in the study needed and utilized additional support from the community at some juncture along their quest.

All the families in the study pool experienced many educational challenges. Eva and Emma talked about how their children used programs, such as scholarships, academic tutoring, and counseling, to assist the family and children through moves and deployments. Emma said her children finally experienced "some stability after years of deployments, and because of that stability, they feel comfort in knowing that all the basic needs are met." They described this stable time as foreign and jarring for the family, indicating that a certain level of comfort came with the uneasiness of military life.

### **Summary**

This chapter laid the foundation for the study participants, themes, and findings from interviews, journals, and focus groups. Fourteen families participated in the study, and the participants came from many different paths in life. The themes that arose from the survey included Continuity and Stability, Separation and Adjustment, and Educational Challenges. From these primary themes, nine sub-themes surfaced to help build a wide-level view of how military service affects children academically. The consensus from all but one participant concluded that military deployments do not harm children's academic performance.

Conversely, the overall military lifestyle and transient nature became the primary stressors in the family. Many families expressed how stressful and disruptive military life is; however, they also mentioned how rewarding and adventurous it is. The study participants were introduced in this chapter, along with the research questions and thematic findings. Next, chapter five will interpret and discuss the findings of this research.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION**

### **Overview**

This hermeneutical qualitative study aimed to understand the impact of deployment on children's academic performance at the military base school. The quest is to discover the experiences of the military family as they relate to connection and children's performance in school. From the participants' accounts, core themes arose that aided in exploring the topic. This chapter discusses those themes, highlights the lessons gleaned, and interprets the findings. From a discussion of findings, critical implications to policy and practice, in addition to the theoretical and methodological, will arise. Opportunities and limitations highlight future roadmaps, hoping aspiring researchers will expound. The foundational theory behind these discussions is the attachment theory posited by John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth in 1969.

### **Discussion**

The study was founded on attachment theory and used the phenomenological approach, where lived experiences create the framework to view this phenomenon (Creswell and Poth, 2018). Every participant voiced their story, creating a rich depiction of the military lifestyle. Three themes emerged from the research, branching into nine subthemes that fed the discussion and implications to come. Through various data collection forms, a further understanding of what was meaningful from the family perspective, the community, and the military lifestyle was attained.

The study's implications are based on the research from the literature review in chapter two, the participants' lived experiences, and the researcher's unique interpretation. A deep understanding of the dynamics of the family as it relates to service to their country and their

children's educational performance will help many families, communities, programs, institutions, and, ultimately, children.

### **Summary of Thematic Findings**

Three themes emerged from the research covering many topics. The themes were Continuity and Stability, Separation and Adjustment, and Educational Challenges and Support. Continuity and Stability described the transient nature of the military lifestyle and included such activities and relocations, deployments, and long-term exercises. Separation and Adjustment contested the effects of the severance between the military members and their families while attending to their military commitments. Educational Challenges and Support depict how children perform and are supported within their academic institutions. The findings from the research highlight the benefit of qualitative inquiry. By finding meaning from the data, solidifying interpretations, and creating an added knowledge point, this study furthered the body of research supporting the need for a greater understanding of the military child and their family's needs and experiences (van Manen, 2014).

This study attempted to answer a central research question: "What are the experiences of military families, specifically their children's academic performance during deployment?" The consensus and interpretive findings were that children within a military home who experienced deployment did not show a decline in academic performance. However, the military lifestyle did create many obstacles for children and their families to overcome, which led to various social and emotional implications. These nine sub-themes aided in developing the findings framework of the study.

Two sub-questions branched out from the research question. The first one, "How do the societal/academic environment and the connections children make support the family and the

child during a deployment?” The findings from this topic resulted in an increased understanding of the importance of connection and attachment. All children within the study had at least one secure connection to someone in their family, most likely their stay-at-home caregiver. The themes supporting this result are quality and quantity of connections, social isolation or inclusion, and activities and support. All the parents who participated in the study emphatically detailed their support and promotion of connection.

