



**Australian Government**

**Australian Institute of Family Studies**

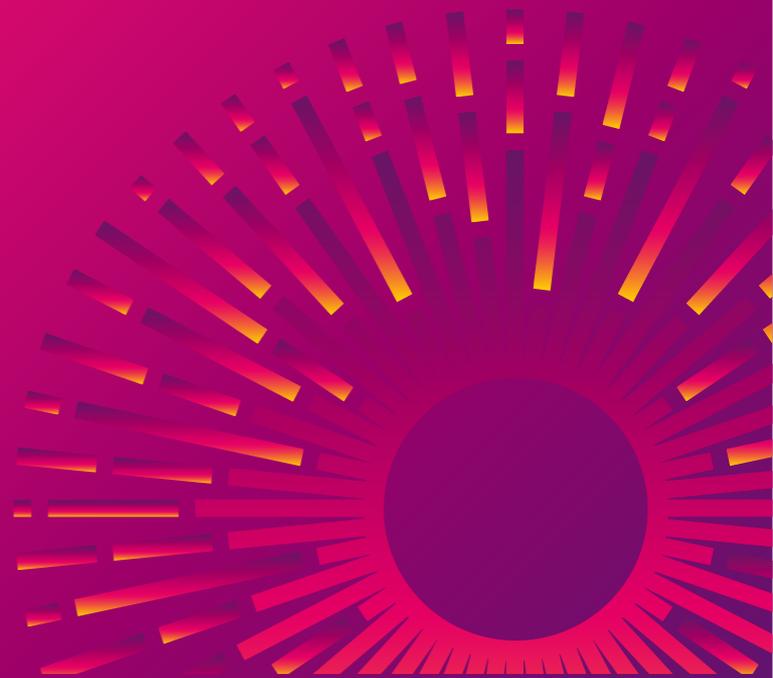


Discovering what  
works for families

# Findings from the Family Wellbeing Study

Dr Galina Daraganova

Australian Institute of Family Studies



# The Family Wellbeing Study



- The Family Wellbeing study was commissioned by the Australian Government **Department of Defence** and **Department of Veterans Affairs** to investigate:
  - the health and wellbeing of differing family members whose Australian Defence Force (ADF) members were current serving or recently transitioned
  - the impact of military service on families
- The study was undertaken by the **Australian Institute of Family Studies**



Australian Government  
Department of Defence



Australian Government  
Department of Veterans' Affairs



Australian Government  
Australian Institute of  
Family Studies



# Why study ADF families?



- families can play important roles at all stages of a person's military career
- military experiences and the military lifestyle can affect families
- the challenges can vary at differing times of a person's military career
- there are different types of family members
  - Spouses/partners
  - Young children
  - Parents of ADF members
  - Grown up children of ADF members
  - Brothers and sisters of ADF members
- not much is known about some types of family members



# Why study ADF families? (cont.)

- Research has mostly focused on the effects of military service on spouses/partners and young children, particularly during deployment
- There is less research on how other types of family members are affected both during military service, and after servicemen leave it



# Military families during peacetime



- high mobility – every two or three years (Clever & Segal, 2013)
- separation & reunification (Clever & Segal, 2013)
- employment (Hosek & Wadsworth, 2013)
- financial burden (Hosek & Wadsworth, 2013, Harrell, Lim, Castaneda & Golinelli, 2004; Lim & Schulker, 2010)



# Transition to civilian life – impact on families



## Interpersonal re-adjustments

- new family roles and responsibilities, challenges in finding employment, financial strain (Berle & Steel, 2015)

## Social needs

- loss of established social networks and the need to develop new social relationships (Danish & Antonides, 2013)

## Health needs

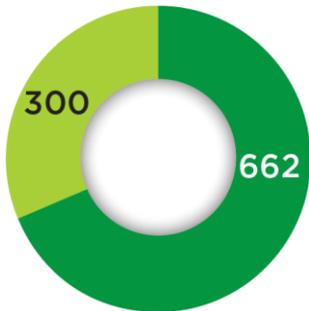
- servicemen may leave military service with mental and physical health problems that require family and service support and cause stress for family members (Muir, 2018)



