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## INTRODUCTION

This report summarises work completed through an RAF Families Federation project into the experiences of dispersed families within the RAF; defined for the purpose of the research as those not living within 10 miles of their Parent Unit. The project was funded by the Chancellor, using LIBOR funds.

The research was instigated in response to:

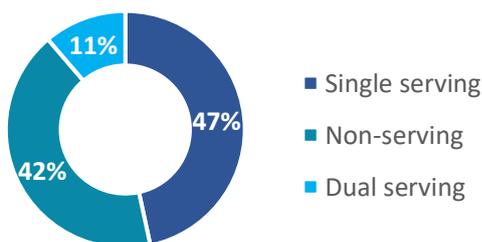
- Lack of knowledge regarding Dispersed Families within the RAF, and UK Armed Forces more generally
- Acknowledgment of the changing 'RAF family' – including those not entitled to SFA and those who aspire to greater geographical stability as a result of personal circumstances
- Anticipation that the Future Accommodation Model (FAM) could lead to a greater proportion of RAF families becoming dispersed

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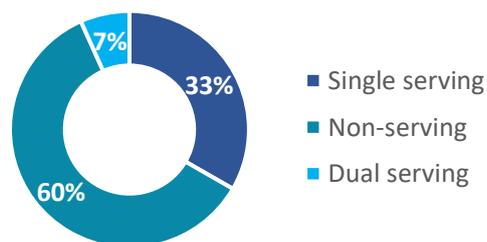
## METHODOLOGY

The research gathered data through online surveys, family interviews, an online stakeholder survey, plus a range of informal stakeholder meetings. This data was considered alongside existing survey data, reports and other documents in order to draw the following conclusions and recommendations.

Survey responses (n=401)



Interview participants (n=30)



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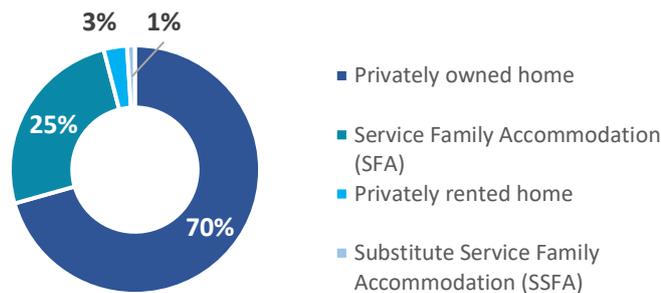
## REASONS FOR DISPERSAL

### 1. HOME OWNERSHIP

There is a clear appetite amongst the RAF population to live in a privately owned home, with 72% of RAF respondents to the 2019 FAMCAS survey stating this as their preference.

A high proportion of survey respondents and interviewees were homeowners; 70% of survey participants lived in a privately owned home (compared to 38% of RAF FAMCAS respondents during the same period<sup>1</sup>). ‘Living in our own home’ was the most commonly identified benefit of dispersed living in our survey, followed by ‘Stability of our family life’.

Accommodation type (survey responses)



Families described both push and pull factors leading to the decision to purchase a home.

Positive (pull) factors	Negative (push) factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Financial security for the future</li> <li>Preparation for transition from the RAF</li> <li>Ability to choose where to live</li> <li>Ability to decorate and adapt a home</li> <li>Availability of the Forces Help to Buy Scheme</li> <li>Information provided through Joint Service Housing Advice briefs</li> <li>Increased family stability (see below)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dissatisfaction with quality or availability of Service Accommodation</li> <li>Ineligibility for Service Family Accommodation (e.g. due to relationship status<sup>2</sup> or Service type)</li> <li>Perceived impact of mobility on the family</li> </ul>

## 2. FAMILY STABILITY

The families involved in the research experienced greater stability than seen across the RAF as a whole. 82% of all survey respondents had not moved home during the past 12 months, compared to 71% of RAF respondents to FAMCAS (2018). Stability was greatest amongst homeowners, with 71% saying that they had not moved for 2 years or longer, and around a third having not moved for more than 5 years.