The second sub-question, “how the societal/academic environment and the connections children make support the family and the child during a deployment,” was highlighted. This question culminated with the added decoration from the first sub-question: Children need a community to thrive. Connections and secure attachments are essential without stress but are imperative when stressful events occur. The sub-themes supporting this result are changes in behavior and motivation, importance of routine, resilience and coping mechanisms, and quality and quantity of connections.

The findings of all research questions conclude that families are affected by the military lifestyle in both positive and negative ways. The primary mechanism supporting stability, resilience, and success is the attachments and connections within the family and community. When these connections change, as they often do in the military environment, children and family members find support within the community through activities, programs, and social engagements.

### **Interpretation of Findings**

Of the prime three themes, nine subthemes were presented in Chapter Four and will be expounded and reviewed here in chapter five. This data set provided first-hand accounts of how the military lifestyle, coupled with the attachment profiles of the family, affected the children as



they progressed through their academic careers. Overall, the findings do not support a negative impact on educational performance; however, they corroborated the importance of connection and relationships and how they helped mitigate the effects of stressful events. Furthering this discussion, the following sections will present a detailed interpretation of the findings.

### ***Foundations of a Military Family***

The military lifestyle's foundation is rich in experience, potential, and service. Military life requires families to adopt and create the skills necessary to navigate a constantly changing environment. Military service also calls for temporary absences by military members supporting various missions. This sacrifice by the family can create sensitivity within the group as they adapt to changes in dynamics (Alfano et al., 2016; Coffey & Davis, 2019). The military lifestyle also calls for frequent moves as the family goes from station to station. Through this transient and unpredictable commitment, families must rely on and support each other in ways uncommon in the civilian world.

Many military families have children, which creates complexity within the family dynamic. The effects of separation and transition become compounded as more people are added to the equation (Cramm et al., 2019; Feinberg et al., 2020). Families are a core supporting element for many military members. Therefore, understanding the unique dynamics when parents participate in the game of life through a military lens is imperative to providing support services to the family.

This study tried to pinpoint the family's attachment structure so that the community stakeholders could understand how programs can support the family's emotional needs. The findings proved that through healthy and secure attachments, children can thrive through the

trials of military life and become more resilient members of society. Additionally, the study found that the family's health relies on the parents' health and support structure.

### ***Relationships and Connection***

Given that military life is riddled with transition, the members of the family and the community at large must spend efforts and attention toward improving and cultivating healthy relationships. Humans are social creatures and regulate based on the quality and quantity of connections they have in their environment (Bowlby, 1969; Ewhiffen & Kerr, 2005; Gardenhire et al., 2019). Serving as head attachment ambassadors in the family, the participants in the study testified to the effects of healthy attachments. They proved that all things are possible when guided in the correct direction.

The children of military families often have their connections severed or impaired from separation and disconnection. Many families had to work to create and reconnect the lost connections. For some families, these connections would always look different; however, they stressed the importance of frequent and positive connections with their children in their formative years. In this way, young people could rebuild the trust lost through unmet expectations. Having frequent and positive connections is paramount to creating healthy attachments within the family (Bowlby, 1969).

### ***Resilience and Coping***

The commitment to serve the nation requires a certain resolve that only certain people have. The obligation to serve requires a selfless sense of sacrifice that may or may not be shared by the service member's family. Because of this, the service member's family must learn to cultivate resilience and coping mechanisms. Each family mentioned in this account developed a toughness that is unique to them but allows them to persevere through adversity. Military

families experience parenting, educational, emotional, financial, separation, location, healthcare, career, and many other challenges that many civilian counterparts never or rarely ever experience (Gewirtz et al., 2019; Hajal et al., 2020; Knoblock et al., 2018).

