

Improper Channels:  
A Feminist Analysis Of Military Social Services In Relation To Canadian Military Wives  
And Their Work

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ABSTRACT


This thesis is an exploration of how Canadian military wives' experiences of needing help with their everyday work are transformed through the military system so as to render their troubles as military wives manageable in specific ways.


A feminist, non-positivist method of institutional ethnography used by the researcher reveals an understanding and explication of the power relations and ruling experienced by military wives in their relation to the military helping professions. The author argues that women marrying military members become 'objects' of military knowledge and organizational action. This study shows how military wives' work in their families helps keep their husbands operationally effective, thus the wives are doing work for the military. The military both creates wives' troubles and transforms them into personal problems.

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## **Introduction**

The subject of this study is deeply rooted in my personal experience as a military wife. I was raised in a military family and have been married to a Canadian serviceman for twenty one years. Over the past ten years, as my awareness of women's issues grew, I began to examine my life more closely, particularly my role as a military wife.

My father was a padre in the Canadian Armed Forces and, as a child and an adult, I watched him provide help for military families, both in Canada and overseas. He always appeared able to provide some sort of help to troubled families. However, he was often frustrated by the inflexibility of the military system. My mother, a military wife for twenty seven years, taught me much of what I know about the role. She had three patriarchal institutions to contend with: the church, the military and the family itself. She carried out her job as military wife with ease, juggling the military, the church and the family with tremendous grace and integrity. Growing up on military bases in six provinces and two overseas bases and living as a military wife for over half my life has provided me with the opportunity to gain first hand knowledge about how military families may experience troubles in their lives and how those troubles are dealt with by the helping professions of the Canadian military.

I begin this study with my own story. I married a man in the service when I was nineteen. Three years later, when I believed the marriage was not working I decided to leave it. During the break-up my husband sought help from the military and was seen by a number of military helpers. They asked him what the problem might be from his perspective. He was advised by the helpers of ways to "handle" his wife. I was never asked by anyone in the military system about what I believed to be the problem or my

reasons for making a decision to leave the marriage. I was completely left out of the process. At one point when I had actually left the marriage my husband asked me if I might like to see the padre on the base for some counselling. Needing someone to talk to, I agreed. During the counselling session the padre told me I would be happier if I stayed home and maybe did some crafts. This experience was devastating to me at the time. I was not listened to or helped in any way. He did not listen to my story and seemed to have a pre-conceived idea of what would be best for me in my situation; in this case to stay in the marriage. After my experience of this marriage break up and the role the military played in it, I was left with the impression that what was important to the military was keeping my husband doing his job. I was an obstacle to the process by causing a disruption in the orderly way the military needed to function.

As I carried on with my life, and went to university to become a social worker, I began working with a group of women attending a support group for parents called Parents in Crisis. Several of the participants of this group were military wives. Listening to their stories of trying to survive in the military system revived my interest in how women are treated by the military system when they are experiencing difficulties. One woman in particular, Jane, had an experience that was devastating to her. She has three children under the age of six; one of whom is physically disabled. At the time she was living in the Married Quarters (MQs) on the base, and her husband was away at sea with the navy. During a stopover in Mexico he was jailed, for some reason unknown to his wife. Jane received a call that he was in jail and that he didn't know what was going to happen. She attended our group shortly after she received the call. Jane didn't know how she was going to cope or when her husband was going to be home. We listened to her problem and tried to support her. She had been told by a military official that a padre would visit her in the morning to see if he could help. We were all relieved that she would receive some support from the military. When the padre visited Jane she was very upset and she tried to tell him

what she was going through. She said he stayed with her a short time and left abruptly. She received a phone call several hours later from the padre and he told her he had never been in an MQ that was such a mess and that he “would need ten soldiers with shovels to clean it up”. The woman was devastated. She had been unable to keep her house tidy or organized during her crisis and she felt that when the padre came to help he in no way took her situation into consideration. The Canadian military owns the MQs which they periodically inspect. The state of the MQ is what the padre chose to focus on; the state of the MQ instead of the state of Jane, who was under so much duress. The padre went one step further. The following day he arranged for a military MQ inspector to see the house. This visit further enraged Jane who continued to reach out to our group for understanding and support. She said she felt completely betrayed by the padre and the system as a whole. She felt (as I had almost twenty years before her) that the military operation was more important during the crisis than her personal situation. She felt her story was not heard by the helper in the helping process. When her husband was finally sent home she told us that he was under orders from his superiors to “go home and get your wife under control, and clean up your MQ”.

To complete my undergraduate social work requirement I undertook a practicum in a family service agency in Victoria. During this time I worked with professional counsellors who were involved with military families. While at the agency I became aware of assumptions being made about military families by the helpers. For example, when there was a case conference meeting involving several family therapists and the family under discussion was known to be a military family, the family was automatically seen to be troubled and difficult to work with because of the logistics of military life. The father was usually unavailable for ongoing family counselling sessions and often the family was posted in the middle of the treatment. The family was seen to have services available to it in the military system and the civilian helpers sometimes discussed their frustration at the

military system not meeting the needs of the military families. As I completed my practicum I became aware of stereotypes about military families in this civilian agency and found myself defending the military lifestyle during many case meetings.

At the time I began graduate work in the Faculty of Human and Social Development at the University of Victoria, I started to pay attention to stories I was hearing from military wives about the organization of their lives by the military. I wondered if other women who were military wives had experienced what Jane and I had. When they were seeking help through the military system was there an invisibility of their issues and a silencing of their voices; and if so, how does that happen?

I have learned what I know about military wives' experiences through my own experience and also through my professional interaction as a social worker with the staff at the Military Family Resource Centre (MFRC)<sup>1</sup> in Esquimalt, Victoria. In October 1992 I was asked to facilitate a workshop at the MFRC's Annual Women's Conference for about twenty military wives. We spent the workshop discussing the stereotypes surrounding their lives versus the reality of the life of being married to a serviceman. We examined the discrepancy between what the world believes is a typical 'military wife' and what we as women living that life know. Through my own experiential knowledge, and with the knowledge of many other womens' experiences, I began to wonder if the category of 'military wife' is constructed or organized in some way that serves a purpose. I began to think that this area needed further study. During a preliminary literature search I realized that many of the assertions made in studies did not reflect my experience as a member of a military family or illuminate my experience as a military wife. This discovery served to heighten my interest in the topic of military wives. Coinciding with my literature search, a friend and military wife of twenty six years telephoned from Calgary. She had received a

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<sup>1</sup> Military Family Resource Centres will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5.

survey in the mail called the Military Spousal STRESS Survey. She began to fill out this eighty four page document but ended up throwing it in the garbage out of frustration over the way the information was being gathered. She was not able to say what she wanted to say by filling out a 'pre-determined, pre-conceived' survey instrument that in no way reflected her daily experience. She said she is not stressed and could not relate to the questions being put forward in the survey. She dragged the survey out of the garbage and was phoning to say she would send it to me for my research project.

Drawing on what Narayan (1988) refers to as "epistemic privilege" that "amounts to claiming that members of an oppressed group have a more immediate, subtle and critical knowledge about the nature of their oppression than people who are non-members of the oppressed group" (p. 35), I began to think about the importance of my membership in the military wife group as a starting point for my research. I have come to believe that military wives are an oppressed group and that being part of that group enables me to have a unique perspective and to begin to find a way to study how this oppression happens. With the belief that the women are oppressed and this 'epistemic privilege' notion in mind, I began puzzling over why military wives' experiences were often invisible in the military system. As a social worker I believe in the need to uncover power inequities and to recognize oppression in people's lives. As a feminist social worker, I recognize the need to change oppressive structures for women and to acknowledge and reveal women's experience. My problematic was taking shape. The concept of problematic is used here, "to direct attention to a possible set of questions that may not have been posed or a set of puzzles that do not yet exist in the form of puzzles but are latent in the actualities of the everyday world" (Smith, 1987, p. 91). I decided I wanted to know what happens to women's problems, which are also my problems, when we seek help through the military system.

This study is presented in six chapters. In chapter one I review the literature related to Canadian military families and military wives. I reveal that what exists in the research is

written mostly from the standpoint of the military; research sponsored by the military to meet the mandate of the Canadian Armed Forces. In the military research studies, wives' everyday experience is not available. I then review the literature which provides a conceptual framework with which to study the question I have raised.

In chapter two I describe the methodology used in the study, a feminist method known as institutional ethnography. This method enabled me to understand and explicate the power relations and ruling by the military of military wives. I then describe the study itself and how I undertook an institutional ethnography on a Canadian military base.

Chapter three is comprised mainly of the voices of the military wives who participated in the study - the women's own words. The words are the point of entry into the relations that exist in the military organization and they provide the threads into the rest of the study of the organization of the women by the military. In this chapter I argue that control of military wives happens through the construction of their lives into the category 'military wife', and that 'military wives' actually work for the military. I show how women become dependent on the military system, as they learn how to navigate it and play prescribed roles that put them in difficult, if not impossible, situations. Being dependent on the military system often means the wives must seek help from military social services. An exploration of how wives learn about these services and how to successfully navigate them leads into the next chapter.

In chapter four I argue that women marrying military men become 'objects' of the organizational action of military helpers. By showing how military padres and military social workers' work is directed and organized to benefit the military, I demonstrate how women's experience and voice is excluded or obscured in the helping relationships.

Chapter five is about military family support in Canada. First, I describe family support as it exists in Canada today and second, I draw on my experience with a particular support centre in Esquimalt, British Columbia, to develop my argument. Relying on

observations, fieldnotes, informal interview data and work experience at the centre, I explore the military power relations which I contend disable the centre from fully realizing its mandate to support military families in their own communities. In this chapter I argue that although the centre is based on a community participatory model, it carries out the military mission.

Chapter seven concludes with a brief summary of the study and offers reflections based on the discoveries made during the research process.

## **Chapter One**

### **Thinking About Military Wives**

To understand the problem I identified for this study, I needed a conceptual framework. I reviewed literature pertaining to American and Canadian military families in general and wives in particular. As I examined what has been written about military families, I looked for ways in which the literature made sense or not of my experience. After reviewing the research about Canadian military families spanning the past two decades, I focussed my review on the past ten years. As a starting point for the review and analysis of the research, I chose military wives' action in Canada in 1984 that led to the forming of the group known as the Organizational Society of Spouses of Military Members (OSSOMM). This chapter follows the process of how I developed the conceptual framework for this study.

### **Background**

According to Freeman (1994), Canadian military families generally consist of two parents and their children, one of the parents being a member of the Canadian Armed Forces. In 1989, 62% of the members of the Canadian Armed Forces were part of military families (Directorate of Personnel and Information Services). Of the 88,000 service members in 1989, 46,000 were married to non-service spouses. At the time of this study there were about 46,000 Canadian military wives married to serving members, 20,000 military wives of former service members and 40,000 wives of retired service members. (Harrison and Laliberté, 1994) According to the Department of National Defence, most military families will relocate every three years, with the military moving between 21% and 25% of its families every year. Military families are often isolated in Married Quarters

(military housing also known as MQs), in which case the whole family is subject to military regulation. The military organization gives the family definition and identity, which in turn leads to a reliance by the families on the military organization for support and a sense of community (Family Support Program Project, 1989).

Some unique characteristics of military families shed light on the problems facing them in the military lifestyle. Troops must at all times be ready to perform their military duties, part of which includes frequent training and regular travel away from home. Wong (1992) states that members of the military must adopt the values of the military institution, to the point of transcending self-interests, showing a dedication to duty, and exhibiting self sacrifice. This includes, by extension, their wives. Being required to relocate frequently, there may be little or no maintenance of an extended family unit and families may feel deprived of important social supports. In this case, the military organization often becomes a substitute extended family network.

### **Military Family Research**

I reviewed the available literature from the early 1970s through the present. The early literature focussed on topics that were central to how the military operated and how wives affected that operation. The First Conference of Military Families was held at Canadian Forces Base Trenton, Ontario, in January, 1977. The participants included military social workers, chaplains, wives and children of military personnel, and staff members of civilian health and welfare agencies who were working with military families (Schlesinger, 1977). At the conference, military sociologist Franklin Pinch expressed alarm about the negative impact of the women's movement on the traditional family and, by extension, on retention and readiness (Harrison and Laliberté, 1994). Following the conference, Schlesinger and Baker (1978) reported early signs of problems in the Canadian military family. Schlesinger wrote a paper based on case material selected from the files of

military social workers and raised the following issues: mobility; separation<sup>2</sup>; one parent families; housing, both on and off base; marital problems; alcoholism; child-care problems; parenting; loneliness; discipline; rank and family life, i.e., the separation of military families according to rank; children's education; boredom; the extended family of the military family; financial problems; health problems; and child and wife abuse. He pointed out that these issues were not being addressed by the military and asserted that "the family cannot be treated like a platoon" (p. 40). He asked at the end of the paper, "is it not time that the Canadian Forces pay more attention to the needs of military families?" (p. 41). Schlesinger concluded that by paying more attention to families, retention and morale in the forces would improve.

Baker (1978) undertook an exploratory and descriptive study in which he surveyed military families and military social workers. He found that frequent periods of separation (of the military member from his family) could result in the family becoming demoralized, with a feeling of helplessness in determining the course of their lives. Baker believed there should be suitable support systems provided to families undergoing separations of six months or more. Families should also be allowed an adequate length of time for reintegration upon reunion. Much of existing research points to stressors military families face - basic issues, such as the ones Baker and Schlesinger raised, that are not being addressed by the military (Butler, 1978; Finn, 1987; McBride-King, 1986; Schlesinger, 1978; Social Work Conference 1977; 1978). One study pointed to ways stressors could be addressed. In interviews with military resource personnel, service wives and civilian resource agencies, military chaplains found that stressors could be alleviated if service families are made to feel they are important and viable members of the community and that the military community cares about them, takes them seriously, is prepared to listen to them

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<sup>2</sup> Separation is used here to mean the separation of the military member from the family.

and to treat them with respect (The Chaplains of Maritime Command Study, 1981, cited in Family Study Report, 1989).

The catalyst for what little research on family life in the military has been undertaken after 1981 in Canada, appears to have been action taken by a group of military wives. In the Study Report on Family Support (1989), there is a discussion of the many social changes that set the stage for the military to recognize the need to study families. The authors identify one particular change and state that:

Another social change (affecting military families) has been the formal adoption of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1982. This has had an impact on the CF (Canadian Forces) and the military community and has precipitated the need to examine some current CF policies (p. 18).