*“Moving school and my job every 2 years was just not working. Combine that with huge price rises and the appalling quality of SFA and we just wanted to provide more stability, a chance at a more stable education and a nice family home for our children”*

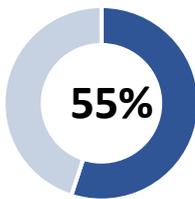
<sup>1</sup> MOD: FamCAS 2018

<sup>2</sup> Note: the survey was carried out prior to the extension of eligibility to personnel in a Long Term Relationship

The most common reasons provided for choosing to move to their current home related to increased stability, including:

- children's education
- spouse or partner's employment
- avoiding frequent house moves in the future

Stability was also identified as a key factor for those families managing additional health or educational needs.



of survey respondents said that it was either unlikely or very unlikely that they would move house for their next posting

### 3. DISPERSED FAMILIES IN SERVICE ACCOMMODATION

26% of survey respondents and 13% of those interviewed were living in Service Family Accommodation (SFA). Broadly speaking these fell into three categories:

- **Housing allocation:** families allocated Substitute SFA (SSFA), outlying SFA or SFA at another unit (including UK diaspora)
- **Retained accommodation:** families in retained Service Accommodation at a former posting
- **Dual serving couples:** who were not co-located

Dispersed families living in Service Accommodation potentially experience less stability than those in private accommodation.

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## CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED BY DISPERSED FAMILIES

Our research uncovered a wide range of issues linked to dispersed living, however there was greatest commonality of opinion regarding the following categories.

### 1. IMPACT OF SEPARATION ON FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

#### The issue

The majority of dispersed families involved in our research felt disadvantaged by the degree of separation that they experienced, in comparison to families living closer to their parent unit; 61% of survey respondents said that they felt disadvantaged or very disadvantaged.

Whilst families may achieve greater stability of location through living in private accommodation, the Serving Person is likely to remain mobile. 45% of survey respondents said that they lived separately during the week, or for longer periods (compared to just 18% of Families Continuous Attitude Survey (FamCAS) respondents during the equivalent period<sup>3</sup>). The proportion of survey respondents reporting regular separation increased significantly once distance from home to unit exceeded 50 miles. Families told us that periods of separation could be increased due to affordability; Get You Home rates are based on returning home every two weeks.

It should be noted that these separations are in addition to absences experienced by other RAF families (such as deployment, training, and exercises).

### Reported impact

Families told us that increased separation led to:

- Greater role loading of the at-home partner

*“I have to operate as if a single parent family. I am solely responsible for everything to do with children, school and home”*

- Difficulties for the absent partner reintegrating into the family

*“A sense of being an outsider in the family dynamic. Not involved fully in my children's lives and education. Also trying too hard to fit back in at weekends.”*

- Increased childcare requirements (and hence cost)

*“As I live away, my children have full time care as I am not around to pick them up from school or childcare. It is extortionate.”*

- Reduced opportunities for family interaction and communication

*“Strain on the family, due to limited time together”*

- Absent parent missing out on family life and milestones

*“Missing out on seeing my son during the week and helping him with school, missing out on important issues in his and my wife's daily lives.”*

- Effect on quality of life

*“...our family life is undeniably measurably worse off due to the separation required. ”*

- A negative impact on relationships within the family as a result

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<sup>3</sup> MOD: FamCAS 2018

*"We argue now while I work away all week, this was never the case when I worked at the Base we live at"*

The ongoing nature of these separations caused anxiety and concern for the future in a significant number of cases.

#### Case Study

Mrs. A was living in retained SFA with her three children, and her husband generally came home a few times per month. They expected to remain in the quarter at their former parent unit whilst the children completed exams.

Mrs. A was very unhappy about having to live away from her husband; she knew that it was the best thing for their children's education but said *"I hate it... it's not us"*. She described how communication with her husband had been affected, initially leading to arguments. Since he had been posted away one of her children had developed very challenging behaviour, which she felt was due to his absence. She had to deal with this on her own and was not able to talk things through with her husband as easily. She listed a range of additional tasks that she had taken on during her husband's absence, describing herself as *"cook, cleaner, and taxi driver"*. She was worried about how much longer she would have to carry on managing by herself, and her ability to do so.

#### Other work in this area

The Naval Families Federation commissioned research into the impact of 'weekending' on their families, published in February 2019<sup>4</sup>. Their findings bore significant similarity to those of the RAF Dispersed Families research, and the resultant guide to parental absence<sup>5</sup> could therefore be a useful resource for the RAF community.

