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EXPLORING HOW CANADIAN MILITARY SPOUSES DEFINE AND
EXEMPLIFY RESILIENCE AND LACK OF RESILIENCE

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JESSICA MACISAAC

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CC BY: JESSICA MACISAAC

Approval of Thesis

The undersigned certify that they have read the thesis entitled

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Submitted by

Jessica Maclsaac

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Health Studies

The thesis examination committee certifies that the thesis
and the oral examination is approved

Supervisor:

Dr. Steven Johnson
Athabasca University

Committee Members:

Dr. Beth Perry Mahler
Athabasca University

Lisa Wozniak
University of Alberta

External Examiner:

Dr. Tara Collins
University of Calgary

February 29, 2024

Dedication

This work is dedicated to all the military spouses in Canada. Especially to those who my family has met along our military journey and to those who motivated me to complete this work. My only hope is that I did you all justice in telling your stories and that together we can influence change. I am continually in awe of the strength, selflessness, and grace this community has and I look up to each one of you. To those of you that I have been lucky enough to share time with, thank you for reminding me how important this work is.

Acknowledgement

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To my husband and children, thank you for your unwavering support, encouragement, and space to complete this degree. You never stopped believing in me. Thank you for making sure I saw this through to the end. Without you, this would not have been possible, this triumph is ours to share.

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Abstract

The military profession, though a noble one, comes with its own set of unique characteristics. The combination of routine relocations, being separated from loved ones, and military members being placed in high-risk environments with the potential of injury or death, is the reality for military spouses and their families. Research focusing on the resilience of military spouses in Canada is gaining momentum, creating an opportunity to learn more about this community's resilience. Using semi-structured interviews, this netnography collected data from five military spouses in Canada to understand how military spouses define and demonstrate resilience and diminishing resilience amidst the routine challenges associated with the military lifestyle. Social connections and mentorship were identified as some of the most valued protective factors to their resilience. These insights can inform new resiliency frameworks and models tailored to the military context and guide the improvement of existing policies and resources for military spouses.

Keywords: military spouse, Canadian Armed Forces, resilience, resiliency, netnography, mentorship

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Preface

Military families live in unique circumstances. They experience long periods of separation from loved ones, they relocate continuously, and military members routinely work in high-risk situations that can result in permanent injury or death (Daigle, 2013; Rowan-Legg, 2017). This is a reality that I know all too well as a military spouse.

For over 12 years, my family and I have endured relocations across the country and away from family; missing out on holidays, birthdays, weddings, and funerals of loved ones; experiencing homesickness; facing isolation; and grieving for lives lost during military operations. “You knew what you signed up for,” is a phrase that every military spouse has heard at one time or another. Before becoming a military spouse, I knew we would relocate often. I knew my husband could be deployed and that during deployments my life responsibilities would increase exponentially. What I did not know was how hard it can be to start over in a new community every few years or how heart breaking it would be to watch friends get posted out, friends that you clung onto because you finally made a real connection with someone since your last move. I did not know the level of exhaustion and stress that I would experience during a deployment as a mom with two young kids. These are things I did not know when my husband signed up for the military.

I also did not know that I would have the kindest neighbors that would stay through the night with my toddler so my husband and I could rush the baby to the emergency room. I did not know that I would have meals randomly dropped off on my doorstep during deployment, to help lighten my load for a day. But, most of all, I did not know that when my husband signed up for the military that he was signing us all up for life to

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be a part of this amazing, supportive, and resilient community of military families. At times it can be tough and unpredictable as a military spouse. However, this lifestyle has allowed us to meet friends that we now call family, explore more of our beautiful country than the average Canadian, strengthen our marriage, learn that it is ok to ask for help, and be granted career opportunities that would have not been possible otherwise.

The Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) is a large, traditional organization that has been defending and protecting Canada for many generations. The society that the organization was originally built around has evolved and become more complex. Currently, my family would not be able to survive on just one income meaning both my partner and I have full-time careers. However, when my spouse is away all the responsibilities of the household and parenting fall on me, and I juggle a full-time job too. Services and resources have adapted to support military families; however, there is still an opportunity to create more consistent resources and programs to ease the extra burden placed on working professionals who are also parents. It is important to let these stories be told so the community can grow and adapt with the ever-changing world around us.

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List of Abbreviations

| | |
|------|---------------------------------------|
| CAF | - Canadian Armed Forces |
| DND | - Department of National Defense |
| MSEI | - Military Spousal Employment Network |
| MSEN | - Military Spouse Employment Network |
| PSA | -Public Service Announcement |
| RCMP | - Royal Canadian Mounted Police |
| USA | - United States of America |
| UK | - United Kingdom |

Chapter 1. Introduction

Background

The military profession, though a noble one, comes with its own set of unique characteristics. The combination of routine relocations, being separated from loved ones, and military members being placed in high-risk environments with the potential of injury or death, is the reality for military spouses and their families (Daigle, 2013; Rowan-Legg, 2017; Wang & Pullman, 2019a; Zwicewicz, 2018). Currently, most research focuses on the health and resiliency of children in military families (Rowan-Legg, 2017; Skomorovsky & Bullock, 2017) and the impact of operational deployments on families (Aiken, 2012; Cafferky & Shi, 2015; Harrison et al., 2014; Watkins et al., 2017; Werner & Shannon, 2013). However, gaps remain in literature that focuses on the well-being and resilience of military spouses.

The assumption is that military spouses are resilient and able to withstand the challenges that the military lifestyle imposes on them. Research to date has not addressed the resiliency of military spouses and how that impacts their well-being. This creates an opportunity to describe the nuances of the military spouse community by exploring how military spouses define and demonstrate resilience or lack of resilience while facing the unique challenges of frequent relocations, separation from family, and high-risk working conditions associated with the military lifestyle.

Purpose

Over the past several years through regular evaluations, the CAF has documented the challenges facing military families (Daigle, 2013; Manser, 2018; Sudom, 2010; Wang

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& Aitken, 2016). However, it would be beneficial to look closer at specific experiences of military families to better inform and tailor CAF policies, programs, and resources. Learning about the resilience of military spouses is one aspect that has recently been identified as a priority (Manser, 2018). Cramm et al. (2018) suggest that more in-depth qualitative research to explore the “contexts, processes and meanings pertinent” (p. 635) to the resiliency of military spouses is critical to inform and shape effective military family programming. Currently, the Government of Canada is in the process of developing innovative programs (National Defence, 2017; Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services, 2020) aimed at building on the inherent strengths and resilience of the military spouse community (Manser, 2018). This initiative would benefit from research focused on exploring aspects of resilience in the military spouse community. Developing a richer understanding of the military spouse’s community, how these individuals define resilience, and how they demonstrate resilience or lack of resilience, can guide development of innovative strength-based community resources aimed at facilitating physical, psychological, and social resilience (Manser, 2018). In response to these concerns, the following research questions were developed.

Research Questions

The following research questions were addressed:

1. How do military spouses of CAF members define and exemplify resilience?
2. How do military spouses of CAF members define and exemplify lack of resilience?

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To gain a deeper understanding of the military spouse community and their resilience or lack of resilience a study was conducted using netnography methodology. Netnography is an ethnography-inspired methodology employed to understand online communities. Through interviews, field notes, and reflective journals I was able to create descriptions of how the community defines and demonstrates resilience and diminishing resilience from their perspective. These insights can help inform new resiliency frameworks and models tailored to the military context and guide the improvement of existing policies and resources for military spouses.

Definition of Terms

Terms that are referred to frequently in this thesis include military spouse, military member, resilience, and a lack of resilience. For clarity, these terms are defined below.

Military spouses are defined as men and women who have partners (i.e., dating, married, or common-law) that are military members. Military spouses are also referred to as spouse(s). Military members, the partners of the military spouses, will be referred to as the military member or the serving member and include individuals who are actively serving in or are veterans of the CAF.

The term resilience has many definitions. For the purpose of this study, the definition adopted by the CAF will be used and is as follows: “resilience is the ability of a family to respond positively to an adverse situation and emerge from the situation feeling strengthened, more resourceful, and more confident than its prior state” (Simon et al., 2005, p. 427).

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This study seeks to understand not only how military spouses define and demonstrate resilience but how they also define and demonstrate lack of resilience. Lacking resilience refers to the opposite of being resilience, a state in which the resilience of military spouses is diminishing, and they are not able to cope with the challenges that they face because of the military lifestyle. Diminished resilience can result in negative impacts to an individual's health.

