Submariner's partner's accounts of deployment: a case study analysis of experience.

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to investigate what submariner's partners experienced while their significant other was out on deployment with the intention of highlighting where the Royal Navy can develop the support they provide for military families. Three female participants were recruited through advertisement on a military families social media page. Participants were interviewed and transcripts were analysed case by case through Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis based on research conducted by Riggs and Coyle (2002). Literature suggested that analysing case by case allowed for participants to discuss circumstances that might have altered their experiences. The analysis produced nine themes- three for each woman who were identified under the following pseudonyms: Julie, Lucy and Daisy. All participants experienced inconsistencies in communication from the Royal Navy and they all turned to their partner to seek emotional closeness or support. Differences in how each relationship dynamic was affected by the deployment experience was also displayed through analysis. Recommendations on how the Royal Navy could develop their support services were made based on the findings yielded from the study.

Keywords: Submariner; Partner; Spouse; Support;

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Operating for over a century, the Royal Navy Submarine Service is one of the largest in the world (Royal Navy, 2019). Due to the nature of their work, submariners can often go for months without contact with the outside world, a difficult time for both service personnel and their families (Stevens, 2001). Based on information from the official Naval website as well as academic literature, the following areas will be reviewed: Supporting married couples; emotional support; and what spouses, partners and families experience.

Supporting married couples

Intimate relationships can be held over a large geographical distance (Crystal Jiang & Hancock, 2013). Up to 3 million US couples live apart for reasons other than divorce or separation (Bergen, Kirby & McBride, 2007) a primary reason being military deployment (Stafford, Merolla & Castle, 2006) although, literature remains inconsistent regarding the effects of separation. Stafford and Merolla (2007) found that partners who were often separate reported higher-quality communication compared to those who lived together. Whereas, Dainton and Aylor (2002) found that partners who visited each other frequently reported higher levels of satisfaction compared to long-distance couples. There is also literature to suggest that there is no difference between the two types of relationships (Guldner & Swensen, 1995) suggesting that not all relationships that involve periods of separation are problematic. Though, different relationships require different demands (Crystal Jiang et al., 2013) hence why it is important to highlight the factors that affect perceived relationship quality.

Stressors internalised within the relationship can have a significant impact on the partners within them (Maguire & Kinney, 2010), including communication difficulties promoted by separation (Guldner, 2004). Stafford (2010) reiterated this point, stating that without communication, interpersonal and relational differences can promote the couple to 'drift apart'. One individual can feel more heavily invested in the relationship (Stafford, 2005), inducing doubts about its longitude and stability (Maguire, 2007). Coping strategies can be put into place which allows couples to develop resilience to the challenges of separation (Tseng, 2016) for example, social support. Approval from each person's social and vocational networks can act as a positive maintenance strategy for couples dealing with separation (Stafford, 2004).

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The Royal Navy offers several services to family members and spouses. According to the official website, personnel and families can access accommodation, childcare vouchers and rail cards to counter challenges that come with relocation and deployment. In terms of communication with their loved one, families can access a monitored and secure method of communicating during deployments. However, due to security measures, service personnel cannot feedback to their families (Royal Navy, 2019). Most of these benefits are only offered to married couples and civil partnerships (Stander, Merrill, Thomsen, Crouch & Milner, 2008).

There appears to be a gap in support networks for those who are not married or in a civil partnership. Often partners will live together without having the titles of 'husband' and 'wife' (Hiekel, Liefbroer & Poortman, 2014) and this is highlighted through the Office of National Statistics (ONS, 2016). In 2016 the ONS identified that marriage rates had decreased by 3.9% since 2002; down from 54.8% of couples to 50.9%. There had also been a 3% increase of couples that were co-habiting from 6.8% to 9.8% in 2016. Furthermore, individuals who are considered 'single' had risen by 5%, representing 34.6% of the population. This coincides with the rise in co-habiting individuals which has been acknowledged as "the fastest growing family type in the UK" (ONS, 2016).

This raises the question of how unmarried couples experience military deployments to ensure inclusive support is provided for all families. A common theme throughout the literature is the reference of spouses of personnel or 'military wives'. There is no mention of those who are neither married or in a civil partnership (Mullin-Splude, 2006). To enhance their support mechanisms the Royal Navy would need to listen to a variety of voices including those with different family dynamics.

Emotional support

Emotional support is often sought by individuals after experiencing distressing emotions such as anger, fear, anxiety, sadness, shame and hurt. An individual may turn to their own social networks, family and friends to access emotional support (Burleson, 2003) which can be divided into two categories: sensitive and insensitive. Burleson (2010) states that sensitive emotional support aims to address feelings in a helpful and effective way. This level of support must require more than just the intention to help but also the knowledge of how to reduce the distressed state (Holmstrom, Burleson & Jones, 2005). Research implies

that when support attempts do not come from a place of understanding or "cold comforts" (p. 155), it can lead to insensitive emotional support; extending and intensifying the individuals' emotional hurt (Holmstorm et al., 2005).

Benefits that the Royal Navy provide can seem ideal for supporting a military family while their loved one is deployed (Snodgrass, 2014). When discussing the literature, it is apparent that emotional support is vital when interacting with individuals, such as military family members, who are in distressed emotional states. The official Royal Navy website highlights the networks they can offer regarding emotional support:

> "From online forums and unit-specific closed Facebook pages, to dedicated service community centres, events and deployment support, a friendly face is never far away. And because everyone can relate to the rigorous life in- or with- the Royal Navy, there's always someone to talk to" (Royal Navy, 2019).