#### Recommendations

- 1.1 RAF families are encouraged to put in place measures to manage increased periods of separation, should this occur through a future assignment.
- 1.2 Family location should be a consideration in the posting process for Serving RAF Personnel, especially where a family is separated through a current assignment.
- 1.3 The RAF or associated agencies should produce Service-specific guidance for families in dealing with routine separation, potentially drawing upon the recommendations and resources created by the Naval Families Federation.
- 1.4 The MOD should allocate funding to a new welfare grant – or extend entitlement to the existing Families Welfare Grant to families routinely separated through Service – in order to provide additional support and resources.

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<sup>4</sup> Gribble R., and Fear N. (2019)

<sup>5</sup> Naval Families Federation (2019)

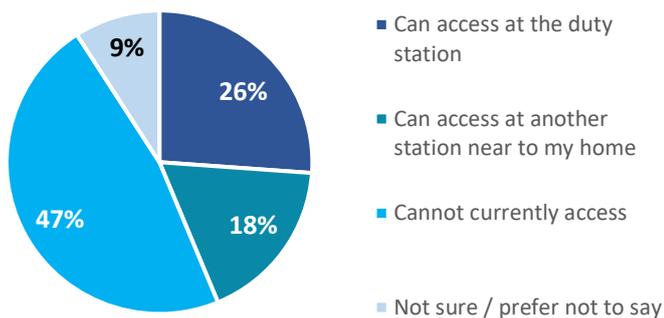
1.5 Military charities are encouraged to introduce measures that address the impact of separation on RAF families, and potentially those from other Services.

## 2. ACCESS TO MILITARY FACILITIES

### The issue

Many RAF dispersed families live away from their duty station; 43% of survey respondents lived 50 miles away or more. Although some families choose to live away from any military facilities, a number of those living near to a former posting (or other unit) reported issues gaining access.

47% of non-Serving spouses/partners responding to our survey were not able to access community or welfare facilities located within an RAF station (and 43% could not access facilities either on or off any station).



Access was also reported to be an issue in just under half of interviews, primarily amongst homeowners.

Families informed us that they were not able to access military welfare facilities due to their location ‘behind the wire’ and lack of entitlement under Control of Entry policies. In addition to family access, a number of Serving Personnel expressed a preference for mess membership at a station close to their home.

A survey of station-based Community Support providers identified that key welfare facilities – such as RAF Hive, Community Support Centre, chaplaincy and SSAFA office – were ‘behind the wire’ at many locations.

### Reported impact

Families told us that lack of access led to a range of issues, including:

- Isolation from the military community

*"...there is no mechanism to ask to be part of the local station for family reasons so the family feel more isolated from the base... because there's no formal entitlement to be there, my family feel like trespassers and tend to avoid events."*

- Being made to feel unwelcome

*"... the base I live on is very family unfriendly positively discouraging my wife and children to visit me imposing simply ridiculous conditions on them if they visit me."*

- Sense of not being valued as an RAF family

*"Prior to my husband's posting he was made to return my dependents pass and car pass when he cleared - although as a now unaccompanied family, we still live here... So although I live 'at a station' albeit in our own house - I have effectively been completely cut off by the RAF!"*

- Inability to access welfare support

*"We receive no support from the RAF, we are too far from his base to receive community support, but don't feel welcome at closer bases."*

### Case Study

Mr. and Mrs. B had bought a property near to his station several years previously. They described how this afforded them stability of schools for their children and had allowed her to stay in her job, whilst also remaining in a community where they had lots of established friendships.

When Mr. B was posted elsewhere Mrs. B had lost her entitlement to access the local base and was not entitled to a pass for his new unit. She said that this made her feel that she was *"no longer seen as a dependant"* and that she had been disowned by the RAF. She said that they definitely still felt like a military family, but without access to facilities they fell between the civilian and military communities. Mr. B was in a role that meant that he was frequently absent, and he was disappointed by the perceived lack of support for his family, saying that this altered his view of the Service; *"the RAF has to talk about the offer in terms of family as well"*.