Chapter 2. Review of the Literature

Introduction

The unique characteristics of the military lifestyle are well documented: frequent relocations, separation from family, and high-risk working conditions (Daigle, 2013; Rowan-Legg, 2017; Wang & Pullman, 2019a; Zwicewicz, 2018). The ramifications of these characteristics have been identified as contributing factors to financial instability, stress, and poor well-being of military families. Research investigating the impacts of the military lifestyle, specifically on the well-being of military spouses in Canada, has recently become a priority with the CAF. There is currently a gap in the literature. It is evident that research is needed to provide in-depth descriptions of this community to provide details related to the impacts the military lifestyle has on military spouses.

A special report by Daigle (2013) is an important historical piece of research pertaining to the health of military spouses. This report was the outcome of an independent, comprehensive review focused specifically on the well-being of CAF military families. The special report provided 18 recommendations for the Department of National Defense (DND) to address. The recommendations that are most relevant to this research project are related to the modernization and maintenance of support to military families and promoting more extensive and independent research related to their well-being. The recommendations focusing on improving and maintaining support for military families were categorized as implemented as of June 2018 (Government of Canada, 2019) though some military spouses suggest more work is required in this area. The

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support provided to military families from the perspective of military spouses will be discussed in further detail in the results section.

As per Daigle's (2013) recommendations, academics in Canada have investigated the health and resiliency of children in military families (Mahar et al., 2023; Rowan-Legg, 2017; Skomorovsky & Bullock, 2017), spousal employment (Wang & Pullman, 2019b), and the impact of operational deployments on families (Aiken, 2012; Cafferky & Shi, 2015; Harrison, et al., 2014; Watkins et al., 2017; Werner & Shannon, 2013).

However, one gap remaining in the literature is understanding resilience from the perspective of military spouses. This creates an opportunity to explore how military spouses define or demonstrate resilience while facing the unique challenges associated with the military lifestyle. To understand the resilience of military spouses in Canada, it is important to understand how the interplay of unique characteristics of the military lifestyle affects their daily life often related to frequent relocations as well as separation and high-risk working conditions. These characteristics are discussed below.

Frequent Relocations

Frequent relocations and the disruption in routines it causes is a reality of the military lifestyle. At times there can be a lack of predictability and choice, making it difficult for future planning, putting additional stress on relationships and on the health of each family member (Daigle, 2013). These routine stressors lead to higher rates of depression and anxiety disorders among military spouses compared to their civilian counterparts and are contributing factors to job dissatisfaction among military members serving in the CAF (Rowan-Legg, 2017; Snyder, 2013). Relocations can impact the

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continuity of access to health care services and may also lead to financial and career instability.

Access to Health Care Services. Frequent relocations create challenges for military spouses in maintaining continuity in health care services (Rowan-Legg, 2017; Snyder, 2013). When relocating to isolated or underserviced areas, spouses routinely experience challenges securing health care providers which can be further compromised by delays in transferring medical records (Rowan-Legg, 2017). As a result, military spouses are four times less likely to have a family doctor compared to the civilian population (Rowan-Legg, 2017). To receive necessary health care, some spouses travel great distances to the location of their previous posting to maintain care with their former family doctor (Daigle, 2013; Rowan-Legg, 2017). The only option for others is to use walk-in clinics or hospital emergency rooms for routine medical visits, waiting extended amounts of time due to the non-emergent nature of their visits (Rowan-Legg, 2017). At times, military members are in direct competition with their spouses who are also waiting for specialized care due to overwhelmed military care providers outsourcing services. In some smaller communities, the wait for spouses can be substantially increased due to the large number of military members that are referred to the same services (Daigle, 2013; Rowan-Legg, 2017). This is further worsened by the health care provider shortage experienced across most of Canada (Bain & Manser, 2017). Delays in (and extensive wait times for receiving care) are the biggest challenges for spouses in obtaining reasonable levels of health care (Daigle, 2013).

The challenge in continuity of care may be further compounded by the level of insurance coverage military families receive through the Public Service Health Care

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Plan. Historically, families are satisfied with the health insurance coverage offered except for annual allotments for mental health services and the need to pay upfront for some services or medications (Daigle, 2013). The annual family allotment for psychology services originally established at \$1000 (Daigle, 2013) was increased to an allotment of \$4000 in July 2023 (Government of Canada, 2023). However, that may still not be enough coverage in some provinces. For example, in Ontario, one session with a psychologist for one individual can range from \$120 - \$250 with the initial consultation costing upwards of \$500 (Cedarway Therapy, 2023; KMA Therapy, 2023; The Therapy Centre, 2023). With the increase to coverage just recently being implemented, it is too soon to know if the amount will be sufficient or if the cost of this service could still create a barrier to maintaining consistent mental health care for some military families.

Also, some health care providers require patients and clients to pay up front for services and medications. This requires families to submit for a reimbursement that will not be issued until months later (Daigle, 2013). This out-of-pocket expense can be challenging for families that are experiencing financial hardship. There is evidence that some families do not follow up with treatment because they lack the necessary means to pay upfront for services and medications or are unable to wait several months for reimbursement (Daigle, 2013).

Financial Instability. Research on the financial consequences of the military lifestyle is limited but just recently started to expand. A Canadian study found that spouses of members of the Royal Canadian Military Police (RCMP), and other federal public servants, make a significantly higher annual income and have higher rates of employment compared to military spouses (Dunn et al., 2011). To an extent, these

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differences have been influenced by relocations. Relocations shorten the amount of time that military spouses can spend at a job, resulting in missed opportunities like pay raises and promotions (Wang & Pullman, 2019a).

Relocating due to military postings can cause temporary and potentially long-term financial instability for military families (Wang & Pullman, 2019a). This has been attributed to differences in cost of living between provinces (Manser, 2018) and the impact that underemployment and employment interruptions have on the careers of military spouses (Daigle, 2013; Wang & Pullman, 2019a, 2019b). The financial stress experienced due to frequent relocations can negatively impact military spouses' physical and psychological well-being (Wang & Pullman, 2019a).

Career Instability. Fluctuations in a military spouse's career is one of the biggest stressors associated with the military lifestyle (Wang & Aitken, 2016; Wang & Pullman, 2019a) and it is a contributing factor to job dissatisfaction within the CAF (Daigle, 2013). Career challenges that military spouses face when relocating include: living in isolated or secluded areas (Wang & Pullman, 2019a); pre-existing challenges within the local economy; unavailable or inconsistent childcare (Urban & Wang, 2018; Wang & Pullman, 2019b); and potential discrimination against the military lifestyle by potential employers (Urban & Wang, 2018). As a result, military families experience significant impacts on their household finances (Wang & Pullman, 2019a). On average, military families with dependents carry a household debt load of \$187, 216, which is approximately \$42,000 more than the average debt carried by civilian Canadian families (Wang & Pullman, 2019a).

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In a recent study, an association was found between families living in military housing and spousal unemployment (Wang & Pullman, 2019a, 2019b). This association was attributed to the geographical location of military bases and limited availability of public transit. Military housing is near military bases which are often in secluded or isolated areas. This means that bases are situated away from densely populated areas and potentially rich job markets. Military spouses can experience barriers to commuting into larger community centers due to poor access to local public transit (Wang & Pullman, 2019b). As such, spouses may take jobs that they are overqualified for because there is an available opportunity that is easy to access. This educational and skill mismatch has resulted in lower incomes and increased financial stress among military families (Wang & Pullman, 2019b), negatively impacting the physical and psychological well-being of military spouses (Wang & Pullman, 2019a). Underemployment or part-time employment has also been attributed to pre-existing employment shortages within communities and difficulties re-establishing childcare after relocating (Wang & Aitken, 2016; Wang & Pullman, 2019a).

Challenges military spouses experience in advancing their careers may also be a result of employers' reluctance to hire military spouses (Bureika et al., 1999). Studies completed in the United States of America (USA) (Bureika et al, 1997; Cook & Speirs, 2005; Werber Castaneda & Harrell, 2008) and the United Kingdom (UK) (Army & You, n.d.) indicate that military spouses are overlooked for jobs due to their military connection. The perception is that military spouses will not be available for long-term employment due to frequent relocations or that they will be distracted from work due to competing life priorities especially during times of military deployments (Military

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Family Services, 2017). While recent Canadian literature does not exist to support these findings, a public service announcement (PSA) produced by the Military Family Services (2017) suggests that military spouses in Canada experience similar employer discrimination. Possibly in response to this potential discrimination, the diverse skill set of military spouses was highlighted in the PSA. The PSA suggests that because of living the military lifestyle, spouses are adaptable multitaskers who are highly motivated and an untapped resource that companies can benefit from.