Strategies, programs, services, and the like help support the family through their transitions and need optimization. This study highlighted the need to support connection, attachment activities, and communication between all the constituents involved. Military families face unique challenges that can only be overcome with healthy and supportive relationships from inside and outside the home (Landers-Potts et al., 2017; MacNeill & DiTommaso, 2022; Ohye et al., 2020).

### **Implications for Policy or Practice**

Understanding the military family and what creates a robust environment for children to succeed helps to further the current knowledge base. It provides more data points for policymakers and administrators to shorten the gap between military life and community involvement. This study sought to answer how attachment and deployment affect the academic performance of family children. Administrators, policymakers, chains of command, families, and community support persons will benefit from this knowledge by bettering support services, school policies, collaboration and communication, mental and emotional skills, community understandings, familial relationships, and parenting resources.

### ***Implications for Policy***

Military support services are plentiful and are targeted. Military support programs fill many gaps within the military lifestyle and ecosystem; however, more cohesion and collaboration should be emphasized. This study provided added knowledge to promote streamlining the various ingredients into a more comprehensive journey for military families and

their children. Support services and policies are often location-specific, which creates unequal and usually completely different resources. Military members experience frequent moves, deployments, and duty requirements requiring enhanced services, stakeholder collaboration, and better communication channels.

**Enhanced Support Services.** Support services are vast throughout the military and tailored to specific interests and needs. Many of these programs have rich content and resources that can be gained; however, many families may need help to take advantage of these offerings to the fullest. Time and commitment constraints often play a pivotal role in enrollment and retention rates for such programs. Support services are not required but are usually included in transition training from the military and are often unknown to nonmilitary entities. Families will only benefit from a more robust and complete offering of support services.

The families in the study all commented that they needed help finding what they needed or could not find what they needed without having to touch many different agencies and contact points. Often, the families did not have the flexibility to commit fully to the programs available once found. This disconnect was not the case with all programs; each family study found some help and support, but the complete solution was only sometimes visible. Most parents were non-working spouses with more significant influence in their children's lives than their working counterparts. Having the ability and access to connect with their children allowed the stay-at-home parent to nurture their secure attachment to their children, and having support options available and accessible when needed was paramount toward a successful life.

**Flexible School Policies.** School policies change from location to location and often from one installation to another. Due to these various requirements, children in the military lifestyle have a unique set of constraints placed upon them. As they journey through their

parents' military career timeline, they are exposed to frequent moves and events that most civilian students do not experience. When deployment occurs, or a move is needed, children often struggle with consistency and stability, affecting their overall performance.

All the study participants told many stories of inconsistencies and emotional derailments. Many participants expressed the need for more apparent and more connected transitions from school to school. "They switched schools, and this school over here taught 4<sup>th</sup> grade, but they hadn't reached 4<sup>th</sup> grade yet." Morgan recounts how her children missed learning the state capitals because of relocation. Additionally, the participants highlighted the need for leniency from policy when navigating the complexities of deployment. Though the military does provide direct support for these transitions, added cohesion is needed so that students can continue their educational requirements and paths unaffected by the military lifestyle.

**Collaboration Between Schools and Military.** Currently, within the military system, the civilian equivalent has limited communication and connection with each other to help facilitate smooth transitions and relocations. The connections between schools, schools, and families, as well as between schools and military installations, as the family migrates, are limited and need improvement. Connections are fragmented and often need to depict what the child needs or is experiencing. Misinformation and missing information can help families once found. Teachers often need to communicate with the family constantly. The military and the community will benefit from unifying communication lines to help keep consistency and cohesion.

No one parent failed to provide examples of how misinformation and lack of communication led to instances of strife for their children. Most participants felt their support system needed a more complete view of the complexity of what children experience. Conversely, the families admitted they felt disconnected from the school environment, but most parents

increased their participation and motivation to bridge the gap. Connecting stakeholders through clear communication channels can help align efforts and resources from all parties, creating better value and outcomes for the children of military families.