Families frequently rely on each other for emotional support. Social support acts as a protective factor amongst trauma related and depressive symptoms allowing the individual to feel part of a collective and gauge a sense of belonging (Roh et al., 2015; Turner & McLaren, 2011; Casale, Wild, Cluver & Kuo, 2015) reinforcing that the Naval community will allow access to available emotional support. However, individuals are more likely to expend more effort comforting close family and friends as opposed to an acquaintance or a distanced individual (Coston & Jones, 1992). Burleson (2003) states that "seeking support does not guarantee the receipt of sensitive, effective support" (p. 551) acknowledging that, without levels of closeness, individuals will be less likely to give highly sensitive forms of emotional support. There is a gap to be considered here by the Royal Navy as to what those who are not within the Naval community can do to access highly sensitive levels of emotional support.

To further enhance the development of their support for families, the Royal Navy could provide their own support networks; offering individuals a sense of structural support to meet their own inclusive needs. Research by Gottlieb and Bergen (2010) suggest that social support can be enriched through the influence of health psychologists and sociologists to provide a more structured program to meet the needs of the individual. An example of this can be taken from the Naval Families Federation (NFF). The NFF is an independent charity that aims to provide Naval families with the platform to "have their views heard by someone in a position of power" (NFF, 2020). The HQ of the NFF is positioned in naval establishment

HSM Excellence, though, when searched in the Royal Navy official website there is no reference to the NFF. In the pursuit of developing their support networks for military families it is suggested that the Royal Navy could work more closely with the NFF to provide sensitive emotional support to family members nationally. As an alternative, the Royal Navy could develop their own organisation to work alongside families to provide access to sensitive emotional support, which military families across the nation might need during deployment periods.

What Spouses, Partners and Families experience

Research suggests that military spouses can experience depression during their partners deployment. For the purpose of the Royal Navy developing their support it is important to gauge with family member experiences (Larson & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). Observations from Isay (1968) as to what a spouse may experience during their partners deployment suggests a reactive depression- or what was described as 'Submariners Wives Syndrome'. This held symptomology of "severe dysphoria, uncontrollable weeping, irritability, sleep disturbance and/or loss of appetite" (p.1). Isay (1968) suggested this was an outward expression of suppressed feelings of guilt over the rage they felt about being deserted. This was vital as "a wife can best serve her husband by not being an encumbrance to him" (p. 2). This has been criticised in recent literature, portraying military spouses to be severely dependent; pining for their partner to return from deployment (Chacker, 2016). It is imperative to acknowledge the date of the research conducted by Isay (1968) as attitudes remain congruent to their present societal norms. This research could still be considered relevant as it may accurately depict what some individuals have experienced in a military family although the reasoning behind these experiences may need to be reconsidered in line with current views of roles in relationships (Arber, Davidson & Ginn, 2003; Chen, 2020).

There is a body of existing literature suggesting that each new phase of deployment (pre deployment, deployment and post deployment) can bring a series of new challenges for military families (Pincus, House, Christenson & Adler, 2001). Wiens and Boss (2006) describe an initial phase of anxiety during the stages of pre-deployment. There is a described phase of anticipation as the family prepare for the deployment as well as their loved ones change in emotional state; described as "physically present whilst psychologically absent" (p. 33). The source of anticipation often comes from the idea that there will be a period of

separation from their loved one acting as a significant stressor during this time for many military families (Padden, Connors & Agazio, 2011).

Once their loved one is out on deployment, there comes a stage of emotional destabalisation (MacDermid, Olson & Weiss, 2002). Drummet, Coleman and Cable (2003) explain that this is due to the life stressors that come with the deployment: loneliness; financial stressors; changes in family dynamics and role shifts. These stressors are intensified by a fear of the safety of the deployed family member. In research conducted by Warner, Appenzeller, Warner and Grieger (2009), 90% of military spouses surveyed identified "feeling lonely" and "the safety of my deployed spouse" as current sources of stress. This is further acknowledged in a study conducted by Dandeker, French, Birtles and Wessely (2006) in which over three quarters of the 'British army wives' interviewed admitted to feeling lonely during the initial deployment stage. A second finding revealed that only one fifth of women interviewed relied on support services provided by the army during this time. A further 95% sought support through their family and 85% through other 'military wives'. It is important to consider that these findings came from a quantitative study with a larger sample of 37 and may not be entirely representative of each military spouse. Baxter and Jack (2008) advocate for the use of qualitative case studies, as opposed to quantitative research, because they determine individual subjective experiences as their focal point and analyse them in depth. With distressing emotional states such as loneliness being frequent within this phase of deployment, the importance of sensitive social support must be reiterated and should be used as a key tool during this time.

Post deployment brings a new set of challenges as the deployed family member must readjust. Lincoln, Swift and Shorteno-Fraser (2008) suggest that family dynamics must be reconfigured, often leaving family members uncertain and unfamiliar with their new roles within the household. This can extend the feelings of loneliness and isolation a spouse or partner experiences during the deployment phase. A study conducted by Werber et al. (2013) found that 10% of guard and reserve forces reported that there were problems with spouse mental health following reintegration after and 1-2-month deployment. Contributing factors to spouse's mental health included: the family not being ready for deployment, inadequate communication with the service or unit after homecoming and challenging family finances

(Werber et al., 2013). It could be argued that providing structured support to prepare individuals for the coming deployment could prevent some of these factors.

The deployment period can be a stressful time for all military family members. However, literature on what spouses and partners of submariners specifically experience is sparse. Sample subjects are often described as 'military wives' missing out the large percentage of the population that are not married to their military partner. Because of their marriage status, military spouses often have access to the physical benefits the Royal Navy provides whereas unmarried partners may not. It will be important to hear the voices of this demographic and investigate their experiences for the Royal Navy to develop appropriate and key support.

Past research into this issue is often quantitative. This can leave key experiences overlooked due to generalisation from large sample findings (Queirós, Faria & Almeida, 2017). This implies that one in-depth qualitative case study can contradict the findings of a generalised population (Yin, 1989; Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). A method of analysis, such as Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), would be preferred rather than using a method of statistical analysis. IPA allows the in-depth investigation of how individuals make sense of a major life experience (Smith et al., 2009) and, for the Royal Navy to further enhance their support, it would be a priority to understand military family's experiences.