The Military Spousal Employment Initiative (MSEI) (Government of Canada, 2023) and the Military Spouse Employment Network (MSEN) (Military Family Services, 2023) were created in response to military spouses often being underemployed or unemployed and to create equal employment opportunities for military spouses. These initiatives create opportunities for military spouses to connect with hiring managers, participate in virtual career fairs, and receive career development and training (Government of Canada, 2023; Military Family Services, 2023). As of February 2021, 4100 military spouses belong to the MSEN. Of those 4100 military spouses, 650 found gainful employment (Military Family Services, 2023).

Separation and High-Risk Working Conditions

Other unique characteristics of the military lifestyle are separation from family and high-risk working conditions. Throughout their careers, military members may be separated from their families to comply with operational demands. Each year, on average two-thirds of military personnel are required to work away from their families (Prairie Research Associates, 2017; Sudom, 2010; Wang & Aitken, 2018). These separations can

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last for a few days, weeks, or several months. Depending on the operation, members could be located domestically in Canada or abroad to fulfill deployments, exercises, sea time, training, temporary duties, or to aid in disaster relief mission requirements (Manser, 2018). At times, members can be deployed to hostile and unstable regions increasing their risk of serious physical and psychological injury or even death (Rowan-Legg, 2017).

While the military member is away, spouses assume responsibility of the household including domestic and parenting duties and consequently, they often neglect their own health needs (Daigle, 2013; Werner & Shannon, 2013). The health of the military spouse may also be further impacted by increased levels of stress due to their concern over the well-being of the military member (Werner & Shannon, 2013). Additionally, military spouses may need to take a break from their careers to maintain their daily duties and responsibilities during deployments or times of separation (Daigle, 2013).

Without being close to other supports such as immediate family, the demands placed on the spouse are substantial during these times (Rowan-Legg, 2017; Werner & Shannon, 2013). Survey results indicated that these daily demands attributed to 19% of spouses experiencing depression during deployments and 12% of respondents being diagnosed with an anxiety disorder (Sudom, 2010). These rates are comparable to the rate of mental health issues military members experience when returning from combat (Sudom, 2010). However, anxiety in military spouses has been reported to subside once the military member returns but depression is reported to continue post deployment (Alhomaizi et al., 2020). The risk of developing mental health illnesses increases if the

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military member returns from deployment with an injury (Skomorovsky et al., 2017). Military spouses reported extreme stress and relationship strain when required to support and care for an injured military member (Skomorovsky et al., 2017). The more severe the member's injury the greater the caregiver burden and level of psychological distress experienced by the military spouse (Skomorovsky et al., 2017).

In contrast, studies have also found that spouses can experience feelings of pride and being in control during deployments and can display high levels of self-esteem and active coping strategies (Dursun & Sudom, 2009; Sudom, 2010). During deployments, spouses who experienced lower levels of depression and better psychological health were more likely to have strong social support from family, friends, and from the deployed military member (Skomorovsky, 2014). At present, it is unclear if the resiliency that spouses exhibit during deployments is due to their own inherent resilience and the social supports previously described or a result of community programming and support, or both. Recent survey results indicated that most spouses (70%) are aware of deployment support and programs; however, usage rates are below 10% (Wang & Aitken, 2018). The reason for these low usage rates is unknown (Wang & Aitken, 2018).

While the recent research interested in the well-being of military spouses in Canada is encouraging, there remains critical gaps in the literature pointing to the need for further research exploring the resilience of military spouses. An in-depth understanding of how military spouses define and demonstrate resilience will provide a strong foundation for the development of community programming and resources aimed at enhancing resilience.

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Resilience

Resilience has been described as an on-going process to become or maintain functionality in the face of adversity; the outcome of this process is defined as resiliency (Bowen & Martin, 2011). The notion of resilience has various definitions across many disciplines and is often associated with terms such as: survival, recovery, thriving, hardiness, adversity, coping skills, self-efficacy, perseverance, and tolerance. Literature from the social sciences describes resilience as the ability to overcome adversity, building strength while doing so (Henderson & Milstein, 1996). The field of psychology defines resilience as the ability to withstand hardship by repairing oneself (Higgins, 1994). In contrast to focusing on the individual, the CAF focuses on the family unit and defines resilience as, “the ability of a family to respond positively to an adverse situation and emerge from the situation feeling strengthened, more resourceful, and more confident than its prior state” (Simon et al., 2005, p. 247). The definition of resilience adopted by the CAF was used for this research. The CAF definition of resilience was selected for two reasons. First, its focus on the family, rather than the individual, making this definition appropriate for understanding resilience among this community of military spouses. Second, using the CAF definition may promote the uptake of the findings by this organization and support their mandate to develop strength-based community programs and resources to facilitate resilience.

Within the Canadian military context, resilience is viewed using an ecological-systems theory. This means that resilience is not simply achieved by an individual in isolation but through the interaction and synergy between the individual and their environment (Ungar, 2013). That is, military spouses do not exist in isolation. Their

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environment is composed of the culture and lifestyle created by the CAF and the military as an institution, their local geographic neighborhood, and other like-minded communities (Manser, 2018). This study focused on the latter, the like-minded community of military spouses.

Within the literature, popular press, and social media, military spouses as a community are identified as being resilient. Indeed, most military spouses report feeling resilient and that they do not need to rely on external resources to maintain or develop their resiliency (Wang & Aitken, 2018). The assumption that all military spouses are inherently strong and resilient may be counterproductive to their health. It may also discourage some spouses from reaching out for help because some may feel that they will look vulnerable and less resilient (Cramm et al., 2015).

Manser (2018) suggests that future resiliency research within the military context should be strengths-based by focusing on learning the factors contributing to high levels of resilience reported within military families. This creates an opportunity to learn more about resilience from the perspective of military spouses. Some important questions remain to be asked within this community, such as: How do military spouses as a community define resilience? How do they demonstrate this definition through their community in what they say and in what they say they do? Does the environment within the military spouse community facilitate or challenge resilience? If military spouses do not rely on external support, is it safe to assume that resilience is an inherent quality that everyone within this community encompasses? Cramm et al., (2015) suggests that there is a need for models and frameworks that recognize the contextual factors of the military lifestyle. Understanding resilience of spouses in the complex military culture will support

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the development of appropriate resilience theories and frameworks for this community. Closing this knowledge gap may support a shift in CAF community programming from pre-packaged solutions towards designing resources building on community needs and strengths (Manser, 2018).

Summary

The reality of military families includes the interplay of unique circumstances. The unique circumstances of military life can impose a great deal of stress on a family and if not dealt with appropriately, can have a negative impact on each family member's health (Daigle, 2013). The individual health of each family member is important because it is believed that families are the backbone of the Canadian military. Having a healthy, resilient family leads to strong and healthy military members, making the CAF overall stronger and more effective (National Defence, 2017). Learning about this resiliency among military spouses can guide a strength-based approach to sustainable program development.

Chapter 3. Methodological Framework

Introduction

The community of military spouses in Canada stretches not only across Canada but worldwide, making online groups (e.g., Facebook) an ideal way for community members to stay connected. Of the 1,777 spouses surveyed, most military spouses agreed that social media would “improve services provided by the CAF (58%) and enable spouses to maintain connections with peers (79%) and their military partner (80%)” (Wang, 2018, p. 53). These survey results also indicated that most spouses use Facebook to keep in touch with their peers (Wang, 2018).

As such, an ideal way to engage this community is using a netnography methodology. Netnography is a naturalistic method (Kozinets et al., 2014) based in social constructivism. The assumption is that multiple realities exist (ontology) and are constructed through lived experiences and interactions with others including the co-construction of knowledge between the researcher and the community (epistemology) (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Statement of the Problem

There is a critical gap in the literature regarding the experiences of military spouses including how they understand and demonstrate resilience in the context of the military lifestyle. The aim of this study was to explore how military spouses of CAF members define resilience and lack of resilience. Further, the goal was to provide an in-depth description of how this community demonstrates resilience or lack of resilience.