One reason the adoption of the Charter had an impact on the Canadian military was due to the action of some military wives. In 1984, a group of Canadian military wives met on a base to discuss how they might lobby the military for a dental plan, day care, pensions and a safer traffic intersection. The military said the women were undertaking “political activity” which is not allowed on military bases. The women then formed the Organizational Society of Spouses of Military Members (OSSOMM) in an attempt to raise society's awareness of certain issues affecting military wives. They advocated for the formation of resource centres, child care, emergency shelters and recognition by the military of spouses as persons in their own right. They declared that some changes in the military community should be made. Their issues were brought before the Canadian Senate for debate in 1984. They sued the Department of National Defence under the Freedom of Association and Equality sections of the Charter and forced the military to examine some of their policies (Harrison and Laliberté, 1994). It appears this action was a reaction to the way in which military wives are treated by the military organization. As a reaction to this political move by wives, the military took action described in the Study Report:

The CF (Canadian Forces) reviewed the policy of political activity on defence establishments in a 1986 report by Col. G.L. Logan, Special Assistant to ADM (Pre). The report concluded that the policy itself needed a comprehensive review...(p. 19)

The women's action drew attention to their needs as military wives. The research that followed this action is reviewed next.

The first study to survey Canadian military families on a national level was The Military Family Study (1984). The study was sponsored by the Operational Research and Analysis Establishment, part of the Directorate of Social and Economic Analysis of the Department of National Defence (the Canadian defence department research unit). It was a large-scale survey of families, in which 3,077 respondents, 25 per cent of them spouses<sup>3</sup>, filled out questionnaires about their attitudes to military life.

The research I reviewed agreed that social changes and military sub-culture influence the course of members' lives and create unique 'stresses' that have lasting effects on individuals. That 'stresses' affect the military family is subsequently researched. Three reports were published in 1986 following analysis of the 1984 questionnaire survey, the first being An Overview of Life Work Stress and Its Relationship to Health and Organizational Morale, undertaken by Popoff, Truscott and Hysert. The researchers proceeded in their study believing that unique 'stresses' affect the military family. Beginning with the notion that there is a "direct relationship between job effectiveness and family well-being" (p.1) they deduced that "mental health and operational effectiveness were viewed as behavioural outcomes of a stress process"(p.3). Here, I query the causal relations that are being assumed without the benefit of sufficient exploration of women's

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<sup>3</sup> In the military literature about military wives the term "military wife" has been substituted with the term "spouse". In this study I use the term military wife and refer to the women as wives because I believe the term spouse obscures the fact that the majority of people married to service members are women.

lives.

Using standard survey measures of mental health and measuring operational effectiveness with a series of questions designed to determine organizational identity and morale, Popoff et al (1986) found military families to be in constant flux and experiencing an upheaval of family dynamics. They discovered that the wife's perception of separation is a significant factor of hardship, and that 60% of Canadian military personnel believe that their relationship with the Armed Forces is not reciprocal. They reported that 62% of spouses believe that the Canadian Armed Forces are lacking in their support for Canadian military families. They concluded that further study is needed for the development of an organized social support system in the Canadian forces to ensure psychological well-being and morale.

Even in parts of this research focussing specifically on wives, their voices somehow get lost. The researchers' attention on the wives focuses on how they affect the serviceman and military effectiveness rather than on the wives and their health. The wives, who made up 25 per cent of the respondents in the survey data used by Popoff et al., revealed several perceptions of their lives in the military organization. The wives perceived depersonalization, in that the rules and regulations of the Forces are more important than the people, and the rules leave the individual with little control over his/her life; they also perceived powerlessness and non-reciprocity, in that the Forces does not look after the families. The study also claimed that the wives perceived role conflict. What seems important to see here is that the study is focussing on women's troubles, however, the problematic areas of military life identified by the wives are not taken up by military researchers for further study. Also note that the women's voices are submerged into social/psychological concepts such as non-reciprocity and depersonalization.

At the end of their study Popoff, Truscott and Hysert (1986) assert that it is in the best interest of the Canadian Armed Forces to provide family support because the impact of

the family is felt in the work relationship. They believe that family commitments may reduce operational effectiveness and professional commitment of service members. Separation is identified as one of the high stressors in this study; it is one of the only areas taken up by military researchers for further study. It is one thing to discover that over half the military families surveyed perceive a lack of support from the military, but it is quite another to conclude that the military idea of family support is what they need. I can only speculate that by the time the data from the study had been through the processes of “factor analysis” and “crosstabulation” (researchers’ own words) little was left of the original concerns of the respondents.

The work by Popoff et al was followed by two studies: The Emotional Well-Being of Canadian Military Families in Relation to the Canadian Population (Popoff & Truscott, 1986) and Occupational Stress Among Married and Single Parent Canadian Forces Personnel (Truscott & Fleming, 1986). Both studies used the data from the larger nationwide survey.

For the purpose of this review, I focussed on the first of the two reports. Popoff and Truscott attempted to compare the outcomes of stress in the Canadian Forces (CF) population and the general population. The authors sought to determine if the prevalence of anxiety and depression is higher in members and spouses of the CF than in the general population. They attempted to draw profiles of service people who are the least and most likely to be distressed. Military wives composed 40 per cent of the 1,675 individuals surveyed. In revealing their findings in a section about civilian military spouses, they concluded that the “civilian service spouse most likely to be distressed is under 29 years of age, married to a junior NCO (Non-commissioned officer) and employed outside the home.”(p. 29) They concluded that the comparisons to the civilian population were tentative and required more study. The wives' experience expressed in their own words was not apparent in the results of this study. Rather, the research proceeded on the

assumption that the wives were depressed and anxious, thus obviating the need to explore the actualities of womens' lives. It seems that this type of research creates a way of knowing the military wife that does not embody her actual everyday life, which may include triumphs as well as struggles. I contend this is a stereotypical view, a view which continues to be constructed today.

Studies typically begin by looking for the "adverse effects" of the military system on military wives, and then proceed by making the wives themselves the object of study, with a view to 'fixing' them. For instance, 'stress' has become a key topic of research. An example of the focus on "stress" as an area for study is the recent survey sent to military wives in Calgary called Military Spousal STRESS Survey, mentioned in the introduction of this thesis. Although 'stress' is identified by the military as an issue for military wives, if the research asked questions regarding wives' everyday experiences, researchers might find quite different issues. Canadian military wives are rarely studied as a group of their own and seldom as expert knowers of their own lives. Most of the studies I reviewed incorporate a 'spousal' perspective, where women are discussed in relation to the military member and his work with the military (Family Support Project, Department of National Defence, 1989; Popoff, Truscott & Hysert, 1986; Popoff & Truscott, 1986; Truscott & Fleming, 1987). For example, in the study by Popoff and Hysert, the authors state that of the 1,675 individuals surveyed, "40%...are the civilian spouses of service members" (p. 6).

The spousal relationship to the military was focused on by Finn (1987) in his unpublished paper Separation and the Military Family, in which he pointed to the depression and loneliness faced by many women married to members of the Canadian Forces. Finn surveyed sixty-two Canadian wives whose husbands had spent six months in the Middle East in 1985-86. He found that the serving member is the family's link to the military structure and when the serviceman is away, the link is gone. He recommended the

establishment of a family resource centre at every Canadian base to provide family support.

Finn's purpose was to critically analyze the present military family support system and to recommend improvements. He found that the wives of absent servicemen revealed loneliness, depression, social isolation, lack of companionship, and little opportunity to socialize with adults as their reasons for high levels of stress. He said the effects on spouses can be compared to those of a woman experiencing the death of her husband. He found 50% of the wives were depressed during separations and that the lack of support of extended family meant more reliance placed on the support network of friends and community services. Finn concluded that separations lead to higher stress levels for military wives, which in turn produce lower tolerance levels in dealing with domestic circumstances.

Although this study appears to be focussed on the needs of military wives, the researcher built a military perspective into the way the 'problem' was conceptualized. He asked, "is the military doing everything it can to lessen the adverse effects on families due to separations?" Finn began his study of military wives by conceptualizing the survey questions using the notions of 'depression' and 'loneliness' of military wives during separation. His hypothesis was that the present support network available in the Canadian Forces was inadequate to aid families who were experiencing separation-induced problems, or to prevent problems. I contend that the wording of the questions used in this study couched the response of the military wives in pre-determined military notions, without soliciting information about their actual lived experience. Rather than saying to the women, "tell us how it is for you when your husband is away" the researcher asked "if this is how it is then answer this particular question". For example, in one section of the questionnaire Finn asked the wives to "rank in order the importance of each of the problems in the following list as it applies to your experience in family separation."(p. 38) The list follows:

School performance, ie grades lowered, absenteeism; disciplinary

problem with children; illness of children; illness of the spouse; behavioral problems with children; financial problems; repairs to house, appliances or car; social isolation; difficulty in making decisions; loneliness; sexual tension; feelings of depression; worried about your husband's safety; reunion/reintegration (p. 38).

All of the problems wives were asked to comment on appear based on the assumption that the separation time for the wives was problematic. It follows that Finn found separations lead to higher stress levels for military wives. I would contend that this is a view constructed by the research and that it misdirects subsequent attention.

That women are studied as objects of inquiry using survey instruments, as opposed to subjects of research where their experience is revealed, was becoming clear to me in this review. I was able to see that survey questions beginning with the assumption that there were "adverse effects" on wives during separations were constructed in a way that revealed "adverse effects". The research confirmed a view of women that the military already holds - that *they* have problems and *they* need support.

The Study Report on Family Support (1989) contains the most information compiled about Canadian military families to date. In this military sponsored document the case is made by the authors for a Canadian Forces wide network of Military Family Support Centres. To gather data for this report, survey inventory packages were sent to 53 bases in June 1987. The researchers were seeking information about what support services were being offered on various Canadian bases. The authors concluded that:

- a. military families make a valuable contribution to the military community;
- b. all military families need community social supports and community resources as do other families in Canadian society;
- c. military families have many strengths and coping abilities which can be strengthened through community social supports;
- d. spouses and families must be assured involvement in decision making in matters of family and community life;
- e. the CF has a responsibility to families and should be responsible for instituting an infrastructure to address family matters;
- f. the infrastructure can be established through multi-service family support centres at each location and a directorate at National Defence

Headquarters with appropriately qualified staff; and  
 g. direct family-focused support will enhance the quality of life for families, will improve morale, job commitment, and retention and thus promote overall operational effectiveness (Study Report on Family Support, p.105).

In Canadian military research, social change is often proposed as affecting the well-being<sup>4</sup> of the military family. Some studies conclude that well-being may be undermined by social changes. This is of special interest to military researchers. In the Study Report on Family Support (1989) the relationship of family well-being to the military is described in the following way:

How well families are able to cope with conditions depends on their well-being. Lately, it has also become apparent that morale, job performance and operational effectiveness of the military are closely related to family well-being (p. 15).

In this excerpt, concerns about morale, job performance and operational effectiveness are being linked to the notion of family well-being. Many military researchers have documented social changes adversely affecting the Canadian military family: the increase in single parents, dual career couples, step-families, and common-law relationships, changes in female/male roles in the family with the advent of equal partnerships, women working outside the home, and men becoming more family oriented (Study Report, 1989; Schlesinger, 1978; Popoff, Truscott and Hysert, 1986). It is assumed by military researchers that as society changes, traditional expectations of how families relate to the military are hard to sustain and the well-being of the military family, thus of the whole military establishment, is jeopardized.

The authors of the Study Report on Family Support (1989) identified some of the attitudes in the Canadian Forces community associated with additional stress to family life, gleaned from earlier Canadian research studies. These attitudes are as follows: paternalism,

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<sup>4</sup> The definition of well-being used by military researchers is taken from the World Health Organization, 1958: "well-being is described as a state of complete physical, mental and social health." (Study Report on Family Support, p. 15)

where the presumption is that the military knows what is best for the families; lack of validation of the family and spousal needs and feelings; and the second class citizen syndrome, where there is a loss of identity, little choice in family and community matters, no input into family matters; difficulties in obtaining information, an inability to use base facilities; spouse and child abuse; substance abuse; marital discord; suicide; social isolation; loneliness; depression; and financial difficulties; and insufficient trained personnel to meet those needs, were they to be recognized. The study identifies concerns I had as a military wife, however, what was followed up by the military was recommendation to implement a Military Family Resource Centre model which, as of 1995, is fully operative in the Canadian Forces.

Although the Family Support Study suggests that families believe they give more to the military than they receive; that rules and regulations are more important than people; that spouses are becoming less willing to be excluded from decisions affecting the family and community well-being; and that possibly the military has some responsibility for family problems in the military community, the conclusions drawn at the end of the report assert the perspectives of the organization over the people's experiences within it. For example, the authors conclude that there seems to be a correlation between family well-being and member morale, commitment and job performance, thus pointing to the importance of military family support for the military establishment. Perhaps it is this goal that is behind the "initiative to establish a network of Family Support Centres on every military base in Canada" (Wong, 1992, p. 16). However helpful to individuals they may be, I contend that the Family Support Centre model maintains the perspective that families must adjust to the military and be supported in that adjustment, as opposed to making demands on the military to treat families differently.

### **Summary of the Military Research on Families and Wives**

In the research I reviewed, the military standpoint is represented in conceptualizing each hypothesis and the questions being researched are in relation to the improvement of the organization's operational effectiveness, job readiness, and retention of the military member. Considering that the research is informed by the military agenda, how can the voice of the military family or the wives be heard? Several of the studies (Military Family Study, Department of National Defence, 1984; Family Support Project, Department of National Defence, 1989; Popoff, Truscott & Hysert, 1986; Popoff & Truscott, 1986; Truscott & Fleming, 1987) about military families were sponsored by the military, or were undertaken by graduate students whose education and research were being funded by the Department of National Defence (Finn, 1987, Wong, 1993). In the Study Report on Family Support, conducted by the Canadian military (1989) the direction of the research came from American researchers where:

studies from the U.S. have shown that direct family focussed supports (as family support centres) provide the perception to the member and the family that the military cares about family well-being (Study Report on Family Support, p. 27).

There appears to be an assumption on the part of all these researchers that the husband is the source of strength in the family and a belief that his being away is what causes major problems in family life. Research into types of family support arises out of this belief.

We can see from these studies how military research conceptualizes wives. Wives appear not as people with individual lives, but as adjunct to the military operation. Research is about how the military member was supported or not by his family and his wife. Researchers do not see women as such, they see 'family' or 'spouse'. The findings and recommendations are devoid of women's voices. The research offers ways of thinking about problems the military has to solve, for example, separation caused stress - wives

have personal problems handling such stress, so wives need support.

Even though the research following the inception of OSSOMM was motivated, at least in part, by military wives' activism, the same topics were continually researched and the findings focussed on women's weaknesses that needed to be fixed. Mostly, the wives are seen as weak and dependent stereotypes, views which are perpetuated by the majority of the literature I reviewed. There are a few notable exceptions, especially work by feminist researchers.

### **Feminist Research**

Feminist literature offers a variety of ways of conceptualizing women's experience. Feminist scholarship has criticized the knowledge of women that social science, such as the military research I reviewed, has produced, and developed. New approaches have been developed using experience as a basis for inquiry. Rowbotham (1973) says "the sound of silence breaking makes us understand what we could not hear before" (p. 30). I am interested in hearing the voices of military wives and breaking the silence. Westcott (1979) states that:

Women studying women reveals the complex way in which women as objects of knowledge reflect back upon women as subjects of knowledge. Knowledge of the other and knowledge of the self are mutually informing because self and other share a common condition of being women (cited in Acker, Barry & Esseveld, 1983, p. 140).