This research aims to investigate what submariner's partners experience while their significant other is on deployment. This will be done by interviewing a sample of submariner's partners and analysing their responses case by case through IPA. The findings of this research will be used to suggest ways in which the Royal Navy can improve its support networks for military families.

Method

Methodology

Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) state that arguing a research paradigm is ideal to associate appropriate research methods. This study aims to investigate the lived experience of submariner's partners and spouses; therefore, a constructivist paradigm was deemed most

appropriate (Raskin, 2001). This takes a relativist approach to identify a participant's subjective truths which have been shaped through their own experiences and using an emic perspective to gather data (Morey & Luthans, 1984; Alberti, 2016). Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was selected as the method of analysis. IPA "is a qualitative research approach that is committed to the examination of how people make sense of their major life experiences" (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p. 1). In line with the chosen paradigm, IPA takes an emic and idiographic approach examining participants lived experiences and how an individual makes sense of these. This will allow a greater understanding of how participants experienced their partner being out on deployment and how they made sense of this (Smith et al., 2009). This is contradictory to modern psychology which focuses on making general laws of human behaviour based on large sample findings (Smith et al., 2009) building on the argument that one in-depth case study could contradict the findings based on a generalised population (Yin, 1989). Tsoukas (1989) criticised the use of an IPA case study questioning the validity of qualitative data that can be gathered from a singular case study. However, Yardley (2008) counteracts this by suggesting core principles that evaluate validity in qualitative data: sensitivity to context, commitment and rigour, coherence and transparency and impact and importance. These core principles will be considered throughout this study.

Participants

An opportunistic sample of three participants took part in the qualitative research. The participants were recruited through an advertisement posted on a social media page supporting spouses and family members of submariners (Frandsen, Thow & Ferguson, 2016). In order to take part, participants must have experienced at least one deployment during their relationship with their partner. The sample consisted of three female participants aged between 20 and 27. The size of the sample was based on research conducted by Eatough and Smith (2008) on case by case IPA which suggested that smaller sample size (3-6 participants) makes for an in-depth level of analysis; vital when trying to interpret how participants make sense of their experiences. Furthermore, Smith et al. (2009) stressed the importance of using a homogenous sample when doing an IPA; allowing the researcher to "examine the convergence and divergence of experience in some detail" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 3). The

names of the participants (Julie, Lucy and Daisy) have been changed to maintain confidentiality.

Interview Schedule

A semi-structured interview was selected due to its flexibility, allowing participants to go into detail about their experiences (Pathak & Intratat, 2016). An interview schedule was designed that consisted of questions and prompts. This acted as a guide for the interviews, standardising them to some extent (Newcomer, Hatry & Wholey, 2015). The questions split the deployment experience into four phases: pre-deployment, deployment, reuniting and post-deployment. Participants were asked about their experiences in each phase based on research conducted by Pincus et al. (2001). This stated that there is an emotional cycle for families during a military deployment indicating that their experiences could be different in each phase. This kept the data in context and transparent in line with Yardley's (2008) key principals and congruent with the IPA ethos (Smith et al., 2009). Questions included, 'what were your experiences of the pre-deployment phase?' 'is there anything else in regard to the overall deployment experience you would like to mention to me?' As participants lived in different parts of the country, the interviews were conducted via Skype and recorded for transcription. This allowed the researcher to fully engage with the participant as well as record their responses to avoid misinterpretation and improve reliability (Fernandez & Griffiths, 2007).

Procedure

Ethical approval. Before the study took place, an ethics proposal was written and presented to the University of Cumbia Psychology ethics committee. This proposal outlined details of the targeted sample, research materials (e.g. consent forms, draft interview schedules) and where the British Psychological Society's code of ethics (BPS, 2014) could be compromised and how the principal researcher would adapt to overcome this. For example, there was a risk of participants revealing either their own identities or their partners. This posed a risk of breaching not only confidentiality but measures of security the Royal Navy may have in place. To overcome this, participants were asked to avoid using names of people and to leave out personal details. Although they were to be reassured that if this were to happen details could be edited out during transcription. The study was approved by the ethics committee.

Briefing participants. Communication between researcher and participant was established via email. Before the interview process began, time was taken to ensure the participant felt comfortable engaging with the research (Waples, 2016). Emails were exchanged to discuss an appropriate time for the researcher and participant to interview via skype. Participants were also sent copies of an information sheet so they would be aware of the aims of the interview. Once they had confirmed they were still interested in participating they were then sent a consent form to sign either electronically or physically.

Conducting the interviews. Before the Skype interviews began, time was set aside to build a rapport between the researcher and participant (Waples, 2016). Participants were asked to read through their copy of the information sheet again to ensure they were still comfortable in participating and to ask any questions. They were told that the interview was to last between 30 and 60 minutes. Participants were reminded they had the right to withdraw at any point and were also asked to confirm if they were happy with their interview being recorded. The predetermined interview schedule was used and the researcher used prompts to gain more detail on a topic (Pathak et al., 2016).

Debriefing participants. Interviews with participants lasted from 30-60 minutes. After the interviews were completed participants were given a debrief sheet outlining the aims of the research as well as contact details of relevant organisations. Participants were told verbally that they had the right to withdraw their data up to 2 weeks after the completion of the interview. This was also written on their debrief sheet. The researcher handed out their own details as well as their supervisor's if participants had any concerns or complaints about the research.

Analytical Guidelines

After the interviews were complete, they were transcribed verbatim before beginning the IPA analysis process. The researcher read and reread the data from the participant interview to ensure the participant became the focus of the analysis (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008). The researcher identified anything of interest within the transcript in order to ascertain an understanding of how the individual talked about and understood a certain topic (Smith et al., 2009). From this, the researcher, now at a familiar level with the transcript, distinguished emerging themes within the case study (Biggerstaff et al., 2008). Based on research by Riggs and Coyle (2002), transcripts were analysed and reported case by

case to give voice to each participant and to compensate for each different relationship dynamic (Eatough & Smith, 2006).