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Purpose of the Research

Daigle (2013) identified the health consequences of the military lifestyle and limitations of spousal resources as areas of concern that need improvement. For example, one of the biggest challenges associated with the military lifestyle is frequent relocations (Daigle, 2013; Manser, 2018). Relocations can make it difficult for military spouses to access health services in a timely manner, further impacting any health concerns or conditions they may have. To access health care services military spouses are required to navigate provincial health care systems and are added to the bottom of waitlists with each relocation, resulting in delays in diagnosis and treatment (Cramm et al., 2015). Recent government reports and research findings confirm that accessing health care services, along with creating new social support networks, and securing appropriate spousal employment are still the most challenging aspects of relocating (Cramm et al, 2015; Manser, 2018; Urban & Wang, 2018; Wang & Aitken, 2016; Wang & Pullman, 2019a, 2019b). This interruption in continuous support and employment not only puts a military spouse's well-being at risk, but it is also one of the factors contributing to job dissatisfaction of military members within the CAF (Daigle, 2013). Job satisfaction is of the utmost importance because the CAF is experiencing on-going challenges in both recruitment and retention of members (Zwicewicz, 2018). To encourage retention of military members, the CAF is developing and implementing new policies, programs, and resources to improve the support offered to military families (Zwicewicz, 2018).

Through regular evaluations, the CAF has documented the challenges facing military families (Daigle, 2013; Manser, 2018; Sudom, 2010; Wang & Aitken, 2016). However, it is important to expand the scope to examine the specific experiences of

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military families, including spouses, to better inform and tailor policies, programs, and resources.

Methodology

A netnography methodology was employed to gain a rich understanding of resilience from the perspective of military spouse community. Much like ethnography, netnography shares underlying beliefs of anthropology and sociology by taking a cultural approach to exploring communities (Kozinets et al., 2014). Netnography explores the nuances of culture within online communities by adapting traditional ethnographic methods such as entrée into the ‘field’, field notes, interviews, consent, and fair cultural representation to an online format (Kozinets et al., 2014).

The combination of all these approaches to data collection are ideal for a netnography methodology; however, facilitating all these approaches is not always feasible. Based on the comfort and willingness of the Facebook community selected for this study, I was limited to completing individual interviews.

Research Design

Participants

For this research project, community is defined as a group of people that have similar characteristics and a sense of fellowship because of sharing common experiences, attitudes, and language (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam-Webster, 2021). The CAF military spouse community includes any individual who have partners (i.e., dating, married, or common-law) that are actively serving or are veterans of the CAF.

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Due to the international mandate of the CAF, the community of military spouses are regularly relocated to military bases throughout the world. As such, military spouses often maintain connections with peers, regardless of posting locations, through social media platforms like Facebook (Wang, 2018). Netnography extends beyond spatial proximity that often bounds ethnography (Kozinets, 2020, p. 124) and creates opportunities to research communities that stay connected virtually, such as this community (Jong, 2016). As such, netnography is an appropriate methodology to examine the unique community of military spouses to describe how resilience and lack of resilience is defined and demonstrated by this community.

Sampling

Military spouses identified Facebook as their preferred means to stay connected with their peers (Wang, 2018). As noted earlier, this social media channel is ideal for netnography; that is, a large, engaged online community with detailed posts and member-to-member interactions (Kozinets et al., 2014). To confirm that Facebook was the most appropriate social media channel for this study, I conducted a search using Google, Twitter, and Instagram. This search engine and these social media platforms are the most popular sites accessed today, therefore, potentially providing the most up-to-date content that rich data can be drawn from (Biswal, 2020; Kellogg, 2020). The search results from the social media platforms (Twitter and Instagram) included diverse military perspectives and at times it was difficult to identify the geographical context of each post. Therefore, these social media channels were excluded from this research study. A search on Google resulted in various virtual communication channels (i.e., blogs, chatrooms, websites) that focused heavily on the experience in the USA. However, active communication channels

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focusing on the Canadian military spouses' perspective where not found. The results of this internet search provided additional confirmation that Facebook was the most appropriate social media channel for this research study.

Next, I searched Facebook to identify groups, posts, or discussions related to the research question. Using the search terms "military", "spouse," and "Canada" in the Facebook search function resulted in thousands of posts, people, photos, videos, pages, places, and events. To narrow this search, groups were explored further for content relevant to the research topic. Exchanges within groups encompass all the items in the search results (posts, people, photos, videos, pages, places, and events) but are created for specific purposes or interests which allowed me to further refine the search.

Next, I searched public Facebook groups. This resulted in numerous military groups pertaining to interests such as small businesses, employment, relocations, lost and found items, yard sales, prayer groups, sexual trauma support groups, veteran-based groups, and military base/wing specific information groups. I reviewed group titles and descriptions and found four potential public Facebook groups relevant to the topic of my study. After further investigation, I concluded that these groups would not be appropriate to answer the research question. Two of the groups were based on the USA perspective and the two remaining groups had limited membership and encouraged discussion topics would not help answer the research question.

Subsequently, I searched private Facebook groups, which resulted in numerous groups pertaining to topics such as social support, book clubs, relocations, crafts, base specific information and support, military vehicles, advocacy, and small businesses.

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Group titles and descriptions were reviewed, resulting in four private groups as potential online communities to engage with for this research study. Taken together, I concluded that three groups could best answer my research question. These groups had highly active discussions that could help answer the research question and the membership was open to all Canadian military spouses.

After reviewing and assessing the three groups, I identified one as ideal for this research study. This private Facebook group had a large, engaged membership of close to 8000 Canadian military spouses, me included, with detailed posts and member-to-member interactions that could help answer the research question (Kozinets et al., 2014). This group had been operating the longest out of the three identified groups providing a rich source of archival data and a well-established community to engage with. I refer to this Facebook group as the Military Spouses Network group (MSN) to maintain confidentiality of community.

Being an insider of the community smoothed the process of entrée into the community in my new role as researcher (Cherny, 1999 as cited in Kozinets et al., 2014). This was evident in the number of interested community members who responded to my invitation to participate in this research study (see Appendix A). Within three hours of posting the invitation to participate on the MSN Facebook group page, I received close to 30 messages from spouses interested in participating in this study. The exclusion criteria were reviewed with each spouse, resulting in 22 spouses who met the study criteria. Spouses who were military members themselves were excluded from the study as families with both spouses serving in the CAF have their own set of unique challenges which deserve to be explored independently. Military spouses that I had a pre-existing

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friendship with were excluded from the study to avoid unnecessary bias. Last, all interviews were hosted over Zoom, so it was imperative that the interested spouses had access to this video conferencing platform.

Using purposive sampling, key informants were identified from within the community to capture a variety of characteristics such as a range of ages, differing employment status and various lengths of time being a military spouse. These individuals were knowledgeable about their community and were able and willing to speak about resilience as a representative of this community.

Obtaining Informed Consent

Ethics approval was obtained from the Athabasca University Research Ethics Board (REB) for this study before engaging the MSN group.

I began the research process by sending the lead administrator of the MSN group an introductory message (see Appendix B) to provide an overview of the proposed study and to introduce my potential new role as a researcher in the community. Following approval from the lead administrator, I posted a message in the MSN group to introduce myself to the community in my new role as researcher (see Appendix C) and attached the invitation letter to provide an overview of the research. At this time, I also invited community members to contact me with their questions or if they were interested in participating in the study.

I provided each participant with an invitation to participate letter for their records and answered their questions. Next, I accommodated the participants schedule to book a date and time for an interview. Once the time and date for the interview was confirmed, I

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provided participants with a link to Survey Monkey to complete an online informed consent form (see Appendix D).

Ethical Considerations in Netnography

Social media blends public and private information into a “novel hybrid form” of information (Kozinets et al., 2014). As a result, a researcher using netnography must address ethical concerns, including risk and privacy. I followed the four guidelines to ethical use of netnography described by Kozinets (2002):

(1) I fully disclosed my identity and research intentions to the online community with each Facebook post and provided study details through the invitation to participate letter,

(2) I ensured confidentiality and anonymity of the community members by using pseudonyms (for both the Facebook group name and for individuals within),

(3) I sought and incorporated feedback from community members on the preliminary findings, and

(4) I respected the privacy of the MSN group by gaining approval from the group administrator before interacting with the community.