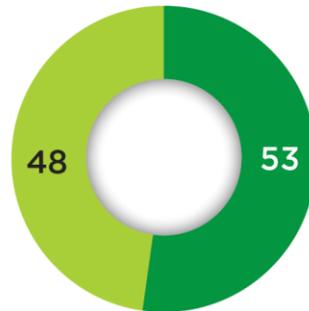
# Family Wellbeing Study participants



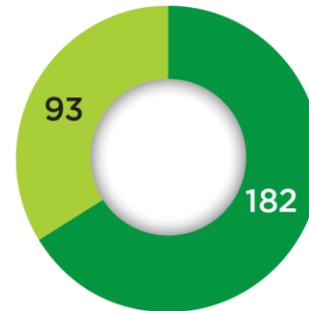
**962**  
spouses/  
partners  
18-58+ years



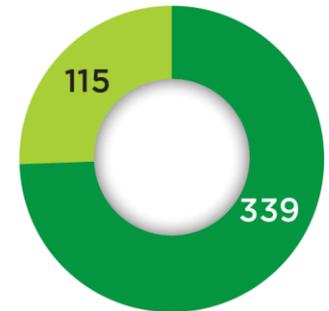
**102**  
adult  
children  
18-37 years



**275**  
parents  
18-37 years



**454**  
children  
2-17 years



recently transitioned      currently serving

# Outcomes examined



- **Mental health and risk taking**

- Psychological distress
- Post-traumatic stress disorder
- Suicidal ideation
- Problem drinking
- Illicit drug use
- Gambling

- **Parenting practices**

- Self-efficacy
- Consistency
- Hostility
- Use of reasoning
- Warmth



# Outcomes examined (cont.)



- **Physical health and quality of life**
- **Couple relationships**
  - Unhappiness in relationship
  - Quality of relationship
  - Abuse in relationship
- **Child behaviour problems**
  - Emotional symptoms
  - Conduct problems
  - Hyperactivity
  - Peer problems
  - Total behaviour problems



# Mental health indicators



- **High psychological distress in the past 4 weeks**  
Kessler Psychological Distress Scale – 10 items (Kessler, Andrews, Colpe, Hiripi, Mroczek et al. 2002)
- **High levels of post-traumatic stress symptoms (PTSD) in the past 4 weeks**  
Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Checklist (Weathers, Litz, Herman, Huska, & Keane, 1993)
- **Any suicidal ideation (thoughts, plans, or actions) in the past 12 months**  
Study derived questions
- **Child behaviour problems in the past 6 months**  
Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (Goodman, 1995), 2-17 years old children



# Family members of ADF personnel: Spouses/Partners



	Current serving	Ex-serving
<b>Employment</b>	68%	64%
Full-time	60%	64%
Part-time	40%	36%
<b>Residential mobility</b>		
0 move	11%	25%
1-2 moves	23%	20%
3-4 moves	26%	16%
> than 4 moves	41%	40%
<b>Couple relationships</b>		
Satisfaction	80%	76%
Abuse (National 7%)	3%	8%

**Positive picture** with overall rates being similar to general Australian population

# Couple relationships



Lower rates of relationship happiness and good quality relationships among:

- family members with high level of psychological distress and poor physical health
- families with ADF members having a drinking problem, high psychological distress and poor physical health

Higher rates of relationship happiness and good quality relationships among:

- families with a longer length of ADF members' service
- families with ADF member of Commissioned Officer rank
- families with no children
- spouses/partners with highest educational level being certificate/diploma compared to university degree



# Family members of ADF personnel: Spouses/Partners



	Current serving	Ex-serving
Psychological distress	1 in 6	1 in 5
PTSD (last 4 weeks)	1 in 10	1 in 10
Suicidality (last 12 months)	1 in 10	1 in 5
Drinking problems (last 12 months)	1 in 10	1 in 10
Gambling (last 12 months)	3 in 10	3 in 10
Severe gambler	3%	3%
Illicit drug use	Really low	4%