Ethical Considerations

From the first stages of this research, ethical guidelines from the British Psychological Society (BPS, 2014) were followed to ensure ethically sound human research. Recordings were deleted once transcribed and transcripts were made anonymous. In line with Staal and King's (2000) ethics of Military Psychology, the participants were made aware not to mention specific details of any military operations or service personnel to ensure confidentiality. They were ensured that if this were to happen, specific names or details would be edited out during transcription. In the event the participant felt distressed, they were reminded that they could stop or withdraw from the interview at any point (Sivell et al., 2019). They were also reminded, both verbally and in written form, that they had the right to edit during transcription and any concerns were to be emailed to the principal researcher.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity juxtaposes different paradigms to understand the effects it can have on human relationships (Holland, 1999). In this section I will be using the first person to discuss how my own assumptions may have affected the interview and analysis process. I believe this will provide more depth and transparency to my study (Yardley, 2008) as I will associate myself to the reader as a researcher whose actions and beliefs may have affected the findings that come from my research (Hyland, 2001). This is reinforced by Webb (1992) who insisted that "the use of the first person is required in keeping with the epistemologies of the research and in the pursuit of reflexivity" (p. 747). Furthermore, Lotz (2000) highlights that there could be a shift in power differentials in favour of the researcher if they do not share how their attitudes and beliefs could affect the research outcomes. As I have taken an emic approach in gathering my data it is important that I make transparent any bias on my part in a reflexive account (Henwood, 2008) and it is important that I disclose my attitudes and beliefs to reveal how these may have shaped the findings (Smith et al., 2009).

I identify under a constructivist paradigm. I believe that individuals construct meaning through their interactions with the social environment (Hurd, 2009). People do not find knowledge but construct it, therefore, it is possible to have different subjective assumptions

of what reality is (Onuf, 2012). I am aware this will affect how I interpreted participant experience. I would identify both myself and the participant as 'co-creators' of the research outcomes (Finnemore & Sikkink, 2001) eliminating power differentials within the research (Brownlow, 2002).

There are personal experiences that could affect how I conducted the study, so it is important that I provide full transparency to the reader (Palaganas, Sanchez, Molintas & Caricativo, 2017). I was in a relationship with a submariner and I first came in contact with this research topic during his first deployment where I struggled to find support. This made me consider, other than physical benefits, what support the Royal Navy were offering others. Furthermore, I felt the deployment experience influenced the relationship I had with my ex-partner. This made me question how others interpreted this experience and what effects it may have had on them. I realise this experience may have led me to unconsciously lead participants during interviews. Therefore, in line with Yardley's (2008) core principles of validity, it is important that I am transparent with my actions to compensate for this effect. I did this by regularly reflecting on my practice to identify where I could have been biased and rectifying it before it took a further effect on my study (Baird, Fensham, Gunstone & White, 1991; Taylor, Werthner, Culver & Callary, 2015). I also ensured I had regular meetings with my dissertation supervisor. As she held no bias towards my research topic, she was able to give me direction with elements of my interview or analysis if the process felt leading or suggestive (Manathunga, 2007; Willemse & Boei, 2017).

Analysis and Discussion

This is an IPA analysis of what submariner's spouses or partners experienced during their deployment. The analysis was completed case by case based on research by Riggs and Coyle (2002). By doing this, each participant was able to express their own subjective account and findings were driven by psychological theory and not a result of the analysis of other transcripts. In line with the IPA underpinning idiography, analysing and reporting emerging themes case by case allowed participants to outline particular circumstances, such as relationship dynamics, that altered their experience of the deployment period (Eatough et al., 2006). Variations of IPA can differ depending on their idiographic commitment and based on the small sample in this study it was deemed appropriate to treat each participant as a case

study and draw conclusions from the group of cases (Riggs et al., 2002) therefore respecting the convergences and divergences within the data and acknowledging that participant experiences may be similar but also different (Smith & Shinebourne, 2012). Dennison (2019) expresses the importance of the use of IPA on single case studies. It is reiterated the use of a singular case study can challenge societal norms and expectations to reveal "unseen aspects of our world" (Dennison, 2019, p.3). By analysing each participant case by case as opposed to looking for similarities across all cases this has allowed for a broader outlook on to the topic and more chance to evaluate experience and produce recommendations. Congruent to the chosen method of IPA master themes were not sought across each case study. Instead, only emerging themes were affirmed with each individual to 'give voice' to their idiographic circumstance and to permit the opportunity for a unique experience to challenge previous literature as discussed in the introduction (Riggs et al., 2002; Dennison, 2019). Therefore, results are shown by the pseudonym of participants followed by their individual emerging themes. It is to be noted that ellipsis points '…' represent a pause in the participants speech and '…..' represents the removal of irrelevant dialogue. '***'represents where the participant has disclosed the name of a person or a recognisable place. Quotes can be identified as P representing page number and L representing line number.

Julie

Julie lives with her husband who has been a Submariner in the Navy for four years. They met and started a relationship prior to him joining the institution and he has been out on two deployments during this time. It is crucial to acknowledge the importance of the inclusion of married participants in this study. This allows for a wider insight into the deployment experience, bringing into light how any aspects may have differed because of the marriage and respecting the convergence and divergence of participant experience (Smith et al., 2012).

A lack of control. In this emergent theme, Julie describes experiences that are out of her control during military deployment. She describes that times and dates in which Submariners leave for deployment are not always certain and this can have an effect on her.