### ***Implications for Practice***

This research highlighted how much people need each other and how attachment and connection help or hurt individuals. People are social creatures; they need connection and attachment to aid them as they sense, filter, and perform in the game of life. Families and communities are the nesting grounds for healthy, responsible community members. Therefore, it is imperative to understand how and what constitutes the experience they have. Children and families can benefit from strengthening communication and connection, encouraging community and support, and facilitating clean and complete communication and collaborations. The families of military and nonmilitary communities will be enhanced in kind.

**Strengthening Communication and Connection Channels.** My results showed that communication and connection are keys to success. Families who are open and connected are more resilient and likely to experience more perceived positive experiences than those who are disconnected and have insecure attachments. Military life requires much of the military members and sometimes requires connection and support from those around them. More importantly, children need guidance, love, and attention in many of the same ways as adults. Fostering connections and attachments helps to soften the symptoms associated with stress and disease.

Many participants boasted about how the quality and quantity of their connections helped their children and themselves feel safe. Having a safe space for expression and learning to connect begins at home and migrates to the school/community. Children who experience healthy connections and attachments have better chances of becoming healthy and happy contributors to

a thriving society. Military life strains those connections, leaving families and children in need. Where and how that need is fulfilled determines how successful or unsuccessful the military family becomes.

**Cultivating Community/Educational Support.** Community is the impetus behind the military lifestyle. It is the glue that holds units together clearly and cohesively and the foundation upon which the family stands. Only some things can always be fulfilled by one person or even a small group of people, but through the connections one has with their community, they can find everything they need. The military lifestyle is transient and requires more than can be given by one or a few people at a time. It demands participation and support from the greater community at large.

Every parent and every family contested the benefit of having community wherever they were or ended up. Based on the findings, children who had made friends at several duty stations previously often stayed in contact with their friends over long distances. New connections are formed as the family plugs into various activities within the community. Developing and expanding opportunities for people to gather and commune will only strengthen the greater community.

**Collaboration with External Services.** Many programs and services are available to military and non-military families. However, most programs do not collaborate to communicate, transition, or filter information. One program may offer guidelines that conflict with other programs. Finding information may lead to one in a vortex of searching to find the right person to talk to. Programs and services are designed to aid individuals in their quest but do little to help connect the dots between function and form.

Every participant spoke about how hard it was to work with different agencies, schools, and institutions. Many families were directed in one direction only to be detoured toward another. Greater training and connection lines can help foster greater cohesion from the directory of individual organizations. The benefits of collaboration will resonate beyond the military community into the civilian realm.

### **Empirical and Theoretical Implications**

This study highlighted specific military family experiences related to attachment, deployment, and educational performance. The results indicated that although many of the children did not experience negative implications from their grades and overall school performance, the consensus from all participants led to attachment and connection implications. Children and family members within the house had various fluctuations within the connection circuit, leading to many members' attachment levels. More often, the disruptions were between the military members and the rest of the family, including the children.

### ***Empirical Implications***

The empirical implications of the study comprised foundational success factors for every military family. These foundations include the inward, outward, and transactional dimensions of how families support one another. The study supported the importance of attachment and connection in human interaction. Participants who understood their roles, managed their internal environment, and sought out the help of others tended to have higher success and perceived positivity toward the military lifestyle than those who did not. Through a solid understanding of relationships, emotions, and interventions, parents become the mentors and champions of their children, whether present or afar.



Previous research studied families trying to encapsulate the experiences of the military family and how children perform (Cerasoli et al., 2014; Cunitz et al., 2019; Nunes et al., 2022). However, the gap in the research surfaced as a connection and how families use attachment to help mitigate the requirements of a military lifestyle through the parents' lens. This research helps to enrich the current body of knowledge by understanding how military families cope with the ever-changing military lifestyle.

As each story became known, increased evidence surfaced to explain the unique nature of the military lifestyle, adding to the current body of knowledge about military families' challenges and successes. Each family involved cultivated connection and viciously fought for each other's relationship. The attempt to connect became the cornerstone of their accomplishments and the foundation for their struggles.