Data Collection

Data collection for this study was completed over a three-week period in September 2023. All participants completed a brief demographic questionnaire (see Appendix E) and participated in individual interviews via Zoom. A semi-structured

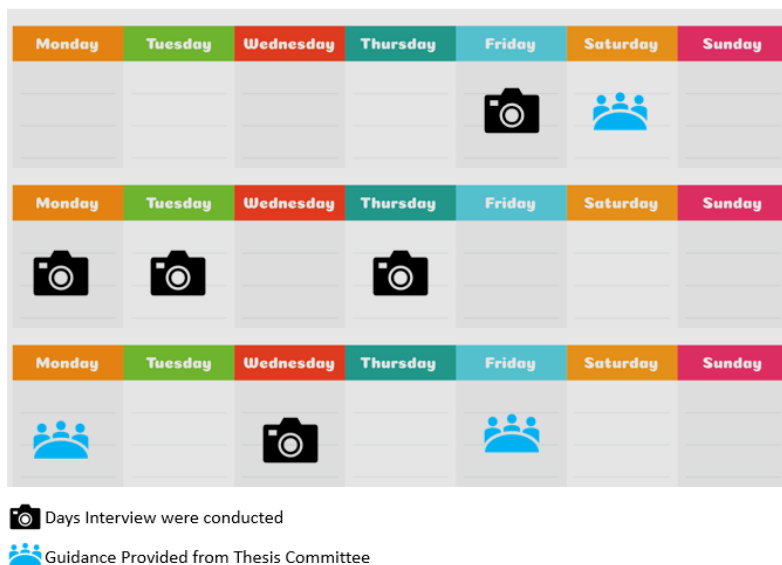
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interview guide was used (see Appendix F) and participants were encouraged to provide as much detail as possible by using probes such as “can you tell me more” and “can you give me an example of that.”. I conducted and recorded interviews using the video conferencing software Zoom. Interviews lasted in length 43-55 minutes, with an average length of 53 minutes. Recordings were transcribed verbatim using the transcription function in Microsoft Word and reviewed for accuracy. For each interview, I took handwritten field notes. In addition, I recorded reflective journal entries to document my personal reflections on the research process and my position in it. I used ATLAS.ti to manage all data (i.e., interview transcripts, field notes, and reflective journal entries).

I outline the data collection process timeline in Figure 1. Timelines were dependent on time required to analyze data and on the time needed by my committee members to provide input.

Figure 1

Data Collection Timelines



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I collected data until my thesis committee, and I felt data saturation was achieved, that is, until the major concepts were defined and explained, and no new concepts or themes emerge (Kozinets, 2002). It can be argued that data saturation could never really be obtained because everyone has different experiences and realities, potentially bringing new ideas forward continuously. For this study, data collection ended when the research question was sufficiently addressed (Kozinets, 2002).

Data Analysis

Data analysis was an iterative process beginning when first contacting the MSN group and continuing throughout the data collection process. I used thematic analysis, which has been widely used across disciplines to draw patterns and relationships from qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Lester et al., 2020). Thematic analysis guidelines suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006) included the following six steps, recognizing these steps are not linear, but iterative: familiarizing yourself with the data, creating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining, and naming themes, and last, producing the report.

To familiarize myself with the data, I gathered all the data, in all the various forms, and organized them in a consistent format in ATLAS.ti so that it could be analyzed (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). Next, I read the data and listened to the interview recordings to increase my familiarity with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). During this process, I captured personal opinions, reactions, and feelings using memos. I linked these memos to specific lines on the transcripts where applicable

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using a code I labeled as “Opinions/Feelings”. Observations and questions were also captured using memos and linked to specific passages on the transcripts.

While I reviewed the transcripts and interview recordings, ideas for codes started to be formed in relational to the research question and applied to passages within the transcripts. After careful consideration, I coded each data source “In Vivo” from the text. For example, I applied codes such as balance, awareness, mentorship, and mindset. After the initial codes were created and compiled, I reviewed codes for central themes and grouped the codes together. For example, some of the central themes that I interpreted from the data were *Protective Factors to Resilience* and *Challenges to Resilience*. I reviewed these themes at the code level for coherence and then again at the broad level of the data set for validity of individual themes in relation to the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Castleberry & Nolen, 2018).

After reviewing all themes, each theme was further refined and defined by identifying the deeper meaning of each theme. This process led to interpretations of the data moving from codes and themes. As a result, analytical conclusions in response to the research question were made (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Castleberry & Nolen, 2018).

The final step of the analytical process involved compiling the results into a report or format that can be readily shared with the intended audience. Reporting the findings of the study went beyond just providing a description of the data, it also made an argument in relation to the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The research findings were shared within the MSN group to provide an opportunity to offer feedback. I contacted the study participants individually to notify them that the preliminary results

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would be shared with the group. Of the five participants, 3 responded in agreement with the findings and provided encouragement on a job well done. Two participants did not respond. Within 24 hours of posting the summary figure on to the MSN group, two comments, three “thumbs-up,” and one “heart” were received indicating agreement with the findings. After these initial comments were made there was no further input from the MSN group. The silence was interrupted as agreement with the findings so the opportunity to provide feedback ended after one week.

My thesis committee was also engaged throughout the research process. They provided guidance related to the research process and reviewed data as themes emerged. Their expertise served as a reliability check to ensure I was conducting the research appropriately and that I was analyzing the data beyond surface level descriptions to provide in-depth interpretations.

Rigour

Qualitative researchers use a wide range of interpretive practices to “better understand the subject matter at hand” (Norman, 2011, as cited in Johnson et al., 2020). As such, it is important to establish confidence in the quality of the research findings using flexible criteria to ensure rigour and trustworthiness in the results (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). Rigour was built into this research process by using the following criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility refers to data findings being believable or credible (Forero et al, 2018; Johnson et al., 2020). This was achieved by spending an extended amount of time with each participant and obtaining community feedback on the research findings. The

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findings on my research study are transferable meaning the findings can be transferred to similar groups within the same context (Forero et al, 2018; Johnson et al., 2020).

Transferability was ensured using purposeful sampling and reaching data saturation. I have provided a rich description of the research process in which my thesis committee audited throughout. In doing so, I have ensured that the research findings are dependable, meaning the research can be replicated (Forero et al, 2018; Johnson et al., 2020). Last, confirmability refers to the research findings to be confirmed by other researchers (Forero et al, 2018; Johnson et al., 2020). This was achieved using reflexive journaling and requesting community feedback.

Summary

Using a netnography methodology provided the necessary framework to gain an in-depth understanding of how the military spouses' community defines and demonstrates resilience and lack of resilience. Using netnography allowed me to engage military spouses in a natural environment in their online community. This methodology coupled with a thematic approach to data analysis provided a systematic approach through the research process. Through this, along with building in trustworthiness through the research process, I was able to gain a rich understanding of the military spouse community and answer my research questions.

Chapter 4. Findings

Introduction

There is an assumption that military spouses are inherently resilient. Through interviews with military spouses, I was able to gain a deeper understanding of how resilience is defined by the community of military spouses and how they demonstrate resilience or diminishing resilience. My findings suggest that though military spouses are required to be resilient, this is not something that occurs naturally within an individual as the assumption may suggest. During interviews, participants shared their experiences with the military lifestyle, which demonstrated that through time and experience resilience is developed. Through their stories they identified what protects their resilience and the types of challenges they have faced that diminished their resilience.

Participant Description

I interviewed five military spouses ranging in age from 28 to 46 with a mean age of 37. This group of spouses identify as female, and Canadian. Four spouses identified as white, with one identifying as multi-ethnic from German, British, Jamaican, Cuban, and Portuguese descent. The number of years that these women have been a military spouse ranged from seven to 16 years with a mean of 11.4 years.

Participants also described their careers, socio-economic status, and degree of family support during interviews. That is, they all had financial security through stable careers or livable wages and a high degree of family support. For example, Participant 1 described herself as being privileged in that she has a supportive family, formal education, friendships, and financial privilege:

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I have a really strong family support. While they may not be geographically here, they are people I can access at anytime. I've cultivated a handful of very close friendships in which that's where I think, a lot of my resilience lies. I married an officer and he makes a livable wage. I do not have to work when I'm going to school, there's a whole lot of privilege there too. I drive. I'm able to do a lot of those things that maybe other spouses cannot. I have an education should I want to access employment, I could have. So I think there's a lot of financial privilege there as well.