> "We had to be escorted on to base to be told he wasn't coming off the boat… until the day like… his mum and sister were crying, and I was upset too… I just said like… lets go" **(P3 L110-112)**

> "I remember them saying they were coming home on a certain date, so I cancelled on all of my friends… but they never came home." **(P4 L133-135)**

In the first statement, she describes a time where she and her husband's family had been escorted on to a naval base to greet her partner but had not been informed that he would not be off the boat. Secondly, Julie recalls an experience of receiving a possible date of when her partner could be returning from deployment. True in both statements, pauses (…) suggest the disappointment Julie felt when her husband did not return from deployment. In line with previous social psychological research, distressed emotional states, such as disappointment, occur when an individual faces inconsistency or unpredictability. This is a reaction over the lack of control they have of the situation and the overall outcome (Kay, Shepherd, Blatz, Chua & Galinsky, 2010; Waytz et al., 2010).

> "I was talking to people and they were saying that… it's all just hearsay that's the rubbish part like… one person will say something and well… it might not be true I sometimes think that people just make stuff up." **(P2 L87-90)**

Julie talks about her experiences interacting with other military family members online. She appears to hold a level of frustration towards this experience over the rumours she hears and clearly states how this bothers her. Research suggests that when there are inconsistent communications, there is a power differential over the individual who has little negotiation over the outcomes and the opponent who has great influence over the outcome (Stevens, Bavetta & Gist, 1993). De Vries, De Dreu, Gordijn and Schuurman (1996) suggest that this can make individuals with little control subject to other people's influence and beliefs to make up for those power differentials. This theory supports why individuals may spread rumours (Teunissen & Bok, 2013). Furthermore, their greater accumulated position of power diminishes Julie's own control over the situation, facilitating her frustration (Sinaceur, Adam, Van Kleef & Galinsky, 2013).

Proximity seeking. Within this emergent theme Julie discusses how the deployment experience can take a toll on their relationship and how she seeks proximity from her husband.

> "like I know they're off away and I'm not getting like… I'm going to sound like proper spoilt but like… he won't give me like the attention that I want because he… is also like feeling sad if that makes sense?" **(P1 L23-25)**

In this statement Julie discusses her relationship with her husband prior to him leaving for deployment. It is implied that when her husband experiences emotional distress, such as sadness or anxiety, he does not seek social and emotional support unlike herself. This supports research conducted by Pascuzzo, Cyr and Moss (2013) suggesting there are different types of romantic attachment styles. Anxious romantic attachment styles have a strong desire for proximity which promotes support seeking behaviours from a partner during periods of emotional distress (Vogel & Wei, 2005; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Alternatively, there is the avoidant romantic attachment style which inhibits support seeking behaviours in times of emotional distress and, instead, internalises this (Holmberg, Lomore, Takacs, & Price, 2011). This suggests that Julie and her partner hold facets relating to these attachment styles and therefore why there are differences in proximity seeking. When faced with emotional strain, these type of attachment styles are not complementary which could add to feelings of upset.

> "and… like there's never like a full goodbye or… like its just rubbish… and like your emotions just seem… like I almost feel angry a bit" **(P1 L20-21)**

Julie reiterates here how the inconsistency of not always having a confirmed date and time for the start of deployment can develop feelings of frustration and anger and this is shown by the number of pauses (…) within the quote. Perhaps this is a result of the need for closure and not being able to access this. Kruglanski and Webster (1996) describe the need for closure as the desire to look for any substantial answer on a given topic rather than extend any period of uncertainty. This need for closure can depend on a series of situational factors: noise, mental fatigue and time pressure (Kruglanski et al., 1996; Acar-Burkay, Fennis & Warlop, 2014). Furthermore, Acar-Burkey et al. (2014) suggests that the need for closure is higher in interpersonal relationships as there is trust invested in close individuals. This theory is aligned with Julie's frustration over the lack of closure at the start of the initial deployment phase.

> "like *** isn't an emotional person but with the first one he was like really sweet and nice and then when he came back on the second one I was like aw he's going to be nice and sweet again like I can't wait… and like he was still nice but he wasn't as…… but you do get the opportunity to miss somebody and I always think at least we'll never get bored of each other" **(P6 L276-280)**

Julie describes the levels of intimacy she experienced from her partner after he arrives home from deployment. Through the way she discusses this experience it appears she had built up an expectation as to how he would behave based off the first deployment. (Reed, Tolman & Safyer, 2015). Despite showing slight disappointment with her husband's behaviour she tries to justify it with a positive and describes the benefits of missing her husband on the relationship. When reviewing the literature on relationship separation, research findings were often contradictory yielding no exact answer on whether the effects were positive or negative (Dainton et al., 2002; Stafford et al., 2007). In this case, Julie appears to see separation as a positive and is grateful to have the time to miss her husband. As suggested by Kelmer, Rhoades, Stanley and Markman (2013) separation from a partner can promote individuals to reminisce positively, leading to a higher perceived quality relationship.

Sacrifice. In this section Julie goes into detail about the sacrifices she has had to make when facing the challenges that come with having a husband in the Royal Navy who goes on regular deployments.

> "yeah and I think like that's the reason why I moved because it gives us that opportunity to have like every weekend together or like on a night and a normal life a little bit" **(P8 L308-309)**

> "yeah but like me and *** have had these conversations where he's said if you earned more I'd move around with you and I've never really been given that opportunity to… like what about my career? Like even though in *** I had that job for like 3 years and that gave me a lot of experience but I could've moved up in that job but now like I'm starting fresh sort of…" **(P8 L319-322)**

Julie disclosed the reason of why she relocated to live with her husband near to where he was based, sacrificing networks: she had previously to be able to achieve a 'normal' way

of living. Dunlop, Hanley, McCoy and Harake (2017) suggest that each individual has a set of cultural and societal expectations (or 'life scripts') that allows them to determine at what stage in their life or relationship they should have achieved a certain milestone. There appears to be a set of constructed 'norms' in Julie's lived world that equate to a 'normal life' based on her interactions with society. By moving and living with her husband she has been able to fulfill these requirements and achieve perceived success (Rubin, Berntsen, & Hutson, 2009). However, this sacrifice contradicts with the vocational aspect of her life. Like Dunlop et al.'s., (2017) 'life script' theory, Thompson and Dahling (2012) express that an individual can have preset milestones of career success depending on several factors, like age. Although, Julie may express disappointment in her career development, she clearly continues to make these sacrifices to show support for her husband's own career. Domene et al. (2012) reiterate this suggesting that when couples 'join lives' one of the facets that promote relationship success is "supporting each other in career transitions and planning" (pp. 21) which Julie has shown towards her husband consistently.