**Relationships and Caregiving.** Relationships and caregiving extend past children into the wholeness of the nuclear family. How parents interact with each other serves as social proof to the children of what the status quo should be. After assimilating the data, the results supported the need for healthy attachments and connections from the perspective of the child and the perspective of the adults. Each person in the family needs a primary connection or attachment person to help them regulate their interactions with the world. Without this connection, individuals suffer, as do children and adults (De Pedro et al., 2018; Long, 2022; Nunes et al., 2022). Given the military lifestyle, families rely on each other to succeed in the outside world.

**Mental and Emotional Health.** Emotion and mental health serve as a critical empirical foundation for the study. Previous studies highlighted that the quality of one's surroundings impacts how one feels about one's experience and performance (Bóia et al., 2018; Bowlby, 1969; Ross et al., 2021). This study supported the idea that children with healthy attachments are less

likely to suffer from performance decline outside the home, such as in the academic environment. Given the requirements and sacrifices placed upon them, every family in the study boasted about how well their children did. Some discussed temporary declines in performance but stated that success was eventually restored.

**Interventions and Therapy.** Through community and support, families are empowered to overcome many obstacles that would otherwise crush them. Military programs are many and often targeted to specific situations. The programs are enacted to help aid military families through their transitions and bolster their quality of life (Johnson et al., 2018; Olson et al., 2018). The families who participated in this study benefited from the programs and support they received from the offerings of military and non-government entities. Through these programs, they offered their children more professional support than they could provide alone.

### ***Theoretical Implications***

Through the lens of attachment, deployments and the overreaching military lifestyle place increased stress on the family. The study highlighted that those deployments could affect children's school performance but added that in the absence of one parent, another serves as the primary attachment person. This primary attachment relationship becomes the foundation on which children develop social and emotional coping mechanisms designed to aid them as they navigate life's difficulties.

The study's implications are found in the attachment perspective posited by Bowlby and Ainsworth in 1969. Positive interactions with caregivers involve handling their expectations and needs with care and intention (Bowlby, 1969). This research supported and added to the body of knowledge by creating and developing a solid understanding of the events, dynamics, and experiences leading up to and through military deployments.

**Greater Understanding of Interpersonal Relationships.** From the experiences of the family members who participated, many children were exposed to countless complex relationships throughout the military service life cycle. With this immersion into a multidimensional web of attachments, children witnessed, lived, and learned how to navigate social networks. They experienced the sting of severance and the sweetness of embrace, creating opportunities for all family members to highlight their understanding of cohesion and group dynamics. Through attachment and connection, the study highlighted how Bowlby and Ainsworth's research (1969) relates to the military lifestyle. The study supported that through military experience, children often become more resilient, open, and understanding adults (Alfano et al., 2016; Cafferky et al., 2022; Coffey & Davis, 2019).

**Acceptance of Personal Differences.** A family comprises many members, each with their understanding and experiences with the world around them. In the military, work and home life can look completely different, causing members and their families to be dissonant when attempting to understand each other. Therefore, it becomes vital to the health of a relationship to identify and understand everyone's unique experience as much as possible. Children often have difficulty understanding and accepting concepts they do not fathom (MacNeill & DiTommaso, 2022; Ohye et al., 2020). A healthy connection can buffer the dissonance between the military member and their children, where concepts are described and explained in a way the child can relate.

**Emotional Regulation and Observation.** The study illuminated the resilience of the military-connected family through the experiences of the children's emotional strength. Regulating one's emotions can catalyze success or failure in any situation, especially in the educational environment. When children are transient and have added stressors of their loved one

being absent or in harm's way, a potential for volatility exists. Through the connections, the child cultivates emotional regulation tactics are learned. In the educational environment, children often learn by observation and through interaction. The primary attachment of people within the child's life acts as a filter to help them understand the greater aperture from which many variables exist (Hoopsick et al., 2020; Wooten et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2018).