### Other work in this area

As a result of our findings in this area, the RAF Families Federation undertook further research into Access to Bases, running to October 2019. These findings are reported separately.

## Recommendations

As identified through the Access to Bases report:

2.1 The RAF and MOD should consider the identified options for family access and adopt those that present the best balance between support for families and security requirements:

- Access to facilities for families living in SFA or SSFA attached to that unit, regardless of parenting arrangement
- Inclusion of those living in private accommodation through station Control of Entry policies
- Consideration of extending ability to access through a universal pass, either on a single Service or tri-Service basis
- Extension of entitlement to access to include those in Long Term Relationships (where registered on JPA)

2.2 RAF stations should review Control of Entry policies to ensure that all RAF families are able to access welfare and community facilities, where appropriate.

2.3 The RAF should communicate to families which station or other military unit they are able to gain access to, where appropriate, and the procedure to be followed.

## 3. COMMUNICATIONS AND WELFARE SUPPORT

### The issue

Families living in private accommodation or retained Service accommodation regularly reported lack of engagement with the Parent Unit. Those families who did receive communication had either been proactive in contacting welfare services themselves (typically through the RAF HIVE) or had a Serving spouse or partner who had enabled contact. Several families described the move to private accommodation as being akin to a transition out of the RAF, so significant was the perceived break in engagement. Where there was a lack of engagement with stations, family members told us that it would prevent them from seeking Service-provided support, should it be needed.

Station-based Community Support staff informed us that data protection prevented them from reaching out to families unless the Serving family member had granted permission. Reliance on the Serving Person to pass relevant information back to their family was identified as a key challenge. Provision of support to families in outlying SFA was described as causing additional strain on limited staffing and financial resources.

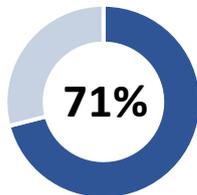
Community Support staff also noted that they did not have sufficient information about dispersed families attached to their unit; in the absence of a marker on JPA, family locations were typically only identified through deployment processes rather than during station arrivals.

Dispersed families who were in contact with the Parent Unit noted that communications received – such as newsletters and deployment packs – were not always relevant to their location or circumstances.

Dispersed families who had experienced deployment during the past 12 months were particularly dissatisfied with support received, with half stating that the family had received no communication or support from the Duty Station during the period of absence.

### Reported impact

Survey results and interviews indicated that dispersed families feel most disadvantaged in terms of the support provided to them, compared to those closer to their Parent Unit.



of survey respondents said that they felt either disadvantaged or very disadvantaged in terms of 'support from the RAF for our family'

Non-Serving spouses and partners were least satisfied in this respect; 78% felt disadvantaged or very disadvantaged in comparison to those living close to their Parent Unit.

A variety of impacts were described as a result:

- Confusion over who would support the family

*"I do feel unsure who to contact if my family need local support though. There's no local HIVE / SSAFA spt to call on or attend."*

- Dissatisfaction with the support provided

*"When I have been detached... and my wife is invited to a 'family coffee morning', she was unlikely to make the 260 mile round trip to spend any time with strangers. I have always found the support offered to 'Annexed' family... to be a little disappointing."*

- Feeling undervalued

*"I don't feel supported by my local base at all - because we aren't based there we don't seem to matter so I am left without any form of military support"*

- Perceived inequality of treatment

*"It appears (from my perspective) that information is more readily available to families living in SFA or retained SFA. Families who have bought their own homes get overlooked."*

- Reduced awareness of the welfare offer

*"I am also very confused by the amount of support services and which I should be talking to. When we were struggling... I didn't know who to turn to for help."*

- Sense of exclusion

*"I would like to come to more family events on station, but without access to the intranet we never know what is going on."*

- Perceived lack of support overall

*"RAF St Mawgan is our nearest unit but we don't officially belong there. We have dropped out of the welfare system."*

*"No contact with RAF at all. No emergency numbers etc...out of sight out of mind."*

### Case Study

Mrs. C had been living in her own home with her children for about 5 years. Previously her husband had been able to return every night, but was now only coming home at weekends through a new assignment.