Lucy

Lucy is ex-partner to a Submariner who entered the Navy after their relationship had started. He went on two deployments over the course of their relationship. Lucy did not live with her partner over the course of their relationship.

Maintaining a life balance. In this section, Lucy discusses the conflict she experienced maintaining proximity with her partner and balancing other aspects of her life.

> "During pre-deployment my work, social and school life really suffered… and in my eyes for good reason like I wouldn't change it… but my life focus was 70% making sure I see *** and 30% everything else so trying to get that balance was hard" **(P2 L64-67)**

Lucy states the challenges she faced while maintaining proximity with her long-distance partner. Lucy appears to acknowledge the fact that other aspects of her life were suffering yet still appears to justify her reasoning for doing this. This coincides with research conducted by Impett, Gable and Peplau (2005) that was orientated around the cost and benefits of daily sacrifice in romantic relationships. Sacrifices were categorised into two goals: approach and avoidance. Approach goals aim to please the partner, creating a positive

emotional response and improvement in life and relationship satisfaction (Gable, 2006). Avoidant goals are sacrifices made by one partner to either avoid guilt or conflict within the relationship. They are often associated with negative emotions and less life and relationship satisfaction and more conflict (Impett & Gordon, 2010). Gable (2006) explains that approach goals are vital for relationship success and this appears to be what Lucy was doing routinely to maintain emotional closeness and relationship satisfaction which can be justified by the positive emotional state (Impett et al., 2005).

> "I couldn't get on with work because I had to entertain him?... Uni was my first real responsibility and I just wanted to do well and I think he struggled with that a bit? I wasn't… I wouldn't drop things to spend time with him any more… I had this thing that was important to me" **(P4 L163-166)**

Lucy moves on to discuss the conflict she experienced again over maintaining proximity with her partner as well as other aspects of her life. Her priorities appear to have shifted after starting university, prioritising her education over relationship satisfaction. Gere and Impett (2018) suggest that at this stage in the relationship "partners already know each other quite well, have at least some knowledge of each other's goals, and have established patterns of relating to one another and coordinating their goal pursuits" (pp. 795). Although, this may be true for Lucy and her partner, her goals begin to interfere with her relationship (Van Lange, Joireman, Parks & Van Dijk, 2013). However, samples within this research often consist of couples in proximity and are well established with one another, not those who regularly experience prolonged separation (Day & Impett, 2016). Proximity was once an approach goal for Lucy but now holds qualities of an avoidant goal as she begins to sacrifice her university work to avoid guilt and conflict with her partner (Impett et al., 2010). This would have produced a negative emotional state justifying why Lucy's urge to seek proximity with her partner diminished.

Conflicting ideals. Lucy describes the guilt she felt going forward with her daily life or trying to arrange plans that did not involve her partner before he went on military deployment.

> "but… like the worse part was I went on a college trip to *** at the start of *** so I got back on a *** and then on the *** he went on patrol….. yeah like… I felt so guilty for even having plans around that time…" **(P1 L27-31)**

> "Going out on a weekend instead of being able to see him and get that time with him… like that just… it felt horrible. It almost… like it restricted my university experience? And like that's not a bad thing… I was happy to do it I just felt bad being out having fun and him stuck working on a sub all weekend… " **(P2 L42-45)**

> "it was more important the second time that I remained strict in my work/ school life. Like I didn't have a job… but like I volunteered in a lot of places to get my hours up and having him at home… like I almost had that feeling of guilt again because I wasn't with him… I… well I suppose it's that adjustment of having him back?" **(P5 L171-174)**

Lucy describes separate occasions where she has been conflicted over being with her partner or experiencing other things. This has resulted in feelings of guilt which are expressed through the frequent use of pauses (…), highlighting the conflict she feels. However, she tries to diminish this by justifying being in a distressed emotional state by insisting that she was happy to do it. She appeared to hold anxiety over her partner feeling rejected and was able to use the guilt as a way of compensating for this. Earlier research by Lydon, Pierce and O'Regan (1997) suggests that each individual has their own moral commitment to a relationship. This is where a person commits to a relationship, not just because of external factors such as social pressures, but because of their own values and morals. When these conflict with other aspects of an individual's life, they may experience negative emotions such as guilt. Overall, Girme, Lemay Jr and Hammond (2014) build on this suggesting that feelings of guilt can arise in a partner when they hold feelings of hurt or conflict, which stems from rejection, and guilt acts as a way of restoring acceptance in the relationship (Lemay Jr, Overall & Clark, 2012). However, as identified by Baldassar (2015) there is a gap in the literature as to why partners, particularly over a long distance, feel guilty in some aspects of their relationship.

Inconsistencies in communication. Lucy describes the levels of inconsistency that came with her partner going on and returning from deployment and how these experiences affected her.

> **"**Both times their patrol was extended by like 4/5 weeks… that was difficult… trying to arrange time off work and then of course uni as well… plus it messes around with you as well. It was just constant ups and downs" **(P3 L99-103)**
>
> "In… like the letter when you get the date it explains… like any issues with your partner getting off the boat on time they'll inform you… well so they say. I'd been travelling for hours ….. and I get a text from *** but off his mates phone….. and it basically said he wasn't getting off until the next day" **(P4 L131-136)**

These quotes identify Lucy's frustration following inconsistencies that came with her partner's deployment. Lucy appears to experience high emotional states during this time though: the frequent pauses (…) indicates there is disappointment associated with the experience and that it may still be an uncomfortable topic to articulate. Like Julie, Lucy experienced the negative emotional states that come with having little control over outcomes in inconsistent or unpredictable circumstances (Kay et al., 2010; Waytz et al., 2010). However, Lucy mentions how these inconsistencies affected not only her emotional state, but her own education implying that other aspects of her life were imbalanced during this period. Greenhaus, Collins and Shaw (2003) suggest that a good work/ life balance creates harmony in a person's life and therefore a positive mental state. This balance also increases higher perceived satisfaction in both vocational and personal aspects of their life (Shrivastava & Purang, 2011). Imbalance between the two can be a source of frustration (Haar, Russo, Suñe & Ollier-Malaterre, 2014) highlighting why Lucy found the inconsistencies that came with this stage of the deployment period so difficult.