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

The limitations of this study were centered around sample size, the lack of inclusion of children in the inquiry, and the design. The sample size was limited to twelve to fourteen military participants, which narrowed the diversity of perspective and population. From an already limited participant pool, the lack of inclusion of children further hindered the depth of the research. Furthermore, using a hermeneutical design highlighted the researcher's bias, causing additional potential for unfiltered results.

This study enlisted fourteen families to give testimony to their lived experiences within the military lifestyle. The study focused on children, educational performance, and their connection to their military members. It did not extend past a military setting into incarceration, civilian equivalent lifestyles, death, or children serving as separated family members. The research did not include other variables, such as extended family members, connections from past locations, or additional locations. It did not account for a larger population of military families. Although this research targeted a specific population through snowball sampling procedures, it limited the transferability to a niche group of families who were military and who experienced a deployment from only two locations.

The study should have also accounted for the educational perspective, thus not giving the teachers and administrators a voice. The most limiting factor of the study resulted from not

including the children themselves. All interviews were administered from the account of one parent in the household.

The study's sampling method created an unequal distribution of participants. Most of the parents were stay-at-home mothers associated with the Army. Therefore, the data may be heavily biased toward one military branch rather than having greater diversity. Expanding on diversity, minority families were poorly represented, which calls for a more robust participant set. A cross-sectional analysis focused on selecting participants from various locations and branches of service but only allowed for a few diverse participants.

Additionally, some participants were male service members, retired families, and dual military families, which limited the scope of each participant's testimony. Including additional segments within the study would allow a richer conversation about how children are affected by the deployment and the overall military lifestyle within the home. Expanding the participant pool is vital to understanding how attachment relationships jeopardize the family. The study only focused on parents within an army family in the United States. This delimitation allows additional researchers to include additional socioeconomic backgrounds and supplementary touchpoints, such as children, teachers, other countries, and many bonus variations.

Considering that the study's foundation was focused on attachment theory and children's performance in school, it would have been beneficial to the research to include the child's perspective. The decision to exclude the children from this account came from the parents' ability to articulate the family dynamics better. The adult participants contributed much more dialogue and details than the children could have obtained. Further research is needed to account for the testimonies of the children of military families.

## **Recommendations for Future Research**

This research furthers the need for additional programs, research, and support organizations that help to aid military families. Therefore, recommendations for further research include expanding the scope and depth of the participant pool to include children and educational stakeholders, adding case studies to gain a more pinpointed account of experiences, and providing a more extensive scope of families reaching into the civilian sector to associate attachment and performance with additional touchpoints. By utilizing these three recommendations, the body of knowledge will be expanded upon, allowing more use cases for the more significant population.

Secondly, the community will be bettered by introducing case studies. Case studies allow individual accounts to become the focus (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Therefore, understanding how sure participants lived their journey will bring more individualized data sets to light. Each family in the study said they could not fully describe the essence of their experience because they could not verbalize the effects of deployments on their children and family. They felt and saw changes but found it challenging to communicate with them.

Conversely, creating studies with more participants will benefit society by expanding the lens from an individual or small group to a more significant percentage of the population. Once a more extensive pool is identified to experience similar phenomena, it can be more applicable to the larger society (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Research and funding are weighted toward need and attachment within the family as they relate to performance in life and are vital to every family worldwide. Larger participant pools focusing on the underserved and special populations only support the need for further exploration.

## Conclusion

This research discussed the core facets of how children within a military family perform in school, given their attachment to their military family members during their absence. In addition, the study delved deep into understanding the unique dynamics of a military family. This task was accomplished with a triangulated approach consisting of interviews, focus groups, and journal entries from fourteen military-connected parents. The foundational concept behind this inquiry was the attachment and loss theory first posited by John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth in 1969. Through this assessment, three themes and nine subthemes emerged as relevant summations of results. Of these conclusions, the themes of Continuity and Stability, Separation and Adjustment, and Educational Challenges provided the foundation to foster meaning behind the phenomenon.