Other spouses (P2, P3, P4, P5) shared similar experiences. For example, their careers were in social work, journalism, government, and one was a successful entrepreneur. Also, they all have had extended family (at some point) live close by to provide support. I report the findings related to how this community defines and demonstrates resilience and lack of resilience in the following sections.

Research Question One: What does resilience mean to military spouses in Canada?

When asked to describe resilience, participants said it was about more than just coping. For example, Participant 3 commented, it is not only being able to “just survive as a military spouse” but the ability to “lead a fulfilling life”. She told stories of enjoying the summer while her husband was deployed. She continued to do things she enjoyed camping and meeting up with family and friends rather than waiting for her husband’s return before she could enjoy the summer. Furthermore, all participants stated that resilience means to keep healthy; mentally (P2, P3), physically (P3), and spiritually (P5),

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because as a military spouse you not only need to navigate through challenging times as an individual, but you also need to help children and the military members navigate through the challenging times too (P2, P3).

Participant 5 described resilience as being “synonymous with military life” and that “there is no other way [to live a healthy life in the military environment].” She also said there is a need “to accept challenges [as a result of being part of the military], deal with the challenges, and move on.” There is a necessity to accept situations such as postings, courses, or deployments and to adapt to the situation and work through it even though the situation may be not desirable (P5). Often, these types of situations arise quickly with little to no time for preparation, meaning military spouses must deal with near constant uncertainty. For example, Participant 5 reported, “There’s not a single moment where you don’t show resiliency...your entire life becomes resilient.”

Research Question Two: How do military spouses demonstrate resilience and diminishing resilience?

Enhancing Resilience

Military spouses described promoting or enhancing resilience through experiences, social connections, and mentorship. They demonstrate resilience through the ways in which they navigate stressful situations and challenges imposed by the military lifestyle. The ability to navigate these situations is developed and challenged over time and new coping strategies are learned as they gain more experience with the military lifestyle and resources, such as inner strength and social support. For example, Participant 1 endured a combination of unfortunate events while her husband was deployed and felt she

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navigated the situation well because of her social connections, mental strength, and mindfulness. She told this story.

My spouse was away in November of last year and as per usual, everything goes down the drain when the military member leaves. In the span of three days, the dog got sick, the kid got sick, I got bitten by a tick, it just was a hot mess. Something broke in the house and I remember feeling moderate, like appropriately stressed. Not to the point that I felt paralyzed by my stress because I had people in my life to rely on and I had already cultivated the personal resilience to get through that. I reached out to a friend to tell her what was going on and was able to carry on with life. I recall it being very stressful, but I didn't feel like it was crippling because I had the personal resilience to navigate that. (P1)

This participant acknowledged that she was feeling stressed and overwhelmed so she reached out for emotional support. By reaching out for emotional support, Participant 1 “didn't stress out in a silo”. She had knowledge of what medical services were available that enabled her to get the required support for her sick child, sick dog, and her tick bite. Being aware of the supports and resources that are available, having trusted social connections, and knowing when to reach out for help all leveraged this military spouse's resilience so she could navigate a stressful situation in a healthy way.

Social Connections. All participants suggested that the biggest factor that enhanced their resilience is the relationships that they have facilitated on their own, with both military and civilian friends and family. Participant 1 discussed the role that these relationships play in her resilience, saying “I'm counting a lot on the relationships I have

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facilitated to be able to be there for me, to be my resilient trampoline so to speak or safety net.” There are benefits and challenges related to each type of friend group.

The benefit of connecting with other military spouses is that spouses may “feel less lonely connecting with someone who has gone through (or is going through) similar situations (i.e., deployments to a high-risk location)” (P4). However, this “support may be fickle” (P5) as military friends are also subjected to being posted to other locations (P1). Also, military friends may not be as available because they are managing their own family during military-related absences (P5).

Establishing connections with civilian friends can provide a strong social network that has its own benefits and challenges. Civilians may have a deep-rooted support system that military spouses and families can tap into (P1, P3, P5). Support from civilian counterparts could also be more consistent as they are less likely to move away or to have to deal with constant partner absences (P3, P5). However, one challenge could be that civilians may be empathic to the military lifestyle. Participant 4 explained that civilians “lack understanding” of the realities of the military lifestyle. This perception of some civilians could make military spouses hesitant to cultivate strong, trusting social connections that could support their own resilience.

Mentorship. Participants described the need for guidance on how to manage life as a military spouse through mentorship with experienced peers or programming. During all interviews, mentorship was consistently identified as a beneficial resource for military spouses. Some military spouses discussed how they have mentored other spouses by mentored them on developing life skills, helping them navigate the posting process (P1),

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driving others to appointments and the grocery store when no local transport is available (P1), and helping to connect other military spouses to medical and mental health services and resources (P5). Participant 2 discussed how she benefited from the mentorship of an experienced military spouse because she had someone to look to for empathy and emotional support during challenging times. Others acknowledged that they would have benefited from receiving a how to guide on how to be a military spouse when they were first introduced to the military lifestyle (P4).

Overall, all participants felt a need for more information and suggestions on how to manage life as a military spouse (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5). Participant 1 described existing orientation programs for families when arriving at a new base/wing. Specifically, these programs involve a military family that is established in the community sponsoring another family newly posted in to support their transition into the new community. A few participants suggested building on this type of model to offer programming that explains what to expect as a military spouse (P2, P3, P4) and to suggest which life skills to develop would be beneficial (P1). Providing mentorship in these areas could leverage military spouses' ability to cope with the challenges of the military lifestyle and as a result support resilience (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5).

Diminishing Resilience

The main theme related to diminishing resilience was military spouses' internal expectation that they should be able to deal with an appropriate level of stress during challenging periods of time. All participants conveyed that they could handle all the challenges, stress, and responsibilities of life when the military member was absent

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without reaching out for assistance until it got to the point where things were “really bad,” (P1, P2) they were feeling burnt out (P3, P4), or that they needed to receive medical care or be hospitalized (P2, P5).

One participant shared her story about a time that was exceptionally challenging. Her husband, the military member, was deployed to Afghanistan and one of his colleagues, and friend, lost their life during the deployment. She and her husband were several time zones apart, making it difficult to communicate and stay connected for weeks.

At the time but I’ve changed that [now], I would have CBC news on all the time, all day. And whenever there was news from Afghanistan, I would stop and listen and without realizing what I was doing to myself, I cracked. I would get to a point where I would suddenly become aware that I had been rigid, like tense in my entire body for minutes at a time. I couldn’t get my brain; I couldn’t get myself to do anything else. I was just paralyzed. Paralyzed. With what? I, I don’t know. Like fear, maybe? But I would just it was like paralysis and that didn’t get better.
(P2)

Through this story, it is easy to see how important social connection is to resilience. Without the consistent connection with her husband to reassure her that he was safe, her resilience diminished, which is evident by how her body and mind reacted to events. Participant 2 describes further the social connections she had with her work colleagues and her sister-in-law during that time being her “lifeline” even though she “didn't feel like [she] could or even wanted to open up and talk about what was going on,

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they [her colleagues and sister-in-law] were there.” This experience that Participant 2 describes confirms the perception that military spouses are reluctant to reach out for help, possibly due to their internal expectation that they should be able to handle an appropriate level of stress. There seems to be an unwritten rule within the military spouse community that one is not to ask for help unless the situation is dire, which negatively impacts resilience.

Summary of Findings

As noted earlier, a diagram of the summary of the research findings was created and shared with the community during data analysis to verify my interpretations of the data. See Figure 2 for the summary capturing the findings providing specific detail of the factors that enhance or challenge the resilience of military spouses.

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Figure 2 Resilience as Defined by Canadian Military Spouses



These findings were grouped into themes and further developed and interpreted to answer the research questions which were previously described.

Summary

Military spouses define resilience as not only surviving through the challenges that the military lifestyle imposes on them, but the ability to lead a fulfilling life amidst these challenges. Having trusted social connections and receiving mentorship provides the most leverage in maintaining resilience for military spouses. Without these strong social connections, resilience easily diminishes. However, military spouses are reluctant to reach out for support unless they experience more than an “appropriate” amount of stress and they need to seek out medical intervention and hospitalization.

Chapter 5. Discussion

Introduction

A common assumption is that military spouses must be inherently resilient. My findings suggest that military spouses are resilient, but it is a quality that is developed over time and with experience, not a naturally occurring phenomenon. Protective factors include social connection, inner strength, awareness of resources and support, and mentorship. Factors that diminished resilience included not reaching out for support, dealing with military member's absences due to operational demands, and the posting seasons. It is important to understand what factors enhance or challenge this community's resilience. The protective factors such as mentorship and social connection can be leveraged to enhance the community's resilience and reduce the impact of the factors that challenge or diminish their resilience.