**Positive picture** with overall rates being similar to general Australian population



# Other sub-groups of concern



## **Spouses/partners who have *served* in the ADF**

- When compared to *civilian* spouses/partners, they
  - had higher rates of psychological distress
  - had higher rates of PTSD
  - were less warm when parenting dependent children

## **Spouses/partners of *recently transitioned* ADF members**

- When compared to spouses/partners of *current serving ADF members*, they
  - had higher rates of suicidal ideation in past 12 months, but not in lifetime
  - had higher rates of illicit drug use in the last 12 months, but not in lifetime (although this was very rare in general)
  - had higher rates of gambling in the last 12 months



# Family members of ADF personnel: Adult children

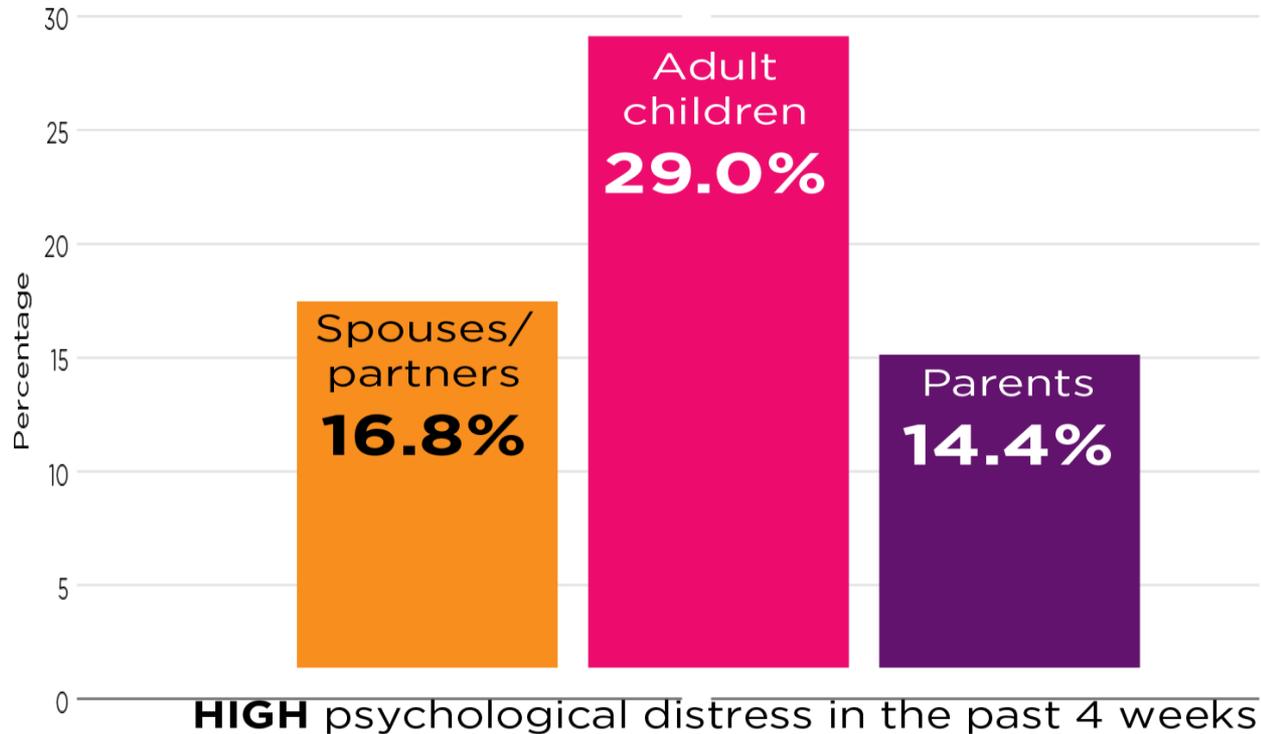


	Current serving	Ex-serving
<b>Psychological distress (last 4 weeks)</b>	1 in 4	1 in 3
<b>PTSD (last 4 weeks)</b>	1.5 in 10	1 in 10
<b>Suicidality (last 12 months)</b>	1 in 5	1.5 in 10
<b>Drinking problems (last 12 months)</b>	1 in 5	1 in 5
<b>Illicit drug use lifetime</b>	3 in 10	1 in 2
<b>Illicit drug use last 12 months</b>	1 in 10	1 in 5