From Continuity and Stability, three supporting subthemes branched out: Quality and Quantity of Connections, Importance of Routine, and Activities and Support. The essence of the military lifestyle is flexibility and resiliency; therefore, it became foundational for all participants to enhance the quality and quantity of the family's connections, given their transient nature and separation. Furthermore, connections must be included in the routine established by the family so that children and parents are accountable in their interactions. Routine becomes a stabilizing factor within the family as they migrate from place to mission. All study participants fostered connection and routine into their library of coping strategies to support their children as they moved through the educational system. The families participating in the study all experienced multiple iterations of separation from a few weeks to over a year at a time. Often, the absence was patterned, culminating in various years apart. Using available activities and support systems, most families, while turbulent at times, held military life in high regard.

Separation and adjustment accounted for emotional coping and adjustment, changes in behavior, and social isolation and acceptance. These concepts played a pivotal role in how the family responded to fluctuations in the home environment. Emotional coping and adjustment allowed for the supervised and guided management of emotion through a primary attachment person, usually the parent in the rear. Through the buffered connection, the family's behavior changes were filtered and sifted into the family's new paradigm. The parents expounded that accepting the military lifestyle became a core contributor to the children's assimilation and academic success. In civilian schools and communities, most isolation and trouble integrating occurred.

The theme of educational challenges from the family's military service included disruptions in environments, resilience and coping, and activities and support. Given that the family experienced frequent and impactful changes in their routine and environment, the family became the coping mechanism through which resilience and perseverance were cultivated. From this foundation, children who participated in extracurricular activities and took advantage of support programs tended to experience less time in transition and uncertainty, as the activities provided stability and routine while enhancing the inclusion of the child into their new situation. While they might not have had the same services from one station to the next, every family elaborated that sports, clubs, activities, groups, and programs played a foundational role in their family's success.

This investigation expanded the current body of research focusing on the military family. The foundational theory was aligned with attachment and loss from Bowlby and Ainsworth (1969). The study supported the idea that connection and attachment are the foundation of academic success for the military child. While service to one's country requires sacrifice, the



family, community, government, and non-government organizations must work closely together to strengthen the home in support of the military.

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## Appendix A

### IRB Approval

# LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

## INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

July 14, 2023

Christopher Casely  
Meredith Park

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY22-23-1794 EXPERIENCES AFFECTING MILITARY CHILDREN'S PERFORMANCE IN SCHOOL: A HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGY

Dear Christopher Casely, Meredith Park,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:104(d):

Category 2.(ii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation; or

**Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB.** Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

Sincerely,  
**G. Michele Baker, PhD, CIP**  
*Administrative Chair*  
**Research Ethics Office**

## **Appendix B**

### **Participant Recruitment**

Hello [Potential Participant],

As a graduate student in the School of School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a PhD degree. The purpose of my research is to investigate the effects of deployment on children's education through the lens of attachment theory and if you meet my criteria and are interested, I would like to invite you to join my study. Participants must be 18 years of age or older, a member of a military family (one parent is or has been on active duty) and have school-aged children while that family member was on a deployment. Participants, if willing, will be asked to participate in a 30-45min virtual audio-recorded interview, a 30-45min audio-recorded virtual focus group, complete a 5-10min journal entry, and asked to confirm transcripts for accuracy. It should take approximately 1.5-2 hours to complete the procedures listed. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of the study, but the information will remain confidential (participant identities will not be disclosed).

Would you [like to participate?

[Yes] Great, [could I get your email address and phone number so we can set up a time for an interview?

[No], I understand. Thank you for your time.

A consent document will be sent to you one week before the interview. The consent document contains additional information about my research.

If you choose to participate, you will need to sign the consent document and return it to me at the time of the interview.

Thank you for your time. Do you have any questions?