Mrs. C had previously had very good experiences of support for her family whilst living at RAF stations, but her experiences living in private accommodation were very different. She said that they received no contact or support from his current parent unit, and that this left her feeling *"out of sight, out of mind"*. She had assumed that her family would receive some support now that her husband was away a lot more, but this had not been the case. She found it frustrating to be 'out of the loop' and to miss out on community events. The only information that she received was self-sourced via social media. This had made her unhappy with their current situation and the family were considering renting out their home in order to move back in to SFA. *"Overall as a family we are ready to get back into RAF life."*

### Recommendations

- 3.1 RAF Serving Personnel should be reminded of the welfare offer and encouraged to allow contact with their families.
- 3.2 Permission to contact the spouse or partner should be embedded within station arrivals processes.
- 3.3 Station welfare staff should be provided with access to a limited amount of information on dispersed families, to allow support to be tailored or transferred as appropriate.
- 3.4 The RAF should investigate measures to reduce reliance on the Serving Partner in communication between stations and families, within the constraints of Data Protection legislation.
- 3.5 The RAF should introduce a 'marker' on JPA to indicate to station welfare staff that a family is not living in Service Accommodation.

3.6 The RAF or associated agencies should develop improved information for families to clarify the welfare offer and routes to access services.

3.7 The RAF should ensure that station-based welfare staff are aware of the ability to transfer deployment support to another unit.

3.8 The MOD should include a complete review of how welfare is delivered .families not residing at (or near to) their parent unit through the 2020 MOD Families Strategy

#### 4. INTEGRATION WITHIN LOCAL COMMUNITIES

##### The issue

Ideally all dispersed families should benefit from becoming embedded and well supported within their local communities, reducing the requirement for assistance from the Service. However, our findings have shown that experiences differ. Some families relished the opportunity for a more ‘normal’ home life than that in SFA, with long-established friendships, whereas others encountered unanticipated difficulties.

Positive experiences	Negative experiences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Separation of work and home life</li> <li>• Being able to choose to live near friends and family</li> <li>• Forming enduring friendships within the local community</li> <li>• Living in a more ‘normal’ environment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Civilian friends not understanding the military lifestyle</li> <li>• Length of time taken to establish friendships</li> <li>• Feeling cut off from the RAF community and station events</li> <li>• Sense of not belonging in either civilian or military communities</li> <li>• Security concerns limiting social interaction</li> <li>• Lack of effective support for Service Children through schools</li> </ul>

Our research showed that the type of community impacted on the family’s ability to integrate. For example:

- families settling near military communities reported better understanding of their family situation
- conversely families moving to areas with very static civilian populations told us that it could be particularly hard to make friends and to feel accepted

Those choosing to live near family and other established support networks reported an improved ability to access practical and emotional support when needed.

Other factors affecting family members’ ability to meet people and create supportive friendships included their employment status, personality, and age of any children.

More formal support through the state was also seen as being more limited in areas with less exposure to military families; for example, schools with low numbers of Service Children. Survey respondents living away from military units gave poorer ratings for effectiveness of their school(s) in dealing with Service Children and were more likely to say that their child had not received support through the Service Pupil Premium (SPP).

During the research we were unable to locate any guidance for families on choice of location when buying or renting a home. Whereas some families considered a wide range of factors when choosing where to live, others took a less considered approach.

*“We stuck a pin in the map, and thought ‘there would be a good area’”*

This indicates that some dispersed families are unwittingly choosing to live in areas with reduced potential for effective support and integration.

### Reported impact

Where families had not integrated well, a range of practical and social impacts were identified.

- Inability to access local support

*“Basically you are a normal family living in a civilian community, albeit a single-parent midweek. No-one really understands the stress of deployment on the family unit, even schools are unsupportive as they have no concept of the problems either the children or the remaining spouse have.”*

- Added pressure on at-home spouse or partner

*“No one I have met (other than military families) understands what it’s like having a partner in the military serving overseas. My employer doesn’t understand the pressure I am under to be a single parent for two young children and still turn up to work. My mental health has suffered hugely.”*

- Loss of support from military community

*“...leaving behind my military support network has been my biggest regret.”*

- Lack of social interaction

*“I cannot go to any meetings or groups in the evenings because my son is in bed and I am sole carer. Therefore I feel very isolated and lonely.”*

- Sense of not fitting in

*“I don’t fit into either the military or civilian community - just a bit isolated and nobody really understands how it feels.”*

- Loneliness & social isolation

*"I'm new to the area, it's harder to make friends and no one understands what it's like."*

*"I am desperately lonely and isolated"*

### Case Study

Mr. and Mrs. D had bought a house in the area that he had grown up in, seeing it as a good environment to bring their children up in. The area that they had chosen to settle in was not close to any military units. Mr. D was away during the week but generally returned home for most weekends. They did not have any family close by who could support them.