Mentorship

Mentorship may naturally occur through strong social connections within the military spouse community. Mentoring community members through the challenges that the military life imposes can be a mutually beneficial endeavor. Those receiving mentorships, or the mentees, can gain emotional support to navigate challenging situations and to develop a sense of community. Those providing mentorship may get a sense of gratification and an opportunity for self-development (Oddone Paolucci et al., 2021).

Krause and Moore's (2020) evaluation of an online university student peer-mentorship program during the COVID-19 pandemic also found that mentorship is

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mutually beneficial. Throughout the online peer-mentorship program, both the mentor and mentee recognized they were not alone in the challenges they faced when transitioning to online classes, reducing feelings of isolation. This sentiment was echoed through the military spouse community in this study who described feeling less lonely during deployments when they were able to connect with someone who shared similar experiences. The mentees of the online peer-mentorship program also reported that they were able to learn new skills that they could carry into the future (Krause & Moore, 2020). This finding is meaningful for the military spouse community because the ability to learn life skills to help cope with the challenges of the military lifestyle was identified as an opportunity to enhance resilience for military spouses. Successfully learning new skills in an online peer-mentorship environment is also promising as much of the military spouse community naturally gathers online using Facebook (Wang, 2018). One can speculate that through the process of mentorship, social connections are created and, much like Cacioppo et al. (2016) and Bowen and Martin (2011) indicated, these connections can improve adaptability to challenging situations therefore supporting an individual's resilience.

Social Connection

The study findings suggest that the biggest factor to enhancing the resilience of military spouses is their social connections. This community cultivates and maintains social connections with their civilian counterparts and with each other. The size of the MSN group, as well as the numerous daily posts that provide support, encouragement, and guidance to other military spouses indicates that kinship with the community is highly valued.

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There is value in having close social connections with others. The model of social resources by Hobfoll (as cited in Cacioppo et al., 2016) suggests that social connections can lead to additional support such as assistance in dealing with difficult circumstances, much like what military spouses experience. The close connection to others has an important influence on the ability to adapt after being exposed to challenging situations (Bowen & Martin, 2011; Cacioppo et al., 2016). For example, military members in high-risk situations have shown to have better mental health outcomes if they have strong social bonds (Cacioppo et al., 2016), suggesting this may be true for military spouses as well.

Implications

The findings from this study fill a gap in the literature that focuses on the well-being and resilience of military spouses. The military spouse community can benefit from this study because the findings describe the social nuances that enhance resilience and diminish resilience of the community members. These findings create a foundation to inspire the creation of meaningful strategies to enhance the resilience of military spouses. Since formal support provided for these spouses by military organizations does not consistently meet the needs of this community, spouses need resources and encouragement to connect with one another.

Limitations

The limitations to this study include my roles as a novice researcher; however, I gained direct experience during the research process as I conducted the study. Also, because this study was part of a requirement to complete a master thesis and I was the

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sole participant in data collection and analysis. However, this was mitigated by presenting the findings to the community of military spouses for feedback, routine discussions with the thesis committee members to receive guidance on the research process, and by composing a reflective research journal throughout the study process.

Recommendations for Further Research

The findings from this study have shed light on social nuances of the military spouse community that have not been addressed in the literature. This creates opportunities to develop a deeper understanding of the social norms of this community that enhance or diminish the resilience of military spouses.

There is an opportunity for future research to explore why military spouses are reluctant to ask for help but are often the first ones to offer help or mentorship to others. During the interviews, all military spouses referred to the idea of formal mentorship being useful for other spouses and were very willing to be the one to help and offer the support. However, on the contrary almost all the military spouses who participated in this study implied that they are hesitant to reach out for help for themselves. Understanding the reasons why most military spouses are hesitant to ask for assistance may provide the necessary information to support a culture shift to make it more acceptable to reach out for help.

Another potential area for future research is to explore ways to enhance social connections for military spouses. At times it is difficult for military spouses to receive the support they require because formal services do not consistently meet their needs.

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Organizations that support military families could benefit from this information to create services and resources that facilitate military spouses to support each other.

Exploring diverse groups within the community spouse population could also be beneficial. This research study heard the experiences from a very small group within the military spouse's community. It could be beneficial for future research to focus on other groups within the community such as LGBTQ2S+ groups, spouses that are new to the military lifestyle and military spouses who identify as men. These groups within the community may have different experiences which deserve to be explored independently.

Chapter 6. Conclusion

The findings from this study contribute to the understanding of how the military spouse community defines and demonstrates resilience. More specifically, it revealed nuances of the military spouse community that have not been addressed in the literature. The findings from this study contribute a deeper understanding of resilience in the military spouse community to address this gap in the literature.

The findings suggest that military spouses identify social connection as the most beneficial factor to enhance their resilience. This community is eager to help their fellow military spouses; however, they are reluctant to seek help for themselves. These findings create an opportunity for further research investigating why military spouses are hesitant to ask for assistance. Understanding this specific social nuance within the military spouse community could help guide new and innovative resources, programs, and services to barriers to accessing support, further enhancing this community's resilience.

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Appendix A: Invitation to Participate

Exploring How Resiliency is Defined and Demonstrated by Canadian Military
Spouses

July 1, 2023

Principal Investigator (Researcher):

Jessica MacIssac

581-992-4053

jmacisaac1@athabasca.edu

Supervisor:

Steven Johnson, PhD

877-848-6903

sjohnson@athabascau.ca

My name is *Jessica MacIsaac*, and I am a graduate student working towards a Master of Health Studies at Athabasca University. As a requirement to complete my degree, I am conducting a research project about understanding how military spouses in Canada define and demonstrate resiliency. I am conducting this project under the supervision of *Steven Johnson*.

I invite you to participate in this project because you have a spouse/partner that is serving in the Canadian Armed Forces, and you can offer unique information on your experiences with resilience.

The purpose of this research project is to inform and guide community programming and resources that focus on enhancing physical, psychological, and social resilience.

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Your participation in this project would involve participating in one-on-one discussions using Facebook Messenger, Microsoft Teams or Zoom AND COMPLETING A SHORT DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY. Conversations will be recorded for the purpose of transcribing into text for the ease of analysis, the recordings themselves will not be used as data for the study. The expected length of this research project will be approximately two weeks or up to several weeks and if selected for a one-on-one discussion, it would be arranged for a date and time that is convenient to your schedule.

Each one-on-one discussion will last about 60 minutes with potential for follow-up conversations if required. Participation in this research is completely voluntary and you may choose to withdraw from the research at any time or not answer questions that you do not feel comfortable answering.

The research should benefit all military spouses in Canada by developing the knowledge necessary to best guide community programming and policies aimed at supporting the resilience of military spouses. I anticipate you will not face any risk as a result of participating in this research. However, the discussions could cover sensitive topics that could potentially raise uncomfortable feelings. If you would like to talk to someone, please let Jessica or Steve know AND WE WILL PUT YOU IN TOUCH WITH A COUNSELLOR.

Thank you for considering this invitation. If you have any questions or would like more information, please contact me, Jessica MacIsaac by e-mail

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jmacisaac1@athabasca.edu or through Facebook Messenger, or my supervisor by
sjohnson@athabascau.ca

Thank you.

Jessica MacIsaac

This project has been reviewed by the Athabasca University Research Ethics Board. Should you have any comments or concerns regarding your treatment as a participant in this project, please contact the Research Ethics Office by e-mail at rebsec@athabascau.ca or by telephone at 1-800-788-9041, ext. 6718.



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Appendix B: Private Introduction Message to Group Administrator

Hi Tracey;

I would like to follow up with you about our last conversation about research within this Facebook group. Currently, I am working on my thesis to complete a master's degree of Health Disciplines at Athabasca University. For my thesis project I am interested in exploring the resilience of military spouses in Canada. I would like to host one- on-one INTERVIEWS with 5-10 group members of this Facebook group to better understand how our community of military spouses define and exemplify resilience. I anticipate this will take roughly two or up to several weeks to complete.