In the case of this study, I not only share the common condition of being a woman with my study participants, but also the condition of being a military wife. Breaking the silence of women's relation to and incorporation by the military establishment as a patriarchal institution is a political undertaking, not just a scholarly one. This is a crucial objective of feminist research. Patriarchy, in this study, is defined as "a set of social relations between men which have a material base, and which, though hierarchical, establish or create interdependence and solidarity among men that enable them to dominate

women” (Hartmann, cited in Tong, 1989, p. 180).

Enloe (1983,1990), a British academic, has studied the military wife through a critical feminist lens and provides a different view of the wives of servicemen. She believes military wives are defined by their membership in a powerful institution and are required to live in a social world deliberately insulated from the real world. (In my experience that real world was known as "civie street".) She says that privileges in this special world come to the women solely by way of their soldier/husband's military status. The women live under the authority of an institution which often portrays itself as a family, thus making them subject to two patriarchal authorities, the husband's and the military commander's. Enloe uses a feminist perspective to analyze the relationship of the military wife to the organization itself. She argues that "women have been of concern - as a threat, an annoyance, a useful resource - to military men for centuries. Military men have sought to *control* women in order to achieve military goals" [italics added](p. 1). In this study I am interested in how this control works. Enloe explains that "women...must somehow be brought under sufficient military control so as to enlist thousands of raw male recruits and keep seasoned veterans" (p. 4). She sees military wives working for the military at arms length and believes military wives must be controlled by the military because today's military forces are technologically and administratively complex, demanding greater support services, so troops must be kept healthy. She says "women, stereotyped as uniquely fitted to perform these sanitary and caring tasks because of their innately 'sympathetic' natures and housekeeping proclivities, provide the military with a useful pool of cheap labour, often unpaid if it can be incorporated into the expected role of 'military wife' (p. 6). Enloe argues "that by looking at women we can reveal, not only the spreading institutional encroachment of the military, but also the processes by which that spread becomes publicly legitimised" (p. 10). She asserts that the military plays a special role in the ideological structure of patriarchy - because the notion of 'combat' plays such a

central role in the construction of 'manhood' and justification of the superiority of maleness in the social order where "to be masculine is to be not feminine"(p. 13).

A recent addition to the Canadian military wife literature is a book entitled No Life Like It: Military Wives in Canada (Harrison & Laliberté, 1994). The authors interviewed 112 current and former Canadian military wives in three Canadian provinces and on two bases in Germany. The interviews were open-ended unstructured sessions which provided the authors with a rich portrait of the life of a Canadian military wife. They also interviewed 47 individuals and groups of people who play a significant non-wife role in the military community. This research tells a great deal about the military's organisational characteristics and how the military creates work for, and relies on, the work of wives. Harrison and Laliberté, from their examination of the experience of military wives through their own stories, argue that military wives actually do work for the military, work that is necessary for the institution to operate. They recommend the following: that the military should accept the fact that its priorities and forms of organization do significant harm to women and children, and should assume responsibility for the consequences and cost; future cost-benefit analysis of militarism should be expanded to include its social costs; and further civilian - not military - research should be done to spell these social costs out (p.242). In their analysis of women's stories, Harrison and Laliberté claim that the military ideology is internalized by the women in mythology, such as the "self-reliance myth" and the "adventure myth". While most of what Harrison and Laliberté say matches my experience as a military wife, I was left feeling uncomfortable about the thought that the majority of my life and the life of my mother had been spent internalizing military ideological myths. This analysis seemed interesting; however, it did not provide an organizational analysis of *how* myths become internalized in military wives lives. In my study I wanted to extend Harrison and Laliberté's analysis to explicate particular instances of military wives' lives in which they are managed by the military.

With the extensive analysis put forward by Enloe and Harrison and Laliberté in mind, I was able to understand the direction I wanted to take in this study. With the rich analysis of the work of the military wife as a backdrop, I began to think about ways of investigating and understanding the organization of military wives' problems. I wanted to explore how wives were silenced and their issues transformed into "problems" that military support could resolve, ignoring the way the military creates the problems in the first place.

Military wives are not the only women who are incorporated into their husband's job by efforts of the organizations men work for. Goffman (1961) talks about the creation of an organizational identity in the following way:

An organization can...be viewed as a place for generating assumptions about identity...Every organization...involves a discipline of activity, but...every organization also involves a discipline of being - an obligation to be of a given character and to dwell in a given world (Goffman 1961: p. 170-1).

The rigid structure of the military is the "given world" the military wife must live in. In the introduction to the book The Incorporated Wife, editor Hilary Callan (1984) undertakes a feminist analysis to explore the condition of wifeness in a range of settings, one of which is the military. The book is a collection of papers which explore the condition of 'wifeness'. She argues that incorporated wives [military wives] are "women who have already had to undergo the 'silencing' or under recognition of the rest of their personhood which allows them to be so designated" (p. 1). Callan, when discussing the person-defining power of organizations says, "their (the organization's) ability to gain acceptance for their own assumptions about the essential and inward character of wives and women is remarkably resistant to change" (p. 5). I am interested in this power to gain acceptance by wives for military assumptions she speaks of. How is it organized and how does it define women? She goes on to assert that, "control can be effectively gained and discipline exercised, through a system of definitions which sustains an intact and unchallengeable

world-view" (p. 5). In my inquiry I am interested in revealing the "system of definitions" sustaining the life of the military wife. I have looked for messages that military wives receive about proper behaviour, especially when they approach military helping personnel.

In her contribution to Callan's book about incorporated wives, Macmillan (1984) drew on her own experience as a child and youth in the British military, as a participant observer, as well as data gathered from biographies, written correspondence, oral communications, published research relating to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and two fictional portraits of army life in the nineteenth century. Her aim was to show that in some diverse writings covering a historical span, a few distinct themes and dilemmas reveal themselves consistently. The themes she revealed are: the issue of the recognition of the wife as having a legitimate presence and claim on the institution; the issue of the wife's contribution to the institution and its function of defending the state; the tension between wifehood and motherhood; and the ambiguous symbolic potency that attaches to the womanhood of wives in 'a man's world' (p. 89).

Callan and Macmillan's work piqued my interest in challenging the military world-view of military wives and discovering how their lives work. How do they become incorporated into the military establishment? How do they become constructed as 'military wives'? In an exploratory and descriptive study, Friars explored Canadian military wives' relationship to the military organization and how wives are incorporated into the enterprise of their husbands' jobs. Friars interviewed ten wives and found that military wives' incorporation is characterized by constraints imposed on wives such as frequent mobility and husband absences, and by contributions demanded by the military. Friar's work is different from other studies I reviewed in that the experience of military wives is explored, from their perspective, during in-depth interviews with open-ended questions. Her work contributes to the scarce knowledge of this subject and furthered my interest in how the incorporation of military wives is organized.

I have shown how military research about women and families begins the process of building women into the military establishment or incorporating them. It offers a 'scientific' legitimization of how to think about wives. My research project is aimed at getting beyond those views that I call stereotypes.

Enloe (1983) believes we must understand the oppression of women by the military and that there is a need for feminist research into the organization of their lives. She says:

A common assumption has made the armed forces almost immune to feminist investigation. That assumption is that the military, even more than other patriarchal institutions, is a male preserve, run by men and for men according to and relying solely on man power (p. 7).

This study begins to challenge the belief that the armed forces is immune to feminist investigation.

### **The Standpoint of Women: A Feminist Approach to Studying Military Wives**

As I began looking for a way to understand differently the lives of military wives, Smith (1991) was helpful in suggesting a method that:

insists on beginning where people are, learning the society from its multiple sites, exploring it together and divergently, and piecing together an account of our discoveries that expands our grasp of how our experience and activity are anchored in, shaped by and part of the extended social relations that are powered by and overpower our lives (p. 167).

Smith, a Canadian sociologist, provides a unique form of ethnography called institutional ethnography that seems perfectly suited to my desire to discover military wives' experience. This method of data collection and analysis investigates and explicates how the everyday world actually is and how it works. Smith says, "a sociology for women preserves the presence of subjects as knowers and as actors. It does not transform subjects into objects of study..." (cited by Reinharz, 1992, p. 105). I did not want to study military wives as objects. Smith (1987), in describing her method says, "it is ...a method that, at

the outset of inquiry, creates the space for an absent subject..." (p. 107). In the case of my study, the "absent subject" is the military wife. Institutional ethnography focusses on the 'work' of people and organization (Smith, 1987). For the purpose of this study the notion of 'work' must be defined. Work is used here as a concept, "that will return us to the actualities of what people do on a day to day basis under definite conditions and in definite situations" (p. 165). Smith (1987) says:

When we take up inquiry from the standpoint of women, we are specially conscious of work essential to the accomplishment of accountable order, that is not itself made observable - reportable as work....going beyond the functional boundaries as these are defined by its ideological practices to explore those aspects of the work organization that are essential for its operation (p.165).

This method provides a way for a researcher to explore the words and work practices of individuals and use these experiences as an entry point to examine larger social processes (Smith, 1987). Taking the standpoint of nursing assistants and patients in American nursing homes, Diamond (1992) has shown in his ethnographic account the organizational nature of the work of nursing assistants and how their work is intricately connected to social and economic policies. Diamond's work revealed the importance of starting in my experience and the experience of people I am studying.

Smith's method enabled me to undertake "an ethnography of the social relations which articulate members of society to the institutional and administrative relations through which this society is ruled and managed" (Smith, cited in Walker 1990, p. 11). A feature of this method important for my study is that it preserves the connections between the social context and the experiencing subject of the research. Smith (1991) conceptualizes these connections as "social relations". When explaining social relations she says, "there are a multiplicity of sites of experience and activity and in exploring a world from any one of these we can discover the relations organizing the different sites of experience and generating precisely the differences in how people are situated in the world" (p. 166). In

this study the notion of social relations offered an alternative way of conceptualizing military wives' experiences from the previously discussed research on military families and wives. G. Smith (1990) believes "the notion of 'social relations' ...operates as a research technique for locating and describing the social form of people's activities over time" (p. 636). He says "it [the concept of social relations] is used to do the looking." The objective of institutional ethnography is to situate the research problem in the 'real world' of practical everyday activities, the 'lived relations' of a class society. Thus, in this case, I would study the interaction of wives and the military, as wives "live" that relation. The objective is to explore and display the social relations that operate to constrain, mold, define and ultimately oppress military wives.

The military is a powerful organization. Its rules and procedures are established to control both military members and their families. This is the notion of "ruling relations" that D. Smith (1987) introduces and defines as:

Identifying a complex of organizational practices, including government, law, business and financial management, professional organization, and educational institutions as well as the discourses in texts that interpenetrate the multiple sites of power (p. 3).

By texts I mean the research, policies, written procedures and other written documents used in social service work practices of the military. Just as D. Smith (1987, p.173-5) analyses her mother-school relations by becoming conversant with the bureaucratic administration of education (the ruling relation), I wanted to extend my understanding of military wives' situations by exploring how the military establishment manages its relation to them. Walker (1990) asserts, "we are not ruled on a day-to-day basis by terror but by ideological procedures - ways of thinking, understanding, and acting - that enlist us in our own ordering" (p. 8).

One way of understanding how ruling happens in the military organization is to examine the taken-for-granted concepts which create the military ideology. Concepts about

military families and wives are created in the research and the research informs military policy. Policy directives guide military helping professionals in their work with military wives. When discussing how people become objects of professional practice D. Smith says, “the categories and conceptual procedures which are the enforced linguistic resources of a given organization (or profession) assign determinate properties and order to ‘what actually happened’ or ‘what was there’ ...in its account” (p. 265). Her thinking about “conceptual procedures” enabled me to explore the professional practices of the military helpers. Walker (1990) says “concepts are not constructed randomly or accidentally but are actual work processes in the production of knowledge” (p.11). Her explications of the social construction of the concepts surrounding ‘family violence’ pushed my thinking beyond how I might ordinarily understand the power of the military in women’s lives.

G. Smith’s (1990) thorough analysis of a “ruling regime” and explication of the notion of recursivity provided conceptual tools with which I was able to examine the social organization of the military helpers. G. Smith explains that:

Recursion...is also discoverable in how particular textually-organized, local experiences of people have the same social configuration as the experiences of others, organized extra-locally through the same texts, at other times and places....(Recursion) makes it possible to go from particular events in local settings to a set of general, textually mediated social relations because they have the same form (p. 636).

Understanding the role texts, such as research studies and policy directives, play in the social relations of military life can be further explored by explicating the recursive properties of social organization (G. Smith, 1990), in this case enabling the military to know women in a particular way. G. Smith explains:

Texts as active constituents of social relations can iterate the particular configuration of their organization in different places and at different times, thereby conceptually coordinating and temporally concerting a general form of social action (p. 635-636).

In this study I examine concepts as work processes in the work of the military and show that concepts are a crucial vehicle in the creation of knowledge about military wives; knowledge that excludes their everyday experiences. The notion of recursivity informed the way I was able to understand how concepts are nested work processes that operate at different levels in the military. I was able to see how concepts, which were identified in policy directives at the extra-local level, organize and influence the local level. Using the notion of recursivity, I show how concepts developed by the leaders of the military become the directives and mandates of the military helpers who in turn conceptualize and categorise the women in military terms, as opposed to seeing them as who they are, in their actual lives. And, of course, these same practices organize women's own sense of their lives and their possibilities.

### **Conclusion**

Research done from the standpoint of military wives can shed light on the ruling forces that shape their lives and exclude their voices from the creation of knowledge in the military. This study of military wives from their own standpoint offers an alternative view, one that discloses how the organization of the Canadian military oppresses military wives.

By thinking about the problematic, critically reviewing the relevant literature and conceptualizing the problematic, I became curious about how the military both constructs and attempts to 'solve' the problems or troubles that arise for wives of servicemen. The research question became:

How are women's experiences of needing help with their everyday work transformed through the military system so as to render their troubles as military wives manageable in specific ways? How does this process 'work' against the women themselves and for the military?

## Chapter Two

### Methodology

Qualitative methodology stands on the fundamental premise that the social world has no existence independent of the activities and understandings of social actors, including the understanding and activities of researchers. Validity of the research is said to depend upon making this fundamental unity central to the investigation (Jackson, 1991, p. 2).

Researchers working within the interpretive paradigm may use methods called ethnography, where the ethnographer participates in people's lives for an extended period of time. Some of the procedures employed by ethnographers take the form of participant observation, documentary analysis, interviews, and case study/critical incidents. In this study I immersed myself in several different military settings and used a number of research procedures in order to develop a full description of the military culture and its relation to military wives.