Overall Mrs. D was very happy with their decision to become a dispersed family, saying that *"overall it was absolutely the best decision for us. We wouldn't change a thing"*. However, she found it hard having to cope on her own, describing difficulties in accessing practical support and in establishing new friendships. Although she now had people who she could call on for help if needed, she was unhappy at not being able to reciprocate because most people had families nearby who would help. *"I don't think you can underestimate the value of being around people who are in the same boat"*. She had found it harder to make friends when most of her neighbours were already in well-established friendship groups, and said that since there were no other military families in the area few people understood her situation; *"it's a quite an alien concept"*. This did make her concerned about any future deployments, compared to her experiences of support 'on the patch'.

### Other work in this area

A 2018 study by the Royal British Legion identified that families living away from military communities were at increased risk of social isolation as a result of *"weakened support from both the military and civilian communities"*<sup>6</sup> and recommended that the impact of this be monitored through the FAM pilot.

### Recommendations

- 4.1 RAF Personnel and their families should be encouraged to research community aspects when seeking to buy or rent a home privately, or in the future through FAM.
- 4.2 The RAF should utilise emerging tools such as the Map of Need<sup>7</sup> in order to support families in the decision-making process when becoming dispersed.
- 4.3 The RAF and military charities should seek to create opportunities for dispersed families to connect with each other, both in person and online, in order to create new support networks.
- 4.4 The MOD Armed Forces Covenant team should continue to engage with Armed Forces Champions across the country to raise awareness of the issues associated with Service life.

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<sup>6</sup> Stapleton (2018), p.24

<sup>7</sup> The Map of Need, Northern Hub for Military Veterans and Families Research

## 5. HEALTH AND WELLBEING

### The issue

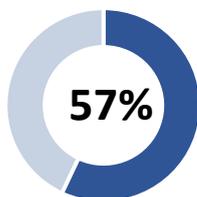
Dispersed families experiencing increased stability reported positive experiences accessing healthcare. Stability of location was beneficial for those with caring responsibilities, such as for elderly relatives, or children with additional health needs. However, dealing with health needs and caring duties was also described as an additional stressor.

*“Having a disabled child has forced us to buy a house of our own so that her needs are met... Looking after a sick child is more difficult with an absent parent and the other children don’t get the attention they should as a result.”*

In routinely separated families, the at-home parent assumed greater responsibility for managing illness and healthcare for the family. There were indications that dispersed families in these situations could be under considerable strain.

Serving Personnel involved in our research noted that long commutes, separation from family, and a tendency to work long hours whilst away from home had a negative effect on their work-life balance and could lead to increased stress. Flexible Working and Flexible Service were seen to offset these difficulties and improve work-life balance, where available. In addition, some Serving Personnel felt isolated and lonely when living ‘in the block’, especially when surrounded by personnel who were younger and unmarried.

The various challenges already identified in this report were identified as contributing to increased stress and anxiety amongst dispersed families, with non-Serving survey respondents twice as likely to report that they had experienced high anxiety levels as RAF participants in the 2018 FamCAS.



of non-Serving respondents said that they had experienced high anxiety levels during the past seven days (anxiety score of 6 or more out of 10)

Non-Serving respondents were most likely to identify separation as a cause of anxiety, and more commonly considered managing on their own and isolation or loneliness to be stressors. Conversely, Serving respondents were more likely to select commuting as a source of anxiety.