Daisy

Daisy met her partner after he had joined the Navy during his basic training phase. He has been on one deployment during their relationship. While he was deployed, Daisy lived separately from her partner but has now moved to live where he is based.

Longing for reassurance. In this emergent theme Daisy discusses her experiences of longing that she feels before and after her partner's deployment. During the distressing period of deployment, she longs for reassurance from her partner.

> "We've got a really strong relationship anyway… I mean I'd say we have but like before he goes… I don't know I just get really clingy? In like I need a lot of assurance kind of from him?... to be like it's all gonna be ok" **(P2 L47-50)**

> "if you're not speaking to someone for like 5/ 6 months… like you don't have any reassurance. Like it's stupid he's on a submarine he's not out partying or anything but still…" **(P2 L53-54)**

Daisy highlights the distressing emotions she feels before and during a deployment. She implies that there is anxiety and to compensate she seeks levels of sensitive emotional support and confirmation from her partner and continues to long for this during his deployment. Like Julie, Daisy appears to hold qualities of an anxious romantic attachment type. During times of emotional distress or uncertainty Daisy longs for her partner to give her reassurance and support (Vogel et al., 2005; Mikulincer et al., 2007). As Daisy lived separately from her partner at this time, she would have adapted mental representations (such as phone calls) to be able to maintain emotional closeness with her partner (Pistole, 2010). Aware that she is going to lose proximity, she may turn to her partner for reassurance and long for further emotional closeness before they must separate for a period (Rholes et al., 2011).

> "you're just so desperate to be with them when they're back like you feel a little bit funny when they're out seeing their friends or having other plans it is difficult." **(P9 L374-374)**

Daisy brings into light the conflict she felt trying to maintain proximity with her partner over a long distance once he had returned from deployment. There appeared to be a conflict in maintaining each other's social lives while longing to keep proximity. Stafford and Reske (1990) suggest that couples in long distance relationships are more likely to idolise their partner as, due to the lack of physical proximity they have with each other, they are more likely to overlook negative aspects of the relationship and focus on positives. Justifying further why Daisy longs to have that proximity and time with her partner. Furthermore, as mentioned in previous research by Pistole (2010), to maintain proximity individuals in a long-distance relationship mentally represent this through maintaining regular communications via phone, text or letter. Now returned from the deployment, Daisy may

have longed to reestablish these levels of proximity although this may have proposed conflict as her partner tried to readjust to other aspects of his life (Sahlstein, 2004).

Regular compromises. Daisy gives voice to the compromises and difficult decisions she has had to make in order to make her relationship work and maintain proximity with her partner.

> "I was constantly having to ask the girls at work to swap shifts erm… we were both so tired all the time because I was driving straight after a nightshift to *** which is like *** hours drive… just obviously you want to see them and you just want to make the most of it" **(P2 L77-79)**

Daisy describes the compromises she had to make with her own career in order to make the most of the time she had with her partner. She appears to see this experience as an exhausting time but justifies this by insisting on making the most of the time they had to be together. Lin, Lin, Huang and Chen (2016) describe compromising as "a useful strategy for solving interpersonal conflicts" (pp. 41) and is often used as a tool to maintain harmony within interpersonal relationships (Leung, Brew, Zhang & Zhang, 2011). In this case study, Daisy compromises to be able to spend time with her partner, maintaining harmony, and making the most of their time together. Chung-Yan and Moeller (2010) highlights that compromising often works on a 'give/ take' basis and costs can often outweigh rewards which may promote negative emotions. Daisy appears to acknowledge the costs of the compromises she made through the way she reflects on this time period, however, appears to insist it was worth the reward counteracting previous research.

> **"**He asked me if I would ever consider living in *** and I was point blank just no way. Honestly if you had met me it was almost laughable that I would move to ***. I never would in my life I'm from really far ***." **(P6 L216-219)**

> "Well we were very good at seeing each other but we never had any money because we were always meeting in *** and staying with his parents. It… it was a difficult decision but I don't regret it for me… moving to *** has been the best decision for me" **(P6 L226-229)**

Here Daisy reflects on her decision of deciding to live with her partner. She clearly started from a position of being adamant on not moving away from home. However, the deployment appeared to have changed her outlook on the relationship as she makes the compromise. Previous literature often proffers the negative aspects that come with compromising. Chung et al. (2010) suggests regular compromising can increase vulnerability and decrease psychological well-being, promoting depressive symptomology (Whitton, Stanley & Markman, 2007). Baker, McNulty, Overall, Lambert and Fincham (2013) acknowledge this reiterating that if compromising is unsuccessful individuals in the relationship can receive psychological hurt. However, the authors also state that successful compromise increases subsequent relationship satisfaction. The effects of compromise remain inconsistent, although, Daisy's behaviour appears to promote the positive effects of compromise. She discusses the experience of moving to be with her partner positively insisting it is the best thing she has ever done for herself and therefore the relationship.

The temporary loss of a partner. Within this emergent theme, Daisy tries to articulate the feelings of loss she experiences during her partner's deployment.