As noted in chapter one, to research the question I undertook an institutional ethnography described by D. Smith (1986) "exploring the social relations individuals bring into being in and through their actual practices" (p. 160). D. Smith says institutional ethnography means "an exploration, description and analysis of such a complex of relations, not conceived in the abstract but from the entry point of some particular people or a particular person whose everyday world of working is organised thereby" (p. 8). As an entry point into the inquiry I started with direct interviews with the women which revealed their experience of living within the military organization. I collected the women's "talk" of their actual daily experiences of living in the military as data and analyzed it as part of the web of social relations revealed by unpicking the workings of the military social services.

D. Smith further declares "the ethnographic process of inquiry is one of exploring further into those processes that organize and determine the actual bases of experience of those whose side we have taken" (p. 177). In the case of this study, that side is the side of the military wife. I 'take her side' by using her standpoint to explore how her experience is organized. This is a research project that puts feminist commitments into practice. In defining "institutional" or "institution" D. Smith says it is the "complex set of relations forming part of the ruling apparatus, organized around a distinctive function" (p. 160). In thinking about institutional ethnography Smith builds on Karl Marx's theory of alienation - his understanding that those who have been excluded from "the making of ideology, knowledge, and culture" find themselves caught up in systems that have power over, but do not reflect their own lived experiences." (D. Smith, 1987, p. 17)

When I began to look at women's stories, I looked to see how they talked about the military and its place in their lives. I carried the notion of "social relations" into my thinking. Instead of pre-conceptualizing their relationships in the military, I attempted to discover the relations that underpin the women's lives and their work as military wives. Rather than seeing women stereotypically, I wanted to understand women's lives from their perspective. D. Smith's (1987) approach in The Everyday World As Problematic was instructive. She says:

A sociology for women preserves the presence of subjects as knowers and actors...For actual subjects situated in the actualities of their everyday worlds, a sociology for women offers an understanding of how those worlds are organized and determined by social relations immanent in and extending beyond them (p.105-6).

Institutional ethnography provided me with a way of investigating the question I had identified. This method of analysis enabled me to situate the problem to be studied in the real world of everyday activities and to explicate the complex relationship between the way the military wives' experience is shaped and the organizational forms of the

Department of National Defence that give it meaning. To coordinate the military, ideologies are systematically developed to provide categories and concepts expressing the relation of local courses of action, such as wives' troubles, to the institutional function. In order to explicate this organizational relationship I have inhabited the world I studied. Institutional ethnography enabled me to explore, describe and analyze such a complex of relations.

Ruling involves the social construction of reality (D. Smith, 1987) and I began my study investigating the social construction of the category of 'military wife'. In this study I show how managers of the military are examining, organising and acting on **their** knowledge of the world all the time. Military wives are outside the ruling apparatus and our stories can't be heard from that distance. Our experience is described in terms and language that are not our own - hence the difficulty I had in recognizing myself or my experience in the literature.

This inquiry was guided by the notion of ruling relations as transmitted in texts (D. Smith, 1987). G. Smith (1990) says, "documents should be read as integral to the social organization of the affairs of people" (p. 636). In the process of understanding the procedures involved in the construction of the military wife, I discovered how our consciousness and lives are being organized and constructed through documentary processes. I show how military wives assimilate certain ideological procedures as a form of social consciousness that somehow becomes their lives, organized through the social relations described earlier. D. Smith (1990) says these procedures (textually mediated relations) are ruptured when people know a situation to be otherwise on the basis of their everyday experiences. This is what I found in my research. When given an opportunity, the women questioned the policies and mandates that rule their lives, particularly when they did not match their everyday experiences.

The discovery of military wives' experiences required reflexive inquiry. Reflexivity embodies the following notions: the people being researched are knowledgeable about their

lives and how they put them together; the researcher and the researched are discovering and constructing knowledge together, although the researcher's job is different from the researched; the researcher is part of the knowledge being constructed and the researcher's experience is part of social relations and part of producing those relations; there is no clear and objective separation between the knower/known; and we as researchers participate in creating the world as we know it. Reflexivity is about using the self in research projects. The use of self was not a problem in this study, but an asset to be used. As an interpretive researcher I believe there is no way to study something without becoming part of what is being studied. Therefore, as researcher, I must get involved in the construction process. Atkinson and Hammersley (1983) state that "all data involve theoretical assumptions" and "we are part of the world we study" (p. 14). This is the reflexive character of interpretive, non-positivist research. As a researcher I recognized that I am part of the social world of the military, and my experience and knowledge helped me to recognize and to understand women who also live in this military milieu. Embracing the notion of reflexivity, I began my research by interpreting my own experience as a military wife, how my life is socially organized, and how I am part of the experienced world. This research process became a dialogue, neither the subjectivity of the researcher nor the subjectivity of the researched was eliminated in the process. Therefore I began my research with, "I know from my own experience" and I remained reflective throughout the process of data collection.

Reinharz (1992) explores the relationship between feminism and methodology concluding that there is no "politically correct" feminist method, only a variety of perspectives. Institutional ethnography is a feminist methodology. Implicit in this method is an aim for intersubjective understanding between researchers and person(s) being studied (Reinharz, 1992). I have tried not to impose my definition of reality on the participants in this research. I worked on a model of participant/partners. The three following goals of feminist research articulated by Acker, Barry and Esseveld (1982) are implicit in Smith's

method: the research must contribute to women's condition through producing knowledge that can be used by women themselves; methods should not be oppressive; the researcher must employ a critical perspective, one which questions dominant intellectual traditions.

In this study I have attempted to understand the processes that result in the inequalities, the exclusion of voice and the distortion or transformation of real life troubles. Social work is about the analysis of power, dominance and oppression. As a feminist social worker I work to change oppressive structures and am obligated to recognize and research the systemic inequities in the society I live in; in the case of this study, my experience as a military wife. I believe this is a necessary step toward changing women's position. My research may provide women/wives with the understanding of how their everyday worlds were and are generated and constructed within the military structure and how the women are active, too, in the construction.

Thus, using a feminist perspective I have taken "sides" with the women in my study and explored "how" the oppression happens. Enloe (1983) believes, as I do, that "loosening the now tightly tied knot between the military and the social order may be the goal that will do most to reverse women's oppression. But the knot cannot be untied unless we can understand just how dependent the military is on the oppression of women" (p. 17). She asserts that "military policies affecting and controlling women are knowable. They (the military) need women who will act and think as patriarchy expects women to act and think" (p. 220). She says, "The processes by which those policies are designed, implemented, evaluated and reversed or modified are ...knowable. The armed forces' long dependence on women, and the ways they have tried to camouflage that dependence (yet ensure the relationship) can be exposed" (p. 213). In this study I have exposed some of the processes Enloe is referring to, in particular the processes that involve the military's ruling of military wives. I began to investigate the research question with the preceding notions of social relations, ruling relations, reflexivity, feminism and standpoint framing my research.

## **The Study**

### **The Setting**

This study was conducted mainly at Canadian Forces Base (CFB) Esquimalt, British Columbia. CFB Esquimalt is the support base for Ships of the Maritime Forces Pacific, Ship Repair Unit (Pacific), Canadian Forces Fleet School (Esquimalt) and Royal Roads Military College. Over a three year period I undertook investigation of my topic at several locations; on the base, at conferences in several locations on Vancouver Island, and at military headquarters in Ottawa, Ontario.

The offices of the military social workers and the padre involved in this study are located on the base, as is the Military Family Resource Centre.(MFRC)<sup>5</sup> I worked closely with the MFRC social worker to gain access to the women who would be involved in the study. The military social workers and padres who informed the study were open and willing participants.

I attended four conferences over the three year period; three Women's Conferences sponsored by the MFRC where I was a workshop facilitator twice and the keynote speaker once, and a MFRC Conference attended by staff representatives from all the MFRCs in the Canadian Pacific region. I also attended a community meeting organized by military wives in the Permanent Married Quarters of Belmont Park.

During a trip to Ottawa I investigated military relations at the offices of the Directorate Family Support Program and the offices of the social work branch of the Directorate Health Treatment Services.

My husband is currently employed by the Canadian Rangers, a Reserve component of the Canadian Forces, and his office is located at Work Point Barracks in Esquimalt. Our

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<sup>5</sup> Chapter 5 contains a detailed description of the Esquimalt Military Family Resource Centre.

social life revolves around and includes many military couples, including currently serving members and retired members. In the ethnographic tradition I have been immersed in the topic of this research at all levels of my life.

### **Research Participation**

Many interviews have provided the foundational data for this study. I undertook in-depth interviews with three military wives ranging in age from 25 to 68 years. One is the wife of a retired service member, while the other two are currently married to active servicemen. I gathered data during two group interviews at the MFRC. A total of 15 military wives who were attending a Moms and Tots support group at the time allowed me to interview them during one of their regular group times. I extensively interviewed three military social workers, one of whom was the Director of Military Family Support Program at the time. Two of these social workers had over fifteen years of military experience each, while one was new to the military social work field. I interviewed: a staff member at the MFRC several times over the course of the study, both in-depth and informally; two padres, one who is currently an active service member while the other is a retired padre of twenty seven years; the Director of the MFRC; and in Ottawa, a Major who develops family support policy for the Canadian Forces, and the chief social worker for the Canadian military.

Approximately 120 military wives were participants in various workshops at three annual Women's Conferences I attended. Using participant observation techniques I was able to glean valuable information from this fieldwork. The topics I explored with the wives during my workshops were as follows: the stereotypes of the military wife; the strengths of military wives; and one workshop offered the opportunity for participants to share stories of how they manage their lives when their husbands are at sea. The data which resulted from these conferences are in the form of flip-chart notes and fieldnotes. I was also an observer at a community meeting attended by five military wives, two of their

husbands, a military social worker, a padre, the base administration officer, the social worker for the MFRC and several local community service providers. Data were gathered in the form of fieldnotes. I was a participant observer at an annual conference of the staff of the MFRCs for the Pacific Region where data took the form of fieldnotes and handouts. To round out the ethnographic data, I had informal discussions with several military wives who were students at the University of Victoria, informal discussions with approximately fifty military wives at various military and non-military functions, informal discussions with military wives at a parent discussion group at the MFRC, my own experience to draw on, and my mother's many insightful comments about her life as a military wife.

The in-depth interviews were interactive, guided conversations, which provided rich detailed material later used in analysis. In analyzing the interview data I found out how each of the women's different experiences or ideas are part of constructing and bringing into being the phenomena I am investigating; how experiences of military wives are organized and managed by the social organization of military life.

When I was interviewing the women I was not seeking their opinions about military life. Jackson (1991) directed me when she states, "...you seek to discover how their words and actions and understandings are actually part of the occurrence or existence of these social phenomenon" (p. 2). The women's "talk" was only a small part of the data in my research, the women being the point of entry into my study. My goal with the research has been to create a unified picture and discover the relations of which the words are a part. Hammersley and Atkinson point out that "while in the latter [meaning traditional survey methods] interviews are the only source of data, in ethnography, interview data is combined with data from other sources" (p. 117).

All participation in the study was completely voluntary. This was assured by a letter of informed consent which participants in the in-depth interviews read and signed. The letter also outlined their voluntary part, a basic description of the research, and the methods

employed to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. Participants were informed that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time and were asked for their consent to have open-ended questions recorded through audio tape. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality the taped interviews and written notes were coded with an ID number. In this report I refer to all the women informants as 'military wife'. The military helpers are referred to as 'military social worker' or 'padre'. The raw data have not and will not be shared with the military institution.

I have treated all the interviews as confidential and tried to keep them anonymous. I have used no names, however due to the small size of the Canadian military community and the location of the research, the military members who informed this study may be recognizable to each other.

### **Documents**

Although first hand narratives with military wives and military personnel constitute the foundation of my study, documents played an important role, for example: pamphlets, newspaper articles, both civilian and military newspapers, research surveys, and military orders. D. Smith (1973) states that, "a documentary reality is fundamental to the practices of governing, managing and administration of this form of society" (p. 257). Campbell (1992) writes, "analysts interested in understanding conceptual practices of exercising power must look at how documents function as constituents of social relations in any organization" (p. 504). I was particularly interested in documents which direct helping practices in the Canadian military. D. Smith (1973) believes, "an organization virtually invents the environment and objects corresponding to its accounting terminologies and practices" (p. 265). She argues that "women's silence stems from social repression, from strong social disapproval of the exercise by women of intellectual leadership and from organizational process (D. Smith, cited in Humm, 1990, p. 210). To understand the organizational process that may silence military wives, I have examined texts and

documents to reveal the social relations of the helping professions as practised in the military. I have observed how the documents or texts govern these activities and organize the social relations (D. Smith, 1987). I have tracked the documentary processes of the social work arm of the helping component in the Canadian Armed Forces, and shown how service provision works. In tracking the documents I found that women's troubles disappear from official accounts; women are silenced and their experience is excluded.

### **Informants**

When I looked at military life from the standpoint of the women (wives), I did not require a sample as such, as I have not tried to generalize from a small number to the characteristics of a larger population. I have, however, explored how the institutional practices of the military penetrate and organize the experience of different women as military wives. Sandleowski (1986) says that, "Sample size cannot be pre-determined because it is dependent on the nature of the data collected and where those data take the researcher" (p. 31). I was interested in exploring the wives' use of social services, or at least their need for, and attempts to access, some kind of help from the military helping professions. Therefore, I chose those military wives who were appropriate informants. I undertook in-depth interviews with a small number of women and military helpers because of the large volume of verbal data that had to be analyzed.

The informants in this study are not representative in the quantitative sense. Any subject belonging to the group, in this case the military wife group, was considered to represent that group in the sense of being knowledgeable about the 'work' of being a military wife. Any woman who had a particular experience of needing help from the military was a possible informant.

Thomas (1993) states that "it is crucial to identify the types of informants who are most likely to possess an 'insider's knowledge' of the research domain" (p. 37). He goes on to say that "the data sources can include a person, a group, documents, or any other

artifact that embodies cultural meanings" (p. 38). What is representative in this study is not the sample but, the "...institutional relations which bring to light not only common bases of experience but also bases of experience that are not in common but are grounded in the same set of social relations" (D. Smith, 1987, p.176).

In this study I have described and gained an understanding of the creation of the social organization of military wives. I have not tried to generalize the wives' experience as such. I have tried to generalize about the social relations and the social organization of their lives as it was uncovered in my research. The individual and subjective accounts of the informants revealed the social relations within which their experience occurs. Embedded in the personal account of each of my informants were the traces or threads I needed as a researcher to begin the process of understanding the context in which their experiences take place.

It is important that, in reading this study, not only the participants recognize their experience, but that other people are able to see and follow the connections I have made. A social worker on a base in Nova Scotia should be able to read the research report and recognize: the organization of the lives of the people on the base; the organization of her/his own work; and how s/he is part of the construction and organization of the lives of the people s/he is attempting to help. This is the meaning of generalizability in the interpretive paradigm. In the Department of National Defence and throughout the military structure, the practices of managing families and organizing their lives are 'general' practices and accomplish the same relations everywhere they exist. D. Smith (1987) asserts that generalizability is a property of social organization. She describes women's experience as the point of entry, "the locus of an experiencing subject or subjects, into a larger social and economic process" (p. 157). This process is a complex of relations, forming part of the ruling apparatus organized around a distinctive function. In the case of my research that function is the maintenance of the military structure and the incorporation of military wives

as workers in that structure. While individual women told me about their various experiences, I have shown that those experiences are not random and idiosyncratic. Rather, they arise out of the particular ways the military organizes women's lives.