My goal is to create a foundational understanding of what resilience is to military spouses in hopes of influencing CAF programming being created to enhance resilience of spouses. I will be doing this work in complete confidence and will not release any information that would expose the identify of individual group members or this Facebook group. If I need to provide a direct quote from a group member, I will obtain their permission to do so before hand and keep their identity confidential. My aim is to complete this research with minimal time and effort required from the admins of this Facebook group.

If you think this is appropriate for this group, I would be happy to send the formal information letter to you, Monique and Krista, and answer any questions you all may have. If it would be easier to chat about details over the phone or video chat, I would be happy to do so. Please let me know what questions you may have.

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Kindest regards,

Jessica

Jessica MacIsaac

Steven Johnson, PhD

Master's Student

Thesis Supervisor

Athabasca University

Athabasca University

581-992-4053

877-848-6903

jmacisaac1@athabasca.edu

sjohnson@athabascau.ca

Research Ethics Officer

Athabasca University Research Ethics Board (REB)

1-800-788-9041 ext. 6718

rebsec@athabascau.ca

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Appendix C: Public Introductory Post for Facebook Group Members

Hello all – I am completing my master’s degree at Athabasca University to explore the resilience of military spouses in Canada.

To help me describe what resilience means to military spouses, I would like to host one-on-one discussions with those of you who have a spouse/partner that is a member of the Canadian Armed Forces. I will host one-hour discussions with 5-10 group members over roughly a 2-week period and ask you to complete a short survey that takes less than 2 minutes to complete. **Your participation is entirely voluntary.**

My goal is to create a foundational understanding of how military spouses define and demonstrate resilience in hopes of influencing CAF programming being created to enhance our resilience.

This work will be done in complete confidence and will not expose the identity of group members or this Facebook group. If a direct quote from a group member is required, their permission will be obtained beforehand and their identity will be kept confidential and anonymized.

To learn more about this study, or to participate in this study, please DM me or email me jmacisaac1@athabasca.edu for details.

This study is supervised by: Dr. Stephen Johnson sjohnson@athabascau.ca

This study has been reviewed by the Athabasca University Research Ethics Board.

Appendix D: Online Participant Consent Form

Principal Researcher:

Supervisor: (if applicable)

Jessica MacIssac

Steven Johnson, PhD

581-992-4053

877-848-6903

jmacisaac1@athabasca.edu

sjohnson@athabascau.ca

You are invited to participate in a research study about understanding how military spouses in Canada define and demonstrate resiliency. I am conducting this study as a requirement to complete *my Master's of Health Studies Degree*.

As a participant, you are asked to complete a short, 4 question demographic questionnaire using Survey Monkey as well as to take part in one-on-one interview using Zoom. Interviews will be about what resilience means to you and how a person shows their resilience. The Demographic questionnaire should take only a few minutes to complete and the one-on-one interview will take approximately one hour of your time and in some cases, a follow-up interview may be required.

I anticipate you will not face any risk as a result of participating in this research. However, the interview could cover sensitive topics that could potentially raise uncomfortable feelings. If you would like to talk to someone, please let Jessica or Steve know and we will put you in touch with a councillor. Involvement in this study is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to answer any questions or to share information that you are not comfortable sharing. You may withdraw from the study at any time during the

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data collection period or up to one week after all data collection is finalized by contacting Jessica directly and your comments will be removed from the study.

The researcher acknowledges that the host of the online survey (Survey Monkey) and one-on-one interviews (Zoom) may automatically collect participant data without their knowledge (i.e., IP addresses.) Although this information may be provided or made accessible to the researcher, it will not be used or saved without participant's consent on the researcher's system. Further, "Because this project employs e-based collection techniques, data may be subject to access by third parties as a result of various security legislation now in place in many countries and thus the confidentiality and privacy of data cannot be guaranteed during web-based transmission.

All hard copy data will be kept in locked cabinets in my home office. All electronic data will be kept in a password protected computer at my home office on a password protected computer and encrypted. All information and records will be destroyed by confidential shredding; electronic records will be deleted, when all project requirements have been met approximately by 31 December, 2028.

A summary of the research results will be shared on the Facebook group before sharing with the public. Feedback is welcomed for two weeks after the research results are shared.

Results of this study may be presented at research conferences hosted by Athabasca University and military organizations such as Canadian Institute for Military and Veteran Health Research. The final research results will be posted within the Facebook group for all participants to access.

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If you have any questions about this study or require further information, please contact Jessica MacIsaac or Steve Johnson using the contact information above.

This study has been reviewed by the Athabasca University Research Ethics Board. Should you have any comments or concerns regarding your treatment as a participant in this study, please contact the Research Ethics Officer at 780.213.2033 or by e-mail to rebsec@athabascau.ca.

Thank you for your assistance in this project.

CONSENT:

The completion of the survey and its submission is viewed as your consent to participate.

[BEGIN THE SURVEY](#)

CONSENT SURVEY:

I have read the Letter of Information regarding this research study, and all of my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I will keep a copy of this letter for my records.

Completing this survey confirms that:

- I understand the expectations and requirements of my participation in the research;
- I understand the provisions around confidentiality and anonymity.

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- I understand that my participation is voluntary, and that I am free to withdraw at any time with no negative consequences;
- I am aware that I may contact Jessica MacIsaac, Steven Johnson, or the Office of Research Ethics if I have any questions, concerns or complaints about the research procedures.

If selected to participate in one-on-one interviews and by initialing the statement(s) below,

_____ I am granting permission for the researcher to use a video/DIGITAL recorder

_____ I acknowledge that the researcher may use specific quotations of mine, without identifying me

_____ I am granting permission for the researcher to attribute my name to any quotes used

Name: _____

Date: _____

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Appendix E: Demographic Questionnaire

Please fill out the information below to help me better understand the community.

1. Gender: _____

2. Age: _____

3. Which race category best describes you? Select all that apply from the following options:
 - Black African, Afro-Caribbean, African-Canadian descent
 - East Asian Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Taiwanese descent
 - Latino Latin American, Hispanic descent
 - Middle Eastern Arab, Persian, West Asian descent, e.g. Afghan, Egyptian, Iranian, etc.
 - South Asian South Asian descent, e.g. East Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, Indo-Caribbean, etc.
 - Southeast Asian Filipino, Vietnamese, Cambodian, Thai, other Southeast Asian descent
 - White European descent
 - Another race category (write in response)

4. Number of years you have been a military spouse/partner: _____

Appendix F: Semi-Structured Interview Guide

The primary question initiating the interview will be " what does resilience mean to you as a military spouse?"

Following this initial question, the interviewer will use prompts or follow-up questions to deepen the conversation with the goal of a detailed description of the attitudes and strategies these nurses use that they attribute to forestalling compassion fatigue.

The prompt questions will be personalized to the response to the initial research question but could include follow-up questions and prompts such as:

1. Please describe a time when you had to show resilience as a military spouse.
2. Please describe a time when your resilience was challenged as a military spouse.
3. How has the military community challenged your ability to be resilient?
4. How has the military community supported your ability to be resilient?
5. What else, if anything, do you think is important for me to know about (your experience of) resilience as a military spouse?
6. Prompts like - Can you tell me more? How did that make you feel?

CERTIFICATION OF ETHICAL APPROVAL

The Athabasca University Research Ethics Board (REB) has reviewed and approved the research project noted below. The REB is constituted and operates in accordance with the current version of the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2) and Athabasca University Policy and Procedures.

Ethics File No.: 25340

Principal Investigator:

Mrs. Jessica MacIsaac, Graduate Student
Faculty of Health Disciplines\Master of Health Studies

Supervisor/Project Team:

Dr. Steven Johnson (Supervisor)

Project Title:

Exploring the Resiliency of an Online Community of Canadian Military Spouses using a Netnography Approach

Effective Date: July 26, 2023

Expiry Date: July 25, 2024

Restrictions:

Any modification/amendment to the approved research must be submitted to the AUREB for approval prior to proceeding.

Any adverse event or incidental findings must be reported to the AUREB as soon as possible, for review.

Ethical approval is valid *for a period of one year*. An annual request for renewal must be submitted and approved by the above expiry date if a project is ongoing beyond one year.

An Ethics Final Report must be submitted when the research is complete (*i.e. all participant contact and data collection is concluded, no follow-up with participants is anticipated and findings have been made available/provided to participants (if applicable)*) or the research is terminated.

Approved by:

Date: July 26, 2023

Venise Bryan, Chair
Faculty of Health Disciplines, Departmental Ethics Review Committee