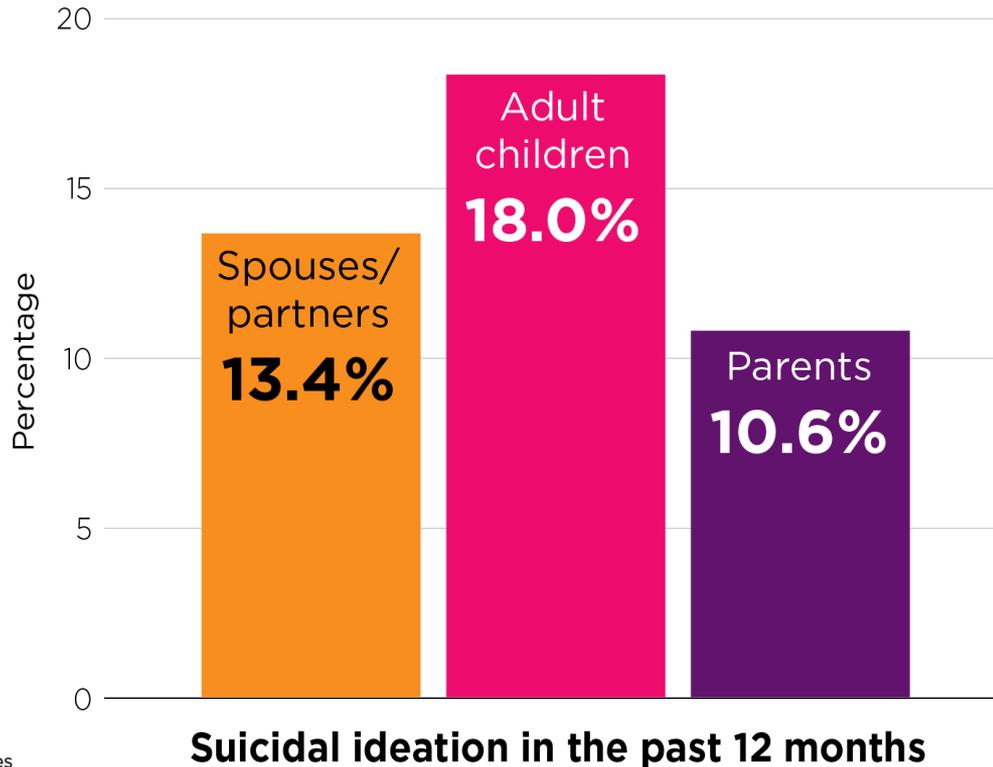
Positive picture with overall rates being similar to general Australian population