### **Analysis**

The information I gathered in the in-depth interviews was taped and transcribed. I was interested in the who, what, and when of the accounts and in how their stories happened. I traced these stories by following the direction of the women's words through the work organization of helping personnel in the military.

By examining research studies, policy directives, pamphlets, reports, books, and policies; by studying the organization of the helping professions on Canadian military bases; and by learning about the experiences of military wives through interviews and observation, I have shown how the constructing, organizing and managing of the exclusion of experience and the silencing of women happens. Analysis in this method has taken place throughout the process of the research. Data derived from data collections through participant observation and in-depth interviews have enabled me to create a comprehensive account of the help-seeking episode in the life of the military wife. As Thomas (1993) states when describing analysis using the interpretive method, "we take the collection of observations, anecdotes, impressions, documents, and other symbolic representations of the culture we studied that seem depressingly mundane and common, and we reframe them into something new" (p. 43). By entering into the research process with the experience of the wives at the local level, I moved through an analysis framed by the notions outlined in the methodology section to a description of a general form of the organization of 'help' as offered by the military. All areas of inquiry have come together to uncover the military method of organizing the troubles experienced by military wives.

Ethnographic research situated me, the researcher, in a position of contact with the women during routine support groups. This allowed the analysis to move beyond mere

description and to develop explanatory insights into the social relations of military life (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983). Using concepts that guide the research, I provide explanatory insights into the military organization of help experienced by military wives, through organizational analysis. If, as Thomas (1993) believes, "intellectual reflections create new ways of thinking" (p. 45) in this study I create new ways of thinking about and knowing the Canadian military wife.

## Chapter Three

### Creating the 'Military Wife'

"We never know what we are in for when we become military wives" (Military wife).

The term 'military wife' refers to women who are married to a member of the military. The term conjures up the image of dependency, living in barracks with many children to look after, neglectful mothers who have no idea how to handle money, uneducated women who are dependent, helpless and submissive (Women's Conference Workshop Fieldnotes, 1993). Thus, I argue 'military wife' is a socially constructed category - pre-supposing a military relation. This chapter is an exploration of how the military wife is constructed as such, and how being a military wife creates problems for the women.

When a woman marries a member of the military she marries into an institution in which her life will be considerably different than if she married a man in the civilian world. She will be expected by the military to support her husband in his chosen career. As this chapter shows, this expectation will pervade her life completely. She will be expected to move uncomplainingly whenever and wherever her husband is posted, sometimes as often as every second year, and to hold the family together when her husband is deployed<sup>6</sup> with the navy, army or air force. It is my contention that she will not know what is expected of

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<sup>6</sup> Deployment is defined by the military as "the assignment of military personnel to unaccompanied tours of duty. The term 'deployment' usually brings to mind Peacekeeping although military troops are 'deployed' at other times as well - for operations and exercises, both domestic and abroad." (Booklet, Preparing For Deployment Stress, March, 1994.)

her as a military wife when she marries her husband. She may have some knowledge of military life if she has grown up as a 'military brat' and had the life modelled for her by her mother. However, if she is new to the military system, she must learn the work<sup>7</sup> involved in being a military wife. As Harrison and Laliberté say, "military wives are...an excellent example of women whose lives have been harnessed to the requirements of a powerful institution"(p. 7).

The military institution is part of what D. Smith refers to as the ruling apparatus and that "the distinctive property of the ruling apparatus is its capacity to organize the locally and inexhaustibly various character of the actual into standard forms of organizational action" (p. 158). This chapter argues that women marrying military members become objects of this "organizational action" as they must learn how to behave properly in the role of military wife. When they fail they endanger their husband's careers. While the military member attends bootcamp and is taught how to be a serviceman, the woman he marries appears to be left alone to learn how to become a military wife. I begin this inquiry by examining how women become "military wives" and how they work in a way that benefits the military. As this and other chapters reveal, the military actually intervenes in families to structure the lives of military wives.

### **The Work of the Military Wife**

The everyday activities of women married to military members are seldom recognized as work; however, the military needs women's labour and seeks to control wives in that process. I argue that this control happens through the way in which the women are organized and constructed to be military wives.

For the military wife there is special work involved in moving, providing childcare on military bases, running the household in the husband's absence and in keeping the

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<sup>7</sup> For a more detailed description of what this work entails see Harrison and Laliberté (1994).

family adjusted to military life. To add to this workload there is also volunteer work on the base. Military wives' work is especially heavy during their husband's absences. There is unrelieved childcare work, sole disciplinary work, children's emotional work, the work associated with handling a family crisis, solitary childbirth work, and family reintegration work.

In Harrison and Laliberté's No Life Like It, the authors attempt to understand the relationship of the wives' work to the military organization. They are interested in how wives' work contributes to the military, how the military makes sure wives' work gets done, and what the overall place of wives' work is within the military's structures and goals. They argue that the military creates work for and relies on the work of military wives.

The normal military career involves 10 - 15 moves. The uprooting associated with moving frequently, and the consequences for the family, is perhaps the most troublesome feature of military wives' experience. One woman I interviewed spoke angrily as she said:

I was so resentful at the military. It wasn't all glory and flowers and banners, moving - because there is a lot of stress with moving. The only other time I experienced such a pain was when my father died. It (the pain of moving) was from the bottom of my throat to the pit of my stomach and it was just wrenching and I had never experienced that before. It was horrible. But unfortunately I as a military wife do not have a choice. I have to pick up and I go, that is part of the program. I don't like it. I find it very interfering and uprooting because there is no stability in having to move every two years and it's really hard on my kids (Military wife, interview, May, 1993).

The stress and pain the woman speaks of can lead to family instability that leaves the women susceptible to other problems. My informant reminds us that beyond the physical work of the move, there is emotional turmoil in relocating. And it may not be simply temporary. It may create family troubles, school and learning difficulties that continue to cause trouble for wives (mothers) to handle. And the women themselves will be

feeling less confident, less capable because of their own stress. Relocation is both constant and erratic. It disorganizes family life and removes any possibility of independence in planning.

Harrison and Laliberté (1994) point out that wives' weak affiliations with the labour market due to frequent moves create vacuums in their lives which make them an ideal reserve army of cheap and volunteer labour on military bases. They claim that military wives do the work that keeps the military institution going. As Harrison and Laliberté have shown, moves are work, which is mostly the responsibility of the wife. According to these authors this extra work "enables the military to extract enhanced loyalty and dependence from wives" (p. 151). The authors say that military wives have a low rate of participation in the labour market as a result of frequent moves. Statistically they assert that 53% of Canadian military wives are at home, as compared to 23% of Canadian women generally (p. 123), and "very few...ever manage to develop themselves through meaningful paid work." (Harrison & Laliberté, 1994, p. 152) The reason wives may not choose to work outside the home, according to Harrison and Laliberté, is that military wives feel compelled to compensate for the destabilizing effects of the members' absences by not seeking paid employment, which can have future consequences for the women. Frequent relocation kills most wives' chances of developing autonomous careers. My informants said that leaving jobs and communities can make them feel unconnected and uncertain about their own futures, and even more dependent on their husband's jobs and the military for security and community. One woman describes the experience:

Moving - careers have been put on hold, jobs have been put on hold, because he's not here and one parent has to be at home. And actually that is one of the big reasons I am not working, because of the inconsistency of having no parents is heart wrenching to the kids. They don't understand. And my career, I was halfway through a course and we abruptly had three weeks notice and we were out of Edmonton and moved here (Fieldnotes, May, 1993).

Through the military practice of frequent relocation, women are pushed back into the military environment, cut off from normal links through employment in the outside world. Moving to a new community can be isolating for a family and many times the military community is even further isolated from the civilian community. By not feeling part of the civilian community, the women become increasingly dependent on the military for their support. By understanding the nature and extent of the work of the military wife we can begin to examine her problems with the military lifestyle and what happens when she encounters these difficulties.

### **Paternalism and Dependency**

To understand the construction of the military wife I am guided by D. Smith's (1987) thinking about 'social relations'. When discussing inquiry she says, "we are in search of conceptual practices with which to explicate the actual social relations disclosed in investigation and analysis" (p. 106). Here, I am searching out relations that create military wives as dependent people and I look at military practices which organize their lives. A number of women I interviewed agreed that the military is paternalistic, although they referred to widely different experiences to explain what they meant by that. And of course, dependency is created in ways that wives may not be fully conscious of. In the next sections I look at some military practices that have the effect of creating dependent or paternalistic relations between the military and military wives. The following two passages show two different ways wives come to understand dependency and paternalism in the military:

You feel protected by the military system. You always feel someone is going to look after you if everything gets bad - that is a dependent attitude. It was definitely encouraged and if you go along with it (the military system) you're OK (Military wife, interview, June, 1993).

Another wife says:

It's sad to see some of the people that the paternalistic attitude has

created. Some people think the military does own their life and is responsible for them. It is a disempowering lifestyle. With the idea of paternalism comes the idea that we'll take care of you - with that idea comes a lack of responsibility for a lot of families. The idea that the military owes me...it's the military's problem. There's no sense of taking control of one's life (Military wife, interview, February, 1994).

There are a variety of military practices that aid in the creation of the military wife as dependent, and teach the women to think in terms of the military's needs, not in terms of their own needs based in everyday experience. This sets the stage for women to experience problems with the military lifestyle.

In the following section I examine these practices more closely to see how a woman marrying a military member becomes a dependent military wife.

### **Kept in the Dark**

Military wives report that they lack sufficient information about the system in which they find themselves living. Because their work is outside the regular flow of orders, memos, and so on, wives must access information indirectly. In order to do their work for the military they need to have information about upcoming moves, deployment dates, and events happening in the community. Wives are completely dependent on their husbands to give them the information they need to navigate the military system. The men may not see the necessity for informing their wives. The reason may be as simple as husbands not understanding the nature of the work the women do in managing the family, as women's work is largely invisible to those not involved. When discussing the notion of work in her own studies D. Smith (1987) says, "we are familiar now with the way in which the concept of work had not been extended in the past to women's work in the home, as housewife" (p. 165). As we have seen, most of the military wife's work is done in the home with her family. In the following passage a woman describes her access to valuable information as dependent on whether or not her husband brings the paperwork containing the information

home to her:

Guys just seem to go past the wastepaper basket and say 'Oh, that's not important' and throw information away. Sixty percent of the time they don't bring anything home, my husband included, he never brings anything home (Military wife, interview, May 1993).

This lack of information from the system increases the women's dependency on their husbands for information about how to live in the military system. The wives I interviewed spoke of their difficulty with the way the military makes decisions. Family members seem like pawns in a chess game, child-like, and subject to parental control. Here a woman talks about her frustrating experiences with the way military makes decisions, which completely organize (and disorganize) the decision making process in her family, and the extent to which the military has authority over her family's life:

I'm doing something and we're waiting for an answer from the military before we make that decision - because what they say will impact the decision we're making. They tell us the answer, we make the decision. Three weeks later they turn around and give us a different answer (Military wife, group interview, April, 1993).

Interfering with decision making in a family removes autonomy. This is also an experience of the paternalism of the military. The women begin to feel that no matter what they decide, the final decision is out of their hands. In the formation of the military wife the military practices discussed in this section serve to re-organize a woman's way of thinking about her life and the life of her family. She may be left feeling uncertain about her own capacity to make decisions and become dependent on the military system for answers.

One instance of a disconcerting kind of organizational experience is what the wives called 'pencilling in' moves for families. A woman describes her experience of being pencilled in for a move: "It means we are slated to go, it's there but it's not carved in stone. They could change their minds up to two weeks prior." (Military wife, group interview, April, 1993) The decision about the move can be changed easily by the military. This

technique of pencilling in the names of families who are expected to move, without consultation and without apparent reason, serves to add to the uncertainty and inconsistency of family life. It fosters a dependency on the military system which leaves the family reliant on the system for answers. Undermining initiative and self-reliance, the military trains its members and their families to follow orders. Paternalism is one side of the equation; dependency is the other.

### **Deployments**

“I have to be in the house for twenty four hours a day and be responsible.”(military wife)

According to the military, “Canada needs a continued strong military, and militarism is an essential service” (Harrison and Laliberté, p. 19). The military’s objective is to maintain a body of fighters for whatever exigency arises requiring the application of force. More recently, this work has been framed in the notion of ‘peacekeeping duties’. An important part of military training is preparedness to deploy at any time, any place. Combat readiness and operational effectiveness are the military’s main preoccupation for which men are required to be away from their families much of the year. For the men, it is the exciting part of the job. Deployment for the wives left at home is quite another matter. One woman explained that if a crisis in the family is going to happen it will often be when the husband is away doing his job. One woman said, “as soon as they (the husbands) go, Murphy’s Law kicks in, Military law it should be called” (Military wife, fieldnotes, May,1993).

Being alone in a new environment with no extended family, no friends and her husband away can leave a woman with nobody to call on except the military system when a problem arises. The wives’ work during absences is intensified. At the top of the list is unrelieved childcare. When their husbands are deployed the women consider themselves ‘married single mothers’, combining the responsibilities of a single parent with the added demands of an episodic marriage relationship. One woman describes her struggle with this

issue in the following way:

I think being a married single mother is difficult because I have to be in the house for twenty four hours a day and be responsible. When is it that I don't have to be responsible? I don't have that option. I'm a married single mother. A civilian single mother has to deal with the same things that we do on a constant basis but she knows that she is the one who does it, she sets herself up so that she paces herself to do it with no abrupt interference of a spouse coming home and then going away. She's in total control and she doesn't have to separate that authority and give it back to somebody and hope to hell he fits in on a temporary basis. We have the extra stress added of being a married single parent (Military wife, interview, May, 1993).

While the wife must accept the level of responsibility of a single parent, she must also be responsive to her husband's needs whenever he is home, which often means a challenge to her authority. She may find she must turn over control whenever the man comes home. Having had to accept routines and orders, he may want to be in charge himself for a while. There is work involved in family reintegration. The wife must therefore be adaptable, but that too has its negative side. Frequent separations and reintegration of the husband can detract from wives' control over their own lives.

A wife talked about how the women could not understand why the men were not able to express what they had experienced upon returning from six months of peacekeeping duties in war-torn Bosnia:

When they (the husbands) came home there was the consistent drinking, the impatience with noise and busyness...it was overwhelming. And we knew not to let them back into our lives expecting it to be the same as if they had just got back from Wainwright because it was a whole different thing and months went by and people were still struggling because the cycle wasn't complete (Military wife, interview, April 1993).