> "It's strange… it's like a physical feeling like… I can't explain it… you know he's not dying or anything but he's being taken away from you and there's nothing you can do" **(P5 L173-175)**

> "it's just almost like a break up? (laughs) but like it's not like part of me just does feel really heartbroken like I know that sounds strange but it's horrible to be missing someone" **(P5 L188-190)**

Daisy relates the feelings she experiences when her partner is deployed to life experiences that are often associated with loss. Grief appears to be a prominent emotion here and this is shown through the frequent pauses as she tries to articulate her feelings. Present literature often associates feelings of loss with the cycle of grief or, as Daisy suggested, with a break-up as both experiences revolve around the loss of a relationship (Fagundes, 2012). Sbarra (2006) suggests that feelings of loss can differ depending on the type of attachment you had to the individual. Furthermore, bereavement literature indicates that feelings of loss come from reflections of the related negative emotions while the individual readjusts (Stroebe, Schut & Stroebe, 2005). Though similar in nature, Daisy is not permanently losing her partner but experiencing a temporary separation and literature does not appear to

acknowledge this. Nevertheless, this brings into light, as discussed by MacDermid et al. (2002), what type of emotional destabilisation families may feel during deployment.

Evaluation

In the past, qualitative research like this has been criticised for its subjectivity (Sarma, 2015) which is why Yardley's (2008) core principles of validity (sensitivity to context, commitment and rigour, coherence and transparency and impact and importance) were applied in multiple facets throughout this study. Analytical guidelines provided by Smith et al. (2009) were adhered to throughout and the researcher acknowledged how they could have influenced the research during the data gathering and analytical process. Theory was underpinned to justify why IPA was chosen as the method of analysis and academic literature was used to produce open ended questions. Furthermore, as the researcher had experienced a military relationship, this allowed participants to give voice to their experiences in a more effective way and this showed in the discourse.

Data analysis highlighted both similarities and differences between the experiences of the three women (Julie, Lucy and Daisy). All women felt conflict between spending time with their partner and other aspects of their lives. This often led to them compromising or sacrificing in their career, home, and other experiences. Nevertheless, for the participants this meant making the most of time with their partner. Moreover, all the women were affected by inconsistencies in communication or delays in their partner's return that influenced their emotional state in some way. Although, there are similarities within the data, it can be observed that each woman experienced the deployment of their spouses differently and this is highlighted in the different themes. This is contradictory to some of the literature mentioned in the introduction. Despite holding some similarities, military partners experiences cannot be generalised and in order to gauge a full insight qualitative case studies, like this one, must be conducted to source appropriate support and reinforce the convergences and divergences of their experiences. For example, all women sought emotional closeness from their partner, but this was expressed through different forms. Julie through maintaining proximity, Lucy through altering her work/life balance and Daisy through seeking reassurance. Furthermore, the temporary separation appeared to improve relationship satisfaction for two of the women. Julie expressed gratitude to have the time to miss her husband while the separation

encouraged Daisy to relocate with her partner. However, this was not true for Lucy: after the deployment she did not crave the proximity from her partner as she did previously.

Notwithstanding, there are areas in which this study could have been improved. Due to the nature of the research being qualitative, semi- structured interviews were conducted to gather relevant data. However, as it is then the researcher's choice to prompt participants on certain topics, there is a possibility that areas of insight were investigated more than others and therefore some experiences may have been left out. Secondly, IPA is heavily reliant on the researcher's interpretation of participant data in order to collect themes. Despite their being a reflexive account on the researcher's part and adherence to Yardley's (2008) core principles of validity to counteract bias and subjectivity prior to analysis, there is still a possibility that the researcher's interpretation of the data may not accurately depict participant experience.

Future research

Evaluation of the study creates sign posting for future research. An insight into how the deployment experience affects children would be ideal in order to evaluate if measures need to be implemented to maintain their well-being as well as their parent's. How submariners themselves handle the deployment experience would also be useful, to gauge an understanding and to evaluate if the correct measures are being put into place to help support their well-being. Finally, there should be continuous research into how deployment affects submariner's partners and families. The Ministry of Defense is constantly changing to keep up with how the rest of the world engages with one another. To counteract this, there should be regular evaluation of how this affects families and what institutions, like the Royal Navy, are able to do to provide support for them. Furthermore, this consistent support will allow families to prepare for when their loved one is discharged from the submarine service and aid readjustment to their new way of living.

Conclusion

The aim of this research was to investigate what submariner's partners experience while their significant other is on deployment. Through the accounts of Julie, Lucy and Daisy, this aim has been met and a new contribution of knowledge in the field of Military Psychology has been made. A few key points can be taken from their accounts of experience.

Julie was the only married participant and from what she described she appeared to experience the same frustrations in the lack of communication from the Royal Navy as Lucy who was an ex-partner of a submariner. Following the discussion of literature in the introduction it appeared that married couples may have access to more support over non-married couples although, having analysed participant's experiences forms of support were not discussed or mentioned during the interviews perhaps indicating it is not prevalent in the deployment experience. The effects of prolonged separation still appear to be inconsistent in line with the observations made in previous literature. Julie and Daisy both discussed how proximity seeking in their relationship did not change after the deployment experience, both indicating that it had increased once their partners had returned. Lucy however disclosed that she found balancing her education and maintaining proximity difficult once her partner had returned from deployment.

It is recommended to the Royal Navy that they make accessible, to all partners of submariners, structured forms of emotional support that might have otherwise been provided to them by their partner or spouse. This could be achieved through providing national community-based chat rooms online or inviting families to meet by utilising the space of military bases across the country. Here, families can access sensitive emotional support by interacting with someone who knows their feelings of distress. A second recommendation would be to establish a policy regarding the spread of rumours of the submarine's progress over social media. It is arguable that disappointment stemming from delays is inevitable, however the frequency of it can be controlled and diminished through quashing false rumours on social media. A final recommendation would be the offering of career support to partners of submariners. The acknowledgment of the regular compromises that partners make to be with their loved one is vital. This could be done by offering career/ educational opportunities within the institution or within the surrounding community providing partners with the opportunity to build on their own career.

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