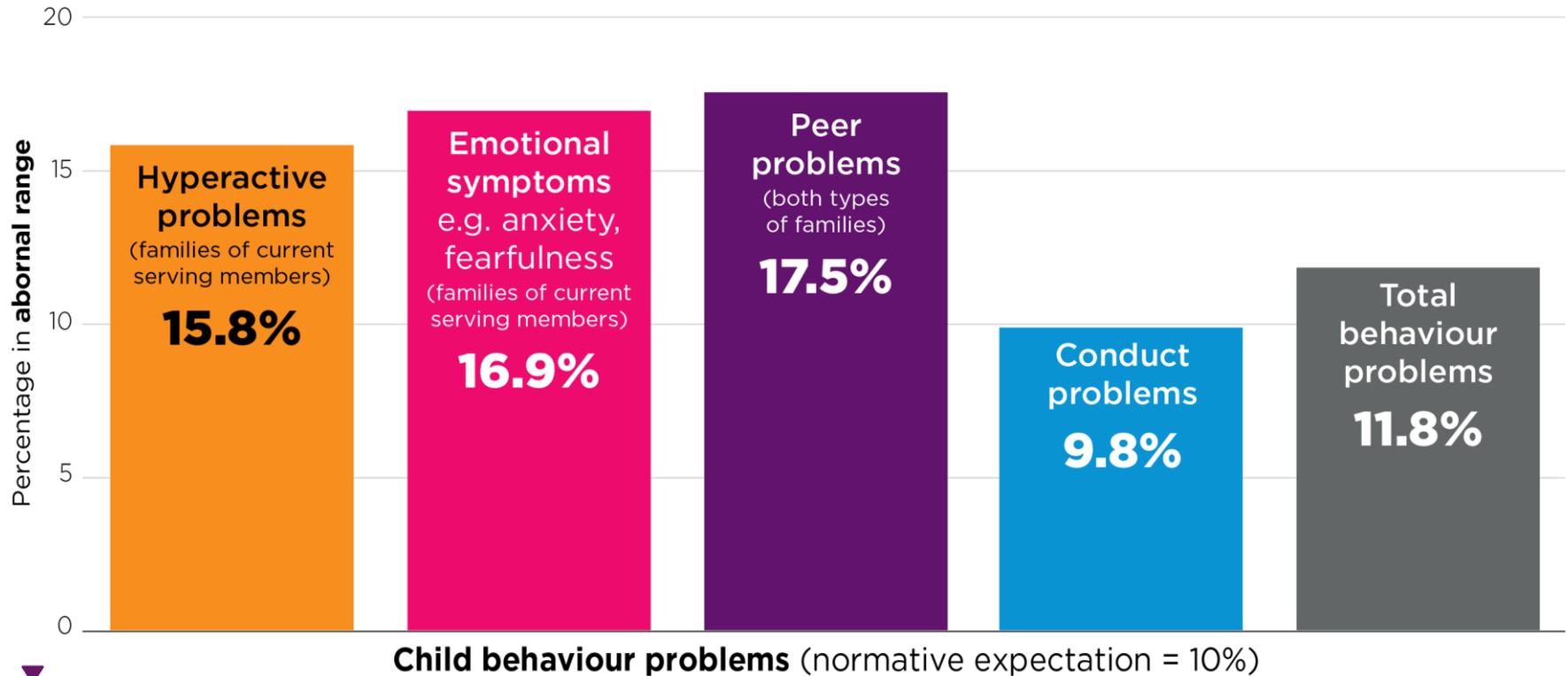
# Mental health of family members - 1



# Mental health of family members - 2



# Mental health of family members – 3



# Implications



In general, military family members **did not** show higher rates of mental health problems than in the general Australian community, suggesting that they had found ways of coping with the pressures of a military family lifestyle.

Nevertheless, some sub-groups seemed more vulnerable:

- adult children
- dependent children aged 2-17 years, especially in families of current serving members
- spouses/partners who have served in a military force
- spouses/partners whose servicemen have recently transitioned to civilian life



## Implications (cont.)



The higher rates of behaviour problems in 2-17 year old children of current serving members suggest that a military family lifestyle (e.g., residential mobility, stress during deployment) increases the risk of problems.

Findings for spouses/partners of transitioned servicemen indicate that this can be a difficult transition for spouses/partners as well as ex-servicemen.



# A huge thank-you to the Research and Investigator Team



## Project Management Team

Ms Karen Barker

Ms Jess Styles

Ms Kanny Tait

Dr Loretta Poerio

Col Laura Sinclair

Ms Kyleigh Heggie

Ms Melissa Preston

Ms Carolina Casetta

Warrant Officer Class One

Iain Lewington

DR Alan Verhagen

## Project Research Team

Dr Diana Smart

Dr Helena Romaniuk

Dr Jacqui Harvey

Dr Stewart Muir

Kelly Hand

## Participants

ADF members and their families