In this case the work involved in reintegrating the family fell on the wife's shoulders, a job she found "overwhelming." She went on to tell me how upon returning from Bosnia her husband was deployed to Wainwright and then directly up north for two months. She said that she and her husband now have two separate lives and that is scary

for them. She said to her husband:

My life does not stop because you are home, it used to stop and I was very isolated because everything was put on hold and that independence, that self-independence that I had was always put on the back burner (Military wife, interview, April, 1993).

All these circumstances: the constant moving; the uncertainty of when moving may arise; the dependency on husbands and the military system for information and decision making about their families; the requirement to leave jobs and connections with a community; the frequent separations when problems inevitably arise; and the experience of being 'married single mothers' can serve to create a military wife who is unprepared for the troubles or problems that arise in families with young children. The combination of military paternalism and the creation of dependency in the military wife sets the stage for military wives to experience troubles with the lifestyle. These are the organizing experiences that create her dependency on the help provided by the military system.

Being dependent on the military system when troubles do arise means the wives must learn how to access help from the system. The following section will show how they go about doing that.

### **Learning the Military's System of Help for Wives**

Another aspect of the work of the military wife is learning to survive military life successfully. She learns she is often alone, especially during births, moves, and other life episodes critical to family life. The military does recognize the importance of having the wives do their work and that wives sometimes need help. But to secure help when absolutely necessary the wives must learn the military 'channels', the procedures they must follow in order to get help from the system. They must learn to identify the assistance available through the military and how to access it. By interacting with military helpers

wives learn that the military's response to family needs for assistance can be less than respectful and many times, not useful. They also learn of repercussions to their husbands' careers, and that their behaviour may cause untoward consequences when they seek help from the system. The following section explicates the instructions wives receive regarding access to helping services in the system.

### **Instructions for Wives**

“Information about procedures and knowledge of the system is a number one priority” (Military wife).

We learned earlier in this chapter that military wives are dependent on their husbands for information about how to live in the military system. The husband also plays an important role in teaching the wife how she can get help from the system when he is away on military duties. This information giving is erratic and dependent on each individual man to impart information to his wife. Three women's stories show how this process can vary. One said, “my husband, when we get posted in somewhere, will talk to the neighbours. He'll also get the numbers of people to contact if there is an emergency and give that to me.” A second woman added, “getting information depends on what unit he is serving with and depends on what it is and if he decides to tell you or not.” The third wife commented, “it depends on if you're married to someone who believes in letting you know - there are some who tell their wives nothing. They leave their wives in the dark” (Military wives, group interview, April, 1993).

The attitude of the husband as the vital link between the military system and the military wife, can be crucial when the woman decides to go to the military to seek help. The husband becomes an arm of the system by teaching and directing. If he does not teach or direct the woman, her uninformed behaviour may result in friction between the couple and the military.

The military wife must learn how to properly ask for help. One of the requests

wives make is to have the privilege of speaking to their husbands by phone during deployment. How she asks may be the key to whether or not she is seen as having a problem which is worthy of assistance. One woman's criteria for reaching for help is as follows:

If there was a dire emergency - I would go (to the system for help), if (my husband) was away - when he goes I always say who can I call if there is an emergency - I need a number. You have to phone and talk to them (someone in the military) and they'll make the decision actually, whether to get hold of your husband or not - whether they feel - if they feel it's a real desperate emergency - usually life or death (Military wife, group interview, April, 1993).

The woman telling this story has learned when she can expect to talk to her husband during deployment. She knows she must have a perception check done by the military authority who ultimately decides whether her problem is worth addressing and how it may be looked at by the system. She must learn how to present both herself and her problem in a manner that will be heard. There are many ways she may learn how to do this. Her husband, other wives, or helpers within the system may teach her. Often she learns by making a mistake.

The paternalistic practice of helpers in the military in deciding what is a problem or not a problem creates further dependency on the system. The decision regarding how to respond to a given situation is taken out of the wives' hands and taken up by someone in the system who decides for them, thus organizing that response to fit the military system. The husband provides the phone number which in turn directs and organizes how the women will ask for help. Wives may want to consult their deployed husbands on a variety of matters of concern. Their experience of asking for help teaches them when it is appropriate to ask to contact their husbands directly and when it is not.

One woman, who volunteers to teach other wives about the military system, explained:

I think that information about procedures and knowledge of the system is a number one priority to go out to people because if they don't know the procedures they can't do it, they are going to make incidental phone calls, they are going to be shut off, they are going to be turned somewhere else and go around in circles (Military wife, interview, May, 1993).

This woman is aware that if the wives call the system for help it is imperative that they know how to follow the procedures the military has in place in relation to wives' problems. For this woman knowing the difference between "an incidental phone call" and a "dire emergency" can become the key to unlocking help from the system. However, learning the difference can be impossible for women under severe stress, as the following excerpt shows. The woman telling the following story spoke sadly to the group about her state of mind when she reached for help in the system after she had learned she was miscarrying her second child:

I called (the padre) when I lost my mind - I couldn't take the pressure anymore. I have a three and a half year old and it was hard to handle my own emotions and the baby and what they were telling me and I just couldn't do it by myself anymore. I said forget it and I talked to some friends and they said "look, it's his baby too and he's got the right to know" (Military wife, group interview, April, 1993).

When a woman is miscarrying her child it is understandable that she would want to share that experience with her husband. Not so for the military wife. The military wife must decide if her request to share the information with her husband is deemed necessary in the eyes of the authorities in the military. The women's decision making is organized by the helper's practice of deciding for the women if they have a problem seen as worthy of attention by the military system. Childbirth is often a time when the wives find themselves alone and dependent on helpers in the system. Learning the military procedure to be followed when a woman needs help can be important when a woman is expecting a child and her husband is deployed. The correct procedure for a pregnant woman is to prepare,

with someone else other than her husband, for the birth of their child. One woman's response to this direction from the military was extremely angry. She spoke sarcastically to the group:

I'm so sorry that I'm pregnant and I've had a difficult pregnancy. The ship my husband was on was not extremely family oriented so I do not rock any boat anymore. I'm really nervous about how it's going to affect my husband (Military wife, group interview, May, 1993).

This woman was experiencing a difficult pregnancy and knew from previous experience that the ship her husband was deployed with was known to be unaccepting of wives' troubles or as she puts it, "not extremely family oriented". She has learned through her experience that she will no longer ask the system for help ("not rock the boat") and that her behaviour when asking for help can have impact on her husband's career. A bad experience in the past teaches her not to ask again.

"How it's going to affect my husband" is a common concern. Repercussions to their husbands' careers is often cited as the reason why women do not approach the system for help. Just what these repercussions are or might be will be discussed later in this chapter.

### **Going Through the Channels**

"If something were to go wrong I would be forced to go through the channels" (Military wife).

With little or no training the military wife is expected to learn how to access help from the system. According to my informants, learning the correct way to access help from the military system involves a procedure known as "learning the channels". The right way to seek help is through the appropriate chain-of-command or proper military channels. The following narrative illustrates one woman's understanding of the proper channels she must follow to receive permission from the military to contact her husband at sea. This is the

woman miscarrying her child whom I introduced earlier in the chapter. The key helpers in the channels have been underlined:

You phone the duty officer and you have to tell him and he's got to go through the channels with MARPAC (Maritime Pacific) finding out where your husband is because they were not in port. My mind was going so fast - everything my husband ever said to me was out of my brain - I couldn't find any papers. I phoned the base operator and I told her I had to get my husband home, he's on a ship and what do I do. She said "well m'am I think you should call the duty officer - I'll connect you". So they had the chaplain call me who was the most ignorant person I ever spoke to in the military. The duty chaplain called me and he was rude and he was ignorant. He kept telling me that I really didn't need my husband home and that it was all in my head, and if the baby died it didn't really matter anyway did it? He said "it's not like you're that far along". Well I'm five months thanks and I was miscarrying. I nearly lost the baby and my husband was in the middle of the ocean. That chaplain really made it hurt - I hate even phoning my husband, it took me days after getting out of the hospital before I even called (Military wife, group interview, April, 1993).

This story not only reveals the proper channels the women must learn in order to access help, but also reveals important clues to the way women are treated when they do seek help. This woman faced much uncertainty, particularly not knowing where her husband was when she needed him. She couldn't find the directives he had provided her with, and when she tried to follow the proper channels her problem was treated lightly, even contemptuously, by an unsympathetic helper. Through this experience of following the proper procedure she has learned to be cautious before asking to call her husband when he is deployed. This is how military wives learn that the assistance they are likely to receive may be less than respectful and not always useful.

### **Repercussions**

"Every single thing you do reflects on your husband" (Military wife).

Some of my informants were of the opinion that repercussions happen to husbands' careers if a woman does something wrong in her work as a military wife. These

repercussions take different forms, he may be passed over for a promotion, posted somewhere he has not requested, or even charged by the military. The military practice of punishing a member for the behaviour of his wife is well known by all military wives. The women talked of “wrecking” their husbands’ careers. The notion of repercussions becomes a determinant in how women will seek help from the system while the systematic practices of reprimand or punishment to the military member reinforces the wives’ compliance with the military agenda. While husbands play a key role in educating the wives in their work, oftentimes a wife’s mistake while accessing help from the system (as the woman in the previous story felt she had) teaches her the importance of the husband’s instructions on correct behaviour. The following stories illustrate how this works:

I always worked with people where you called your boss by his first name and I remember I knew people before I met my husband and now all of a sudden because I was married to him I wasn't supposed to address them by their first name because they were of a higher rank. I'm sorry, as far as I'm concerned it was just 'so and so'. He was reprimanded that time because I addressed the chief at the time by his first name. I didn't realize everything I did, he could be reprimanded for. It never dawned on me, but from that time on it's something I knew (Military wife, group interview, April, 1993).

I was warned because there was another lady (the wife of another sailor) who wrote bad cheques and her husband was pulled into the office. My husband said “don't ever do that to me” (Military wife, group interview, April, 1993).

Women learn by their mistakes that they must be strong and try to prevent emergency situations. Ultimately, by the reprimanding of their husbands for their own behaviour, the women learn that they must behave accordingly.

Wives in the military community guide and help each other. A closely connected community such as the military provides its own positive and negative sanctions for compliance with accepted behaviours. Wives may also ostracize a woman who does not conform to the rules. A room full of women agreed with the one who made the following observations on seeking help. She was extremely angry as she spoke the following words:

There's a bunch of women out there who have screwed it for the rest of us so that if you did have an emergency, they've already wrecked it. They've called for some dumb reason or they really didn't want their husband to go to sea so something happened. Then some of us who do have the odd emergency are afraid to go through the system because it's been so badly abused (Military wife, group interview, May 1993).

It becomes difficult to decide if your personal trouble is a “dumb reason” or a real “emergency” and when to take action on behalf of your family. This story suggests that the women organize themselves and police themselves effectively through group condemnation of the women who “wreck it “ for the rest. The correct and proper way to have a problem and to have it dealt with by the military system is firmly in place in the minds and actions of the women who ‘know’ the right way to seek help. They need to keep themselves and the other women in line so they don't "wreck" their chances of being looked after in the military system.

Even if women say they aren't sure that their actions affect their husbands' careers adversely, the possibility that they might is a strong deterrent on their behaviour. For instance, one woman who disagreed with the others about repercussions said:

That's a myth, though (repercussions). If I do make a move, it - well I don't know if it's a myth - I don't know that it will wreck my husband's career. That's what made me separate myself from him, maybe that's it. I don't let emergencies happen, or at any rate I would never call (the system for help) because it's in the back of my mind that I'll wreck his career (Military wife, group interview, April, 1993).

Here, we can see a woman's consciousness being altered mid-speech as the information in the back of her mind serves to organize her response. She is realizing that fear of repercussions is a strong deterrent to seeking help. Another woman's explanation of repercussions shows her uncertainty about wives' responsibility in their husband's careers:

There's not supposed to be (repercussions) - sometimes there is - it depends on the CO (Commanding Officer) or the Captain or the

Divisional Officer. You can have a great CO and a great Captain and a lousy Divisional Officer (Military wife, group interview, April, 1993).

The ambiguous quality of the notion of repercussions serves to confuse and leave the women feeling uncertain about the effect they may have on their husbands' career and in consequence, their own livelihood.

From the preceding data excerpts we can see the anxiety women feel about stepping out of line. This anxiety serves to organize the women into acting in certain ways. This benefits the military by keeping the husband ready and effective, without being burdened by family responsibilities on the job. This is best accomplished if his wife is behaving and doing her work in ways that the military deems appropriate.

### **Military Responses to Wives' Requests for Help**

“You follow the channels and then they don't actually help you”  
(Military wife).

We now turn our attention to the actual experience of some women who, having learned the channels and 'proper' methods of asking for help, have approached the military system in times of need. Following the instructions on the proper way to access help should ensure the women's needs are met; this is not always the case. Sometimes the help is disrespectful and hurtful. The women may be treated like children - not believed or taken seriously in their attempts to get help. The following story illustrates this treatment:

I needed to get in contact with my husband, I was very sick. I was told if you ever have to get your husband, phone the padre. I did that and he said why don't you just wait until the ship comes in. He (the padre) didn't inform me at all. He (my husband) came home to a wife who was in zombieland, grandma was looking after the kids and he had no idea what was going on. This is what they say. They say if you ever need them this is what you do - and you do it (follow the channels) and then they don't actually help you (Military

wife, group interview, April, 1993).

This wife had learned the proper way to access her husband but when she tried, the reply was not satisfactory. Not only are the women sometimes treated like children by the military helpers, they may believe they are being accused of faking problems, as the following suggests. The woman relating this story spoke with disbelief about how she had been treated:

I was in the hospital four or five days after I had a twelve pound baby. I couldn't stand up without passing out. We live in a row house with fifteen stairs and the kids are upstairs - I could barely move. He (my husband) was scheduled to go to sea, they weren't doing anything that spectacular but they required him. The padre had to come into the hospital to check me out. I'd already passed out on him once after they took the IV out of me. He then had to check out to make sure I wasn't faking. They let my husband stay home, but when he went back to work, boy was he in big shit then (Military wife, group interview, April, 1993).

The fact that the padre was sent to check on this woman, left her with the impression that her problem was not perceived as a problem. The job is considered more important than her family or her health. A military authority makes the decisions, and, as she discovered, getting help means the husband may suffer repercussions at work. According to the story, this husband did suffer repercussions when he went back to work, although the woman did not go into detail. This story points to the uncertainty involved in the life of the military wife which serves to make women unsure of themselves. Even when they try to go through the proper channels they may still be 'wrong'.

Help may also be taken away arbitrarily and without notice or consultation with the women involved, as in the next woman's experience. She was concerned about her reintegration work when her husband returned from peacekeeping duties in Bosnia. While he was overseas she had been involved with a support group, provided by the military. When he returned she was dismayed to find that the support was withdrawn. She was surprised at the way she and the other women had been dismissed by the military:

The support groups and all the de-briefings we had over the process of six months stopped cut and dried when the guys came back. Our room was gone, the support systems were no longer there, you couldn't go to the building, you couldn't stop in for coffee and just mingle. The ties were cut, severed very abruptly and within a week that building was cleaned out; the furniture was gone. It was like a violation of your other self in a way, because that was a safety room for us (Military wife, interview, May, 1993).