## Appendix C

### EXPERIENCES AFFECTING MILITARY CHILDREN'S PERFORMANCE IN SCHOOL: A HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGY CONSENT DOCUMENT

#### Consent

Title of the Project: Experiences Affecting Military Children's Performance In School: A  
Hermeneutic Phenomenology Consent Document

Principal Investigator: Chris Casely, Doctoral Student, School of Education, Liberty University

#### Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be:

- 18 years of age
- A member of a military family (one parent is or has been on active duty)
- Have school-aged children during that family member's deployment

Taking part in this research project is voluntary. Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

#### What is the study about and why is it being done?

This study investigates the effects of a deployment on children from an attachment theory perspective. It is important to the community so that they can better serve the military family to be successful.

#### What will happen if you take part in this study?

\* If you agree to participate in this study, I will ask you to do the following:

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- Take part in a 30-45 minute audio-recorded interview over Microsoft Teams. The questions are open-ended so that you will have a prompt to answer. Each question will help to identify the family dynamic, the primary connections in your home, and the effects of deployment on your family. You will be able to be as brief or detailed as you wish to be.
- Take part in a 30-45 minute audio-recorded focus group over Microsoft Teams. There will be fewer questions and they will be open for anyone to share or discuss their experience. Everyone who is in the study is asked to be a part of the focus group.
- Respond to a 5-10 minute journal prompt. The journal prompt will be brief but allow you to provide a better and more robust picture of how deployments affect your children and your family.
- After the interviews, you will be asked to confirm the validity of the transcription to ensure that they are accurate. Fact checking should take no more the 10-20 minutes.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

- \* Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit simply from participating in the interview, focus group, or journal.
- \* Society will benefit from this study because it will paint a picture of how attachment levels to the deployed parent affect their performance in school. Teachers, administrators, and the community will be better able to cater to the needs of the military family.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

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The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher[s] will have access to the records.

Participant responses will be kept confidential by replacing names with pseudonyms.

Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.

Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

Data will be stored on a password-locked computer. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.

Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer until participants have reviewed and confirmed the accuracy of the transcripts and then deleted. The researcher will have access to these recordings.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

\* Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your

current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

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What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Chris Casely You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact him at [REDACTED]  
You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Meredith Park, at [REDACTED]

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant? If you

have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher[s], you are encouraged to contact the IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515; our phone number is 434-592-5530, and our email address is irb@liberty.edu.

*Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.*

Your Consent

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Approved on 7-14-2023

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher[s] will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above. I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

---

Printed Subject Name

---

Signature & Date

Liberty University IRB-FY22-23-1794 Approved on 7-14-2023
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## Appendix D

### Interview Questions

1. Please introduce me to and about each person in your family household.
2. Describe the relationships between your family members.
3. What are the roles of each person in the family?
4. How has your family changed over the years?
5. Describe the worldview you and your family hold.
6. How do you feel you impact your child's life and why?
7. How do you feel you impact each other's life?
8. Explain your view of the family and what it means to you.
9. Provide your thoughts on the military lifestyle.
10. Provide your thoughts on how your child experiences the military lifestyle.
11. Map the events surrounding the first deployment event your family has experienced.
12. Map the events surrounding the event of the subsequent deployment your family has experienced.
13. Describe how deployments have affected yourself and your partner.
14. Paint a picture of how deployment has affected your child.
15. How have you felt you have changed because of military deployments?
16. How has your spouse changed because of military deployment?
17. How have your children changed because of military deployment?
18. How do you feel military deployments have impacted your child's educational performance (please provide examples)?

## **Appendix E**

### **Focus Group Questions**

1. How has military life benefited your family?
2. What struggles have you and your family experienced most when confronted with deployments?
3. How have deployments affected your child(ren) academically?
4. How has the connection between the family members deployed affected your child/family?

**Appendix F****Journal Entry**

1. From your child's point of view, describe how you feel about your parents' deployment and how it has affected you in school, and has your connection to your family member who deployed made it better or worse?