	Single-Serving	Dual-Serving	Non-Serving
1	Work (47%)	Work (51%)	Separation from spouse/partner (58%)
2	Separation from spouse/partner (41%)	Separation from spouse/partner (47%)	Work (46%)
3	Commuting (39%)	Commuting (44%)	Managing on my own (45%)
4	Worrying about the future (37%)	Lots of small factors combined (31%)	Isolation or loneliness (44%)
5	Family relationships (34%)	Money (29%)	Worrying about the future (43%)

### Reported impact

Families involved in our research told us that dispersed living could have a negative impact on their health and wellbeing in terms of:

- Impact of poor work-life balance

*“Living away from family has been a big struggle to remain positive and not work too much into the evenings.”*

- Increased stress and anxiety

*“Living away from home means all I do all week is work - including with a laptop in the evenings. My mental health is undoubtedly suffering and stress levels are increased considerably, as I rarely get away from work.”*

- Reduced resilience

*“...we don't feel like we have a reserve of strength left to cope with any other negative life events (OOAs, bereavement, accidents etc). As such, we're less resilient than most military families”*

- Mental and/or physical exhaustion

*“My Wife is exhausted most of the time and both of us have suffered from stress over the past few years (the duration of the posting). The worst thing is not knowing if/when I will ever be able to move back”*

- Sense of not being able to cope

*“Choosing to stay in a location due to my children's education was vitally important, but the extra stress and separation is taking its toll. Some days it's extremely hard to cope, especially on my spouse.”*

- Impact of isolation on mental wellbeing

*“...other than my husband I have no one to rely on should we as a family (with two young children under the age of 5) need extra help... I’ve found that this has had a toll on my mental health as it’s been hard to connect with other parents and form relationships with people in the surrounding area.”*

### Case Study

Mr. E had been posted on promotion to a station that was at a significant distance from his home. His wife and children were very settled near to his former posting and had decided to remain in their privately owned home.

Mr. E described the separation from his family as being very difficult. His wife was constantly busy, looking after the children and the house, and working. He said that her work had not been sympathetic or afforded her any flexibility. Although he enjoyed his job, he found it hard to be away from them when things were difficult at home; *“When you ring home every night and your wife is crying it does things to you”*. Every time he returned home, he felt that he had to rebuild relationships with his wife and children – saying it was *“like always being on det”*. Eventually he had become so stressed by his situation that he had sought medical help.

### Recommendations

5.1 Distance from home to parent unit should be a consideration in applications for Flexible Working, to enable improved work-life balance.

5.2 Military charities should consider the introduction of programmes promoting good mental health for RAF spouses and partners that can be delivered away from RAF stations; for example, online or app-based resource.

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## SUMMARY

It is important not to lose sight of the fact that many RAF dispersed families are enjoying the benefits of stability and home ownership. However, our research has shown that support mechanisms have not yet evolved to ensure that these families have a ‘safety net’, should it ever be required. In particular, dispersed families need to feel that they are still a valued part of the Armed Forces community; recommended measures to allow appropriate access to facilities and improved lines of communication would enable this.

Survey respondents who were routinely separated indicated that they felt greater disadvantage across a range of measures than those who were not. It should be noted that patterns of separation can change with each posting location; a family who have previously been flourishing may start to struggle when a Serving partner returns home less frequently.

Families who feel well supported by friends, family, employers, and services within their home community expressed a greater level of contentment with their situation. With the potential

for isolation and lack of support in less welcoming communities, it is important that families be provided with suitable guidance to make informed decisions when seeking private accommodation.

Where the impact of dispersed living on family life was felt to be too great, a number of participants told us that it increased their motivation to leave the RAF, or that they were more likely to encourage their spouse or partner to do so.

*“Encouraging families to be dispersed like this is a terrible idea. After previously planning for my husband to remain in the RAF for the foreseeable future, I have now told him that I want to him leave at the first opportunity so we can be together.”*

*“Living away is causing a strain on our family which has impacted on me at work to the extent I am now considering leaving. It is frustrating that the RAF encourages home ownership but then does not offer the stability to stay in that home by assigning you more than 50 miles away... The more people that take up FHTB and get their own home is likely to see a greater exit rate from the Service as they then get posted away from their home and family.”*

With the potential for the number of dispersed families to increase under the FAM, it is increasingly important that the needs of this population are understood and met.