Through similar experiences the women learn that the system supports them when the men are deployed because the wives are needed for their work on the homefront. The man is then able to concentrate exclusively on his job. He is expected to take over when he returns home. The women's need for support on the return of their husbands is not heard.

The women's input is often ignored or at least not solicited. In addition they are sometimes encouraged to believe their problem is one of psychiatric interest and of an individualized nature. The following words from two military wives emphasize these points. One said, "every time my husband's gone to the military social worker they said it was my fault and I should go see a psychologist." Another added, "they (military helpers) always make the man see them first. Then they can come back and say it's your fault and you should get some help for it without ever seeing you." (referring to herself) (Military wives, group interview, 1993)

The military helpers' practice of seeing the military member without seeing his wife teaches the women that the help is not for them. They are not seen as being involved in their own family problem. They may also be perceived as the cause of the problem. This process of individualizing the women's problems and the idea that they are the ones who need psychiatric help is reinforced in these women's experiences with military helpers. Their experience of life in the military and all that entails is not taken into account when they are seeking help.

When military wives are seen by helpers they find there are certain standard responses the military is able to provide and that these responses are not necessarily useful.

They find that what is needed in the way of help is not available. For example, one woman who is a volunteer in the community and who teaches other wives how to access help, told me why she would never approach the system herself if she had a problem:

A couple of years ago a social worker with the military educated me in how to use the system to my advantage, so I knew a lot of ins and outs because of what he told me. But when a crisis situation happened...the thing that blocked me from asking for help in the system was knowing that what I needed was not there. So I had to go outside the military system because I knew the help wasn't available. It did not exist (Military wife, interview, May, 1993).

Women who do go to the system are directed to what is available, not necessarily what they believe they need. One woman explained in the following way:

The priority should be what this woman needs and not what this other person (the helper) thinks is best for that woman. The system does work if you have the information and the knowledge to use it. And the availability. There isn't anywhere to go to talk to somebody and have real concrete guidance if your child has been sexually assaulted or if your husband is beating the hell out of you. They don't have a one-on-one resource information process. If I go to the padre, because I am an abused spouse, they don't often say to me there are abuse support groups, there are victim services, you have gone through a terrible trauma. There is no connection to things that are already in place in the civilian community that work (Military wife, interview, May, 1993).

Another woman also recognized the practice of military helpers providing help that is already pre-determined:

If you ask a direct question you get an evasive answer because instead of saying "I don't know maybe we can come up with a solution", you get a really vague answer and the subject is automatically changed to things that are already there. When a person is asking for something and they don't have the skills to pinpoint what they are looking for they don't hear what that person is saying. The priority should be what this person needs and not what this other person (the helper) thinks is the best for that person (Military wife, group interview, April, 1993).

Here, again we see the woman is directed to services that are "already there" while

the woman's knowledge of what she might need to solve her problem is not considered. The wives learn that their interests are not being served when they seek help. Rather, the interests of the military are central, as the following story suggests. The woman who had almost miscarried her baby while her husband was at sea explains why she thinks her welfare is important to the military:

Actually I'm really nervous about the trip coming up. The way it's always been with my husband, like especially right now with the problems with my baby, the most important thing to the ship was that I was OK, that I was being taken care of. Because if I wasn't my husband would worry and he is no good to his job (Military wife, group interview, April, 1993).

In understanding the important role she plays in keeping her husband functional in his job, a job that provides for her and her children's survival, the woman becomes part of the help accessing organization. All this must be seen as the work of the military wife. It includes learning to see the importance of the military mission, which is reinforced by her husband, military directives, other wives and the military helping personnel. If she learns the job, she must accept that the military reacts to her with the best interests of the military in mind, not the interests of the woman and her family.

## **Conclusion**

“No matter what you say about not being in the military - you are”  
(Military wife).

This chapter has provided a first hand look, mainly from their own words, at how women are constructed into 'military wives'. They learn about their identity as military wives from the military's perspective and how to think of themselves through the messages they receive. Wives are constructed as dependent and child-like while actually being expected to be capable of managing a family by themselves and catering on demand to the needs of the military husband who moves in and out of the home. The military establishes

itself as a paternalistic organization that takes care of its members and their families, while conversely thwarting families' efforts at being independent. Yet military wives are expected to handle troubles independently, because doing so is central to their work for the military. Even though their work as wives is essential to the well performing military establishment, the wives find the assistance offered by the military difficult to understand and to access. Occasionally they need some sort of help, and, too often that help is unavailable, inappropriate and given not on their own terms but on those of the military.

## Chapter Four

### Military Help for Military Wives

In this chapter I examine the help that is officially offered to military wives by military padres and social workers. How the help is organized determines how *helpful* it is. Previously, I have argued that wives work for the military. Here I extend the argument, showing that the military helpers' work is also directed and organized to benefit the military, not primarily to help the wives.

#### Padres<sup>8</sup>

When a military wife needs her husband during a family crisis, she often approaches the padre. The following description of the padre services in the Canadian military is taken from the military's own Study Report on Family Support (National Defence Headquarters, Director General Personnel Services/Family Support Program Project, Ottawa, 1989)

In the Canadian Forces there are personnel in various disciplines who deal with crisis situations and/or provide counselling to families. There are chaplains (a minimum of one Protestant and one Roman Catholic) regular force or civilian, assigned to each base. Chaplains provide some social counselling services to families as well as spiritual counselling. Personnel who are to be married in a Canadian Forces chapel are required by the ecclesiastical authorities of most of the major denominations to attend a pre-marital counselling course (p. 28).

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<sup>8</sup> The wives in the study refer to padres or chaplains, using the term padre most often, so I follow that practice here.

The padre is directed in his work by Canadian Forces regulations, known as Canadian Forces Administration Orders (CFAOs),<sup>9</sup> in the following way: “A chaplain shall promote the moral and spiritual welfare of all persons on the base or other unit.”(Section 33.03 -- Religious Ministrations) A Padre explains, “our mandate is to provide spiritual and emotional support to members and their families.” This mandate appears to be extremely elastic and, as we shall see, the padre plays an integral role in managing military families. The women I interviewed were unanimous in choosing the padre as their first source of help, should they require it. Two women in a group interview said, “I’d call the padre first before I’d call the social worker. There’s not that element of trust (for social workers)”, and “We were always told by our husbands, if you have to get a hold of me, phone the padre” (military wives, group interview, April, 1993).

As we saw in the previous chapter, wives are taught to be attuned to their responsibilities for their husband’s career. This concern also extends to determining where the women might seek help in the system. Wives learn early in their careers that asking the padre for help is supposed to mean there is no formal record kept of their problem. A military wife of 27 years explained the relation of wives to the padre in the following way:

It (contacting the padre) was the accepted thing. If there was a family problem you went through the person who was in the military. There was no other avenue. The only avenue the wife had was to go through the padre - that was the only way you could bypass the system. If you went through your husband’s boss that would affect his career, but you could go to the padre and that wasn’t supposed to be on record (Military wife, interview, June, 1993).

Yet going to the padre was not completely reliable for the women who needed help. In the next passage a woman related the unpredictable nature of her experience of receiving help from the padre:

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<sup>9</sup> Canadian Forces Administrative Orders are explained in further detail in Footnote #11

It just depends on who the padre is. There are some really nice ones out there and there are some out there who fail to have any empathy whatsoever; and we always get those ones (Military wife, group interview, April, 1993).

### **The Mandate of the Padre**

#### **Adjusting the Wife**

Besides the subjective differences between padres, there are more systemic difficulties. Padres are part of the military organization and have an organizational view of military wives. One of their tasks is to help *adjust* women to their jobs in the military. Even before a woman becomes a military wife, experiences problems with the lifestyle, and needs help, she may have contact with the padre. She may be required to take a marital preparation course. The padre teaches the woman that she must adjust to the military way of life. One padre mentions this need to adjust as a unique feature of the life of the military wife:

The military wife is a unique wife because they live in a different world than an ordinary wife. In the military she must be able to adjust more or have the potential ability to adjust to the world of her husband (Padre, interview, May, 1993).

The practice of holding marriage preparation courses enables the padre to begin to initiate women into the military system. A padre explains in detail what is expected of a woman who intends to marry a military man. He highlights for us how he instructs the women and initiates them into the military system:

I always challenge the wife-to-be, you are marrying a sailor and therefore from that point of view the bride-to-be knows very well that most of the time a sailor is gone. I always remind the bride, you are not only marrying a sailor, you are also marrying the structure wherein your sailor works. You are not only entering his life but you are also becoming a part of the navy's family. The wife should be able to realize this is not an eight-hour (a day) job. It is a service that the boyfriend has been in for a long time. Because her life is affected every time the ship sails she is entering two communities and there are two adjustments there, the adjustment to be with the sailor and the adjustment to be with the demands of the military

family, as structured by the military. Aside from that adjustment, there is an adjustment in terms of language and there is a need to adjust in terms of the role of the wife. She becomes not only the wife but at the same time she becomes mother and father and takes on more responsibilities. With all these changes and adjustments, from a civilian world to a military world, without a basic orientation I am sure there will be confusion in terms of the basic question of now who runs our life. Is it the military or us, the husband and wife (Padre, interview, May, 1993).

Here the padre offers a litany of the demands and adjustments involved in becoming a successful military wife. He covers the demands of deployment, marrying the “structure” and joining the “military family”. He expounds on the demands she will experience as she becomes part of the military family by informing the wife-to-be of the dual parenting role she will be expected to undertake and the sole parenting she will perform as a military wife. He is very blunt in letting her know that the military will now run her life, as it runs the life of her husband-to-be. He teaches the wives-to-be how important it is that they understand the difference between the notion of being *in service* versus the notion of *an eight hour job*. This pre-marital contact with the padre is often the only orientation the women get into the military organization. By performing marriage preparation courses, the padre becomes an extension of the instructions and directives of the military in the creation of the military wife. The padre’s job is to introduce the women to what it means to become a military wife before they enter the marriage. The ability for the women to adjust to the military structure was a prominent and repeated concept in my interviews with military helpers. Helpers seemed to feel that, once the women are sufficiently adjusted into the system, they can then be supported by this same system.

### **Compassion at a Price**

The padre’s work with families is part of his work as spiritual counsellor. He sees it as compassionate work. Here, one padre explains the compassionate nature of his job:

In the military if your wife is sick, the padre will send you (the husband) home to attend to your wife and kids and I really find it

compassionate in spite of the military structure. I'm here to listen and extend the compassionate nature of the military. I find that, because they are in the service, the military is very compassionate. I don't find any institution that says "your father died I'll send you for two weeks off", because an ordinary institution is based on an eight hour job. We can be very compassionate with you but (still) if we need you at twelve o'clock midnight you are going to be there. You scratch my back and I'll scratch your back, (it's) a give and take relationship (Padre, interview, May, 1993).

The reciprocal nature of the Padre's compassionate work and the member's service contract is another aspect of military life the padre attempts to convey to the women. Compassion comes at a price - he says that we (the system) will be compassionate in times of crisis as long as the military member and the military wife know the system organizes their lives, and remains in charge. The padre also offers the added comfort that there may not be repercussions to the husband's career if the wife accesses the padre for help. One padre reinforced this view of the relation between compassion and authority:

We have access to the Commanding Officer (CO) because of compassionate reasons. We don't need appointments to see the CO, we can knock on his door if it is urgent. It is fast and quick for us. We have all the power because we have all the access. We don't have to go through the chain of command. We can break the chain of command because of the urgency of the situation. But, if we brought them (the husbands) home for every problem, there would be no one left to do the job (Padre, interview, May 1993).

Here we see that compassion is meted out in relation to the organization's needs as the first priority. The job is given precedence over the actual situations women may be facing in their day-to-day lives.

### **The Padre's Work**

One padre I interviewed explains how he works in relation to military wives:

If the wife is sick and needs her husband, the first question (we ask) is, can she carry on life without the husband? We call the doctor and usually they say they can't give us information about a patient. We can't assess the situation to see if it is a life or death situation without the information. We get permission from the wife to call the doctor to tell the doctor we need this information (Padre, interview,

May, 1993).

Here we can follow the padre's *work process*; after taking a call for help he must assess the situation, which means obtaining medical information and then making a decision. Only at this point is intervention considered. Usually the wife is asking the padre to contact her husband with a message, or asking for him to be returned home to the family. The padre assesses, on military terms, whether or not the wife can carry on performing her work at home without her husband. She, however, has already decided that the solution to her problem is that she and her family need her husband home for a crisis situation. The padre bases his assessment on the situation. Is it "life or death?"; a concept based on the official knowledge of the military, not on the wife's story and views. The padre explains what the notion of 'life or death' entails:

"Unless there's a death you are not coming back" is what the men are told on the ship. They don't need a man beside them, women have been giving birth for years. The husband may come home if there are complications during childbirth or there is a death in the family (Fieldnotes, Community meeting, June, 1993).

The padre must find evidence in women's lives/stories of how they meet his criteria for intervention. He can act in life or death situations only. For the purposes of examining what a woman may experience when the padre offers help we will re-visit (Chapter 2) the story of the woman in hospital who was visited by the padre. The woman said, "the padre had to come into the hospital to check me out. I'd already passed out on him once after they took the IV out of me. He had to check out to make sure I wasn't faking" (Military wife, group interview, April, 1993). The padre's practice of assessment is perceived by this woman as confirming that she is not faking her illness or its severity. The padre is directed in his work to ascertain whether this is a life or death situation, on which he can legitimately act, within his terms of reference (spiritual/emotional support and compassion). The padre assesses her situation for the military but at the expense of what is actually happening for the woman with a new baby. This situation may not be life or death in his

perception but she believes she needs her husband's support. This is one instance where the military's helping system cannot help the woman in her time of trouble. The padre's assessment is not based on the actualities of the woman's life, but rather on the pre-conceived notion of a life or death situation. While individual padres may be helpful and supportive, their discretion and their ability to intervene are constrained by military rules. These rules and categories objectify women and their troubles to the extent that the padres' assessment may have little if anything to do with women's actual situations.

When the padre assesses whether a situation is life or death or whether the wife can manage without her husband, he has a pre-conceived concept in his mind. Here, the padre tells what informs his work practices, in fact, keeping the member in his operational environment:

We (the padre) would go and assess the situation, our first responsibility is to keep him (the service member) in his operational environment. That's our first responsibility. We are training for a conflict situation really (Padre, interview, May, 1993).

By "operational environment" the padre means keeping the member operational in his job. The operational environment exists wherever the military member is deployed. Once it has been established by the padre that the wife is, or is not, in a life or death situation and it has been determined whether or not to take the military member out of his 'operational environment', the padre then decides alternatives to bringing the member home. A padre describes how he goes about making this decision:

If there are ways to build a support system around the wife that will allow her to carry on, we will do that. She would obviously know for some time that this baby's due or that he (the husband) is going to sea. It wouldn't have been an emergency situation where she goes into labour. If there are some complications, we are talking about something entirely different (Padre, interview, May, 1993).

