

Geographically Dispersed Military Families

Exploring the Psycho-Social Impact of Intermittent Separation

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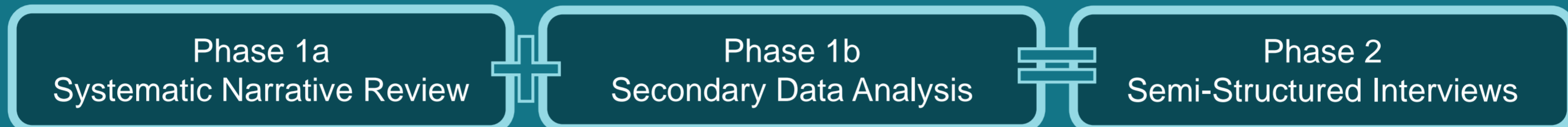
Background

- Perceived role and identity of the military family is shifting. New policies and models from MOD aim to increase flexibility and encourage stability.
- Approx. 24% of military families are living geographically dispersed from the serving family member¹⁻²
- Central to dispersed military family life is intermittent separation.
- Research primarily focusses on impact of operational deployments on spouses and children³⁻⁶
- Reasons for living geographically dispersed: educational stability, spousal employment, wider family support⁷

AIM To explore the psycho-social impact of intermittent separation on geographically dispersed military families

Method

Following a mixed methods approach, a two-phase Explanatory Sequential Design⁸ was utilised with two phases.



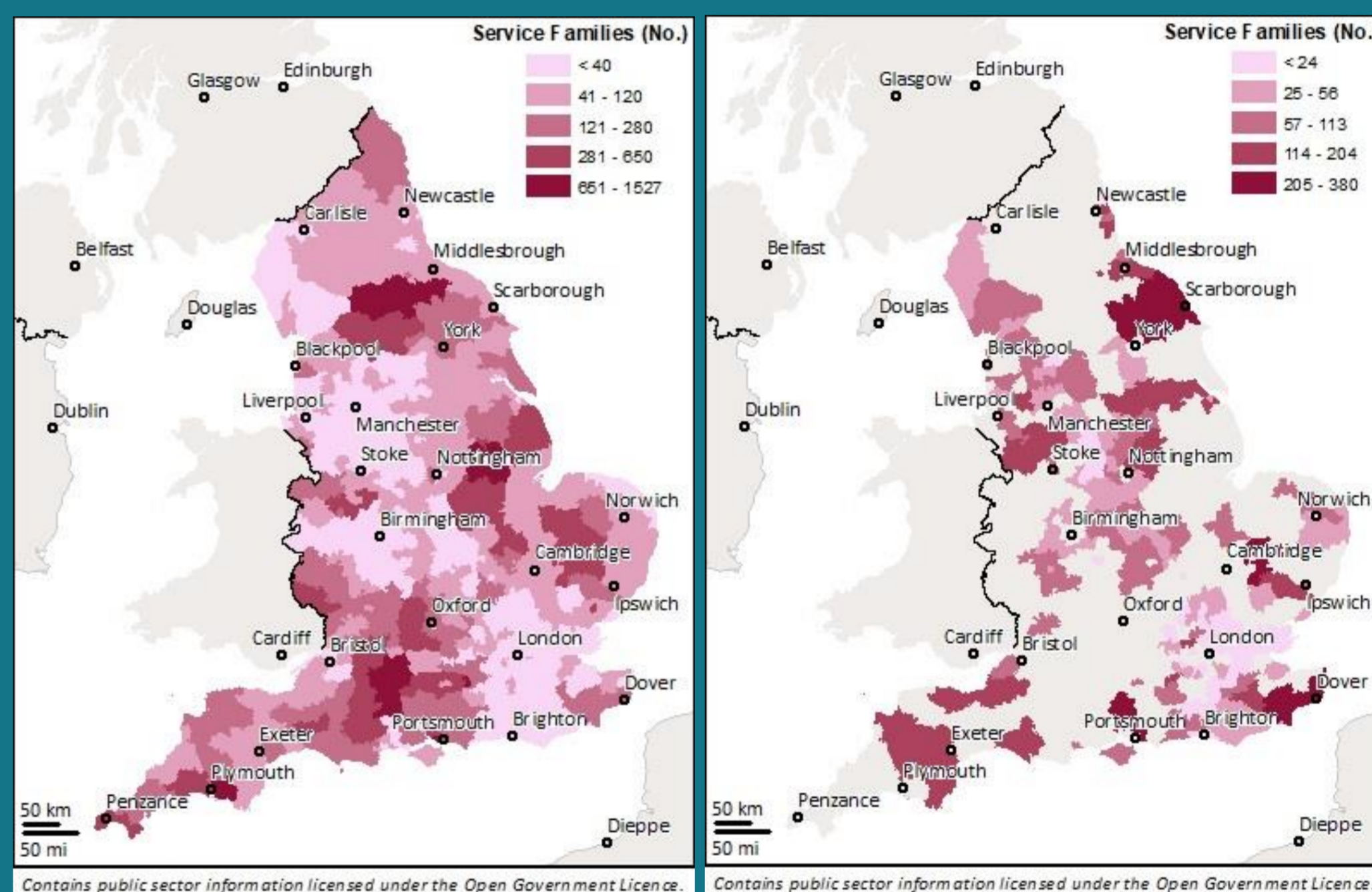
- 1a: Search items developed using PICO Framework⁹ and CASP tool¹⁰ used to assess quality. RQ - How does separation impact military families?
 1b: Publicly available data used to estimate location of military families (Service Pupil Premium, ONS Fertility Rates, Location of Stationed Personnel).
 2: Semi-structured interviews with approx. 30 dispersed family members (spouses, partners and children of UK Armed Forces personnel).

Findings: Phase 1a

- Psychological well-being changes across a separation period (e.g. deployment) with specific increases in stress¹¹⁻¹⁴, depression¹⁵⁻¹⁶ and anxiety symptoms¹⁷
- Deployment was credited with personal growth, prompting family members to cultivate their skill, talent and autonomy¹⁸
- Social support often mitigates the psychological effects of military-induced separations^{16,19-21}
- Higher levels of social support were significantly associated with better psychological health²¹, higher levels of relationship satisfaction¹¹, fewer depressive symptoms²¹, and lower levels of stress^{20,22}

Findings: Phase 1b

Geospatial estimation of all and dispersed military families in England.



Findings: Phase 2

Semi-structured interviews with civilian partners, spouses and children of UK Armed Forces personnel aged 16+. Lived dispersed within last 2 years.



Identity: Acceptance, Isolation, Stability
 Single Parent, No Formal Support, Independence, Emotional Growth
 Stress, Loneliness, Low Mood, Lack of Understanding, Uncertainty
 Compromise, Poor Communication, Separation Anxiety
 Resilience



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