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## REFERENCES

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MOD (2018a) *Tri-service Families Continuous Attitude Survey 2018*

Naval Families Federation, 2019. *The Experience of Parental Absence in Royal Navy and Royal Marines Families. Final report.*

Stapleton, M., 2018. *Loneliness and social isolation in The Armed Forces community,* The Royal British Legion, London

## RECOMMENDATIONS BY AUDIENCE

<b>RAF Serving Personnel and their families</b>	
1.1	RAF families are encouraged to put in place measures to manage increased periods of separation, should this occur through a future assignment
3.1	RAF Serving Personnel should be reminded of the welfare offer, and encouraged to allow contact with their families
4.1	RAF Personnel and their families should be encouraged to research community aspects when seeking to buy or rent a home privately, or in the future through FAM

<b>RAF: Air Command</b>	
1.2	Family location should be a consideration in the posting process for Serving RAF Personnel, especially where a family is separated through a current assignment
1.3	The RAF or associated agencies should produce Service-specific guidance for families in dealing with routine separation, potentially drawing upon the recommendations and resources created by the Naval Families Federation
2.1	The RAF and MOD should consider the identified options for family access and adopt those that present the best balance between support for families and security requirements
2.3	The RAF should communicate to families which station or other military unit they are able to gain access to, where appropriate, and the procedure to be followed
3.3	Station welfare staff should be provided with access to a limited amount of information on dispersed families, to allow support to be tailored or transferred as appropriate
3.4	The RAF should investigate measures to reduce reliance on the Serving Partner in communication between stations and families, within the constraints of Data Protection legislation
3.5	The RAF should introduce a 'marker' on JPA to indicate to station welfare staff that a family is not living in Service Accommodation
3.6	The RAF or associated agencies should develop improved information for families to clarify the welfare offer and routes to access services
3.7	The RAF should ensure that station-based welfare staff are aware of the ability to transfer deployment support to another unit
4.2	The RAF should utilise emerging tools such as the Map of Need in order to support families in the decision-making process, when becoming dispersed

4.3	The RAF and military charities should seek to create opportunities for dispersed families to connect with each other, both in person and online, in order to create new support networks
5.1	Distance from home to parent unit should be a consideration in applications for Flexible Working, to enable improved work-life balance

<b>RAF Stations</b>	
2.2	RAF stations should review Control of Entry policies to ensure that all RAF families are able to access welfare and community facilities, where appropriate
3.1	RAF Serving Personnel should be reminded of the welfare offer, and encouraged to allow contact with their families
3.2	Permission to contact the spouse or partner should be embedded within station arrivals processes

<b>RAF HIVE</b>	
1.3	The RAF or associated agencies should produce Service-specific guidance for families in dealing with routine separation, potentially drawing upon the recommendations and resources created by the Naval Families Federation.
3.6	The RAF or associated agencies should develop improved information for families to clarify the welfare offer and routes to access services

<b>Ministry of Defence</b>	
1.4	The MOD should allocate funding to a new welfare grant – or extend entitlement to the existing Families Welfare Grant to families routinely separated through Service – in order to provide additional support and resources
2.1	The RAF and MOD should consider the identified options for family access and adopt those that present the best balance between support for families and security requirements
3.3	Station welfare staff should be provided with access to a limited amount of information on dispersed families, to allow support to be tailored or transferred as appropriate
3.8	The MOD should include a complete review of how welfare is delivered to families not residing at (or near to) their parent unit through the 2020 MOD Families Strategy
4.4	The MOD Armed Forces Covenant team should continue to engage with Armed Forces Champions across the country to raise awareness of the issues associated with Service life

<b>Military Charities</b>	
1.5	Military charities are encouraged to introduce measures that address the impact of separation on RAF families, and potentially those from other Services
4.3	The RAF and military charities should seek to create opportunities for dispersed families to connect with each other, both in person and online, in order to create new support networks
5.2	Military charities should consider the introduction of programmes promoting good mental health for RAF spouses and partners that can be delivered away from RAF stations; for example, online or app-based resources

<b>RAF Families Federation</b>	
1.3	The RAF or associated agencies should produce Service-specific guidance for families in dealing with routine separation, potentially drawing upon the recommendations and resources created by the Naval Families Federation.
3.6	The RAF or associated agencies should develop improved information for families to clarify the welfare offer and routes to access services