As the padre says, his first responsibility is keeping the military member in his working environment. Unless there are complications, the padre will attempt to "build a

support system around the wife". He must assess the woman's situation while supporting the military work of the husband. I contend that these military concepts serve to organize the help the padre will provide for the wife. We see that as the assessment is carried out, it is not done with the woman's welfare as first priority, but rather for the sake of the military organization.

In the padre's talk we are introduced to the military notion of a "support system" for the woman when her husband is away. This activity of providing support is all important in keeping the woman functioning without interfering with her husband's service to the military. The support system may consist of a referral to the Military Family Resource Centre, an attempt to draw on the extended family for help, or referral to an outside civilian agency.

### **Work Practices that Organize the Help**

"Padres always make the man or whoever's in the military see them first" (Military wife).

When a husband is deployed, the wife may contact the padre directly, but if the husband is home a different scenario takes place. If the member is not deployed and the couple is experiencing difficulties, the approach of the padre is different. One of the criticisms of military professionals, explored in Chapter Two, is that the women are not consulted by the helpers; their husbands are deemed the only source of relevant information regarding family situations. This reflects my experience with the padre I consulted during marriage difficulties. A padre, describing his work with military wives, confirmed this practice:

I interview first and foremost the member, mostly the sailors. The husband tells me "this is how I see my wife at this point in time". Underlying that is the problem. I find out what the military member says about the wife, for example if their marriage is on the rocks. Usually I interview the guy who comes to me. He would say it was a mistake, I married young or expectations failed (Padre, interview, May, 1993).

This military practice excludes women from the consultation. Troubles are diagnosed in a way that is devastating to the women involved, who already understand they are not of top importance in the organization. Omitted from the process, wives are offered services from the padre that may not be in their best interest. A wife elaborates:

One thing I always found hard was they say "phone the padre". A lot of times it's the padre who's military first and then he's a padre. I don't think that's right. I've had two run-ins with two different padres and as far as I'm concerned that would be the last person I would call unless I had a personal dealing with him and I knew that it would be useful. I knew one (I trusted) but when they switched over I knew I would not go because he (the new one) was definitely military first (Military wife, group interview, April, 1993).

Being "military first" and working in the interest of the military is the way the women have come to understand the way the padre works - for the system, - not for the women. One padre I interviewed was clear about that. He said he conducted his work with wives in the interest of the military operation, not in the interest of the women.

### **The Padre and the Military**

It is important for the women to believe they have found a helper who can cut through the chain-of-command and take action on their behalf. However, once the padre has determined whether or not a situation is worth acting on, there are certain procedures he must follow before he can take action. He does not make decisions in isolation. He is part of the military system and is dependent on other parts of this system. A retired padre remembers:

I can't remember a situation where I couldn't be of some help in some way but I think a lot depended at the time on who you were working with in the administration. If you had a good relationship with the administrative officer and the social worker then it was easier to get things done. But if there was any animosity there it really hindered your relationship in getting things done. The only reason you couldn't help people was because the system wasn't flexible enough (Padre, interview, June, 1993).

Another padre spoke of the ambivalent nature of the system:

I go to the CO and that might be OK. The CO might listen to the recommendation and take the risk (to follow my recommendation). It is dependent on the CO's personality. And it is in how you approach the CO. If you approach the CO in a bad mood it can be bad for the Padre. Maybe it is just the wrong timing (Padre, interview, May, 1993).

Sometimes the padre is frustrated by the arbitrary way a problem is handled once it is out of his hands and into the system, where it is no longer his decision. The padre who related the following story laughed as he recalled it and offered the story as evidence of the lack of control he felt in trying to help some families:

One of the first things I encountered (on the base) was a lot of hanky panky going on between two families, the husbands and wives. They wanted to trade partners and stay living on the base. They wanted to trade kids and everything. I brought this up at the administrative level and the first thing I know one family was posted to Halifax and the other to British Columbia. The problem had gone through administration at the base level, and then to Command for action. It didn't take long in a case like that and it didn't solve anything (Padre, interview, June, 1993).

The padre is dependent on the relations in the military between himself and the CO, himself and the social workers, and himself and base administration. He is part of a web of relations that determine how the problems of military wives are solved. These relations must be taken into account with every decision he makes and they, not he, organize his ultimate response to military wives.

In this section I have shown that the padre's work is subject to military control and is directed by the military notions of life or death situation and operational environment. Work practices, such as assessment and interviews, often exclude the wife from the process of problem-solving carried out by the padre. The wives are correct to be sceptical of "who's side he's on" and whether or not he is "military first". The military controls the help provided through the padre service; it is not driven by the needs or concerns of the

women.

The padre's job is to orient and adjust (through marriage seminars and personal counselling) the women into their role of military wife. Padres thus work for the military as quasi-instructors. They also identify people who may be in need of support systems. Under the mandate of spiritual intervention and compassion doors open easily for the padre. He does not have to go through the chain-of-command. However, whether or not reliable and objective action ensues relies on good personal working relations. Often help is predicated on whether or not the padre is a compassionate person or whether he gets along well with the CO and the social worker. His help is contingent on these factors.

### **Military Social Workers**

“A military social worker? - there's always been sort of a suspicion around them” (Military wife).

If a military wife needs help she may access the services of the military social workers. The mandate and responsibilities of social workers within the Canadian military are as follows:

The only support branch with an equal mandate for both military members and families within the Canadian Forces is Social Work Services. Social Work officers are trained to assess and treat a wide variety of problems such as emotional difficulties. Social Work officers' tasks involve administrative activities such as pre-deployment and compassionate posting assessments and information and referral services to the local and civilian community (Study Report on Family Support, p. 28).

### **The Mandate of Military Social Workers**

“I just assumed that the social workers are for the guys and not for the women” (Military wife).

While some wives felt the padres were not a reliable source of help, the social

workers were considered even less so. The military wives I consulted were of the opinion that most wives do not even realize the military social workers are available to them. One woman said, "If there was some more information about the social workers and what they do it would be helpful." Even if they know about them, wives may not approach the military social worker owing to, as one wife expressed it, "fear of the unknown and then how's it going to affect my husband." Two military wives discussed their knowledge of the social work services offered by the military in the following way:

I didn't even realize there was a social worker until my husband had to do a screening for Alert. I just assumed that the social workers are for the guys and not for the women. I just finished twenty five years in the service and I'm having to learn that wives really existed and they have problems. This mothers' group is helping me, but I never thought of the social workers as being there for the wives either (Military wife, group interview, April, 1993).

and

The structure of the social worker within the military to my understanding is that the members have priority. Members are the priority. They have crisis teams for members when there is a devastating act within their job. They have clinical workers for the members. They are recommended to social workers through their own personal growth programs on the ships or otherwise (Military wife, group interview, April 1993).

While the women rarely mentioned military social workers as a resource they might access in times of need, they seemed to be aware of the power and influence social workers exert in the system. One woman expressed it this way, "There's always been this spooky aura around them - this real power to veto things." Here we see a contradiction between the military documents' explanation of the services of the military social workers available to military wives, and the wives' experiences, illustrated in the following statement, "I just assumed that the social workers are for the guys and not for the women - I just assumed it was for the members."

A military social worker explains why the women may not be informed of his

services,

There are two things involved here, one is we've (social work services) traditionally been very small. If you advertise the services and really become public with the services you very quickly get to the point where you can't cope and it almost becomes unmanageable. I experienced that in ..... where we really went out and pushed the service and it got to a point where it was four weeks to get an appointment. Quite literally you were working at seven in the morning and booking people every forty five minutes until six at night. So the service is not a very public service (Military social worker, interview, December, 1993).

The social worker's description of keeping the service fairly quiet and unadvertised may be why the women are not informed of their services. (However, according to the military, the military social workers are supposed to be looking after any military families who need them.) A military social worker explained his job in the following way:

Our primary job, and we have a lot of resources to do this, is to support military families as opposed to specifically military spouses. We include them in that network and so the military wife has every entitlement to come here (the social work office) and use the services. They do not have to go through the chain of command and they do not have to be concerned about it going back to the Commanding Officer (Military social worker, interview, December, 1993).

### **Social Work Practices of Knowing and Intervening**

In this section I argue that the social work knowledge frame with which the military social worker derives his/her practice techniques does not acknowledge the military wives' knowledge of their own everyday experience. Rather, the knowledge about military wives is socially organized using social work concepts and techniques, and a military perspective. This is a practice that feminists have criticized as oppressive to women; D. Smith (1987) claims that professional practice may be oppressive and that professional knowledge is part of the ruling relations of contemporary society. She says, "the making and dissemination of the forms of thought we make use of to think about ourselves and our society are part of the relations of ruling and hence originate in positions of power" (p. 19). It is my

contention that the power the military institution holds over military wives exists in the social relations of the padres and the social workers who intervene with the women when they have experienced a problem in their work for the military. To understand how social work might get diverted to meet military needs, I will look more closely at how military social workers use professional knowledge when intervening in women's lives. A professionally trained social worker can apply a number of 'interventions' to a list of problems. This skill comes from professional training.

Social workers become knowers of a specific body of knowledge learned in social work training. About this type of knowledge D. Smith says:

Objectified bodies of knowledge embedded in discursive organizations are *known* by the members of the relevant discourse. Through processes of controlled training, those members bear a body of knowledge externalized in texts; they become its knowers(p. 84).

The systematically developed knowledge Smith refers to is relied upon in social work education to create professionals in the field. Compton and Galloway<sup>10</sup>(1989) tell us about this process in their education of social workers, "the central and distinguishing mark of a profession is the ability of the professional person, through an active thinking process, to convert knowledge into professional services that are tailored to the unique requirement of the client" (p. 89). The authors define the knowledge they refer to in the following way, "knowledge...is information about the world and its qualities; about people and their interrelationships. When we consider knowledge we are concerned about truth" (p. 90). Social workers are taught to place value on pre-conceived knowledge to guide them in their

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<sup>10</sup> The text used in this analysis is Social Work Processes written by Compton and Galloway, the text I studied in my undergraduate program in 1991 at the University of Victoria. I was curious to know if the same theory was being taught in 1995. Investigation at the campus bookstore turned up two texts being used in the 1995 undergraduate program. Both contain similar theory to the Compton and Galloway text. They are: *Social Work Practice: Bridges to Change*, and *Social Work Practice: A Generalist Approach*.

practice. Again Compton and Galloway direct students by stating, “our knowledge base tells us that there are certain skills necessary for dealing with problems effectively and we want to know if the client possesses these or is able to use them”(p. 446). In an attempt to identify client skills the social worker is taught to use certain social work techniques to guide their practice. They learn to practice interventions based in social work theory, “interventive theory consists of formulations about the etiology or causes of a phenomenon and the effects of different kinds of experience on the course of the phenomenon” (p. 93).

Military social workers are not only trained in social work practice but are also trained by the military to carry out the duties of military officers. When they help military families they provide a blend of military knowledge and social work practice. A social worker explains:

I am a senior officer and if I call someone and say I want to see you - you better come over - now they can say no - and if they say no - I say I'll call your XO (Executive Officer) and sort it out. That's particularly the case with things like support payments or not following court orders and if they are not dealing with their families properly (Military social worker, interview, December, 1993).

Here we see the authority inherent in the military social worker's position and his use of that authority to practice social work with families. Another social worker describes his practice method from a social work perspective and points out differences between himself and his colleague:

He (the other military social worker) most often does behavioural based interventions. He is structurally-behaviourial based. I am a little more eclectic in my approach than he is. I see that I have some kind of expertise to look at problems, identify problems and coach them to affect some interventions - have a better life (Military social worker, interview, January, 1994).

Here we see a social worker incorporating social work knowledge into his practice. Concepts which are derived from social work theory comprise the techniques of intervention with clients. One of these techniques is assessment. One social work education

text explains:

The purpose of assessment is to reach an understanding of problem, client and situation so that one can construct a plan to solve or alleviate the problem. The ultimate purpose of assessment is to contribute understanding necessary for appropriate planning (Compton & Galloway, 1989, p. 443).

Assessment joins together social work knowledge and technique to plan a solution to the client's situation. As Compton and Galloway describe it:

What must be determined in assessment is the applicability of this generalized knowledge to the particular situation of individual clients in their unique situations and environments (Compton & Galloway, 1989, p. 446).

Guided by the Canadian Forces Administrative Order from Ottawa, their military officer training (all military social workers have had officer training), and social work practice knowledge, one military social worker explains his work in the following way:

We do a lot of assessment and referral. We are not immune to the statistic that people come in for therapy once. We have the expertise to look at problems, identify the problems and coach them to effect some interventions - have a better life. There are specific behavioral things we can implement - communications - we can look at the emotions involved. This is all done within the confines of social work interventions, the confines of the counselling paradigm (Military social worker, interview, January, 1994).

Here we see the social worker describing the social work concepts with which he frames his practice. The social worker practices assessment when a military wife or couple approach him with a problem.

In another worker's opinion, working with military wives often involves problems in 'coping' with military life. Whether or not a military wife can succeed in the military is viewed by the social worker from the perspective of coping as is evidenced in the following segment:

Ninety per cent of spouses cope extremely well, 10% don't cope. 90% have short term difficulties that are treatable. There are

problems if you are dealing with people who are borderline people, from a coping perspective, with those kinds of traits. Now if you have people who can cope well, they are not as traumatic. There are many many people in our organization who get a regular pay cheque, who have regular involvement, who would not get jobs in the civilian community. They would be the marginal people. So you have spouses in the military whose spouses would be marginal and may not be employable outside the military. There are stresses and strains. The other side of that is there's a guaranteed income on a long term basis, a lot of security they wouldn't have outside the military environment based on their academic and social background, so it is an interesting dichotomy (Military social worker, interview, December, 1993).

The social worker draws our attention to the reciprocal nature of the relationship where the “marginal” family gets a regular pay cheque in return for the “stresses and strains” of the military lifestyle. The social worker views military wives’ problems in terms of coping with military life, rather than on individual case scenarios. Categorizing the women according to their ‘coping’ ability is part of social work training:

An understanding of the concepts of stress, coping and crisis is an important part of the knowledge base of social work practice. We need to understand what generalized coping resources of the client are and how these resources are generally used (Compton and Galloway, 1989, p. 150).

By assessing military wives in the frame of coping ability the military social workers build an expert view of military wives that relies on both professional and organizational skills and that makes wives into the ‘object’ of designated social work interventions. I argue that the social work knowledge frame with which the social worker derives his/her practice techniques does not consider the women as knowers of their everyday experience. Knowledge about military wives is socially organized using social work concepts and techniques and the military’s own perception of the lives of military wives. There are other social work knowledge frames from which social workers can derive practice techniques. A different way of practicing social work will be discussed in the next chapter.

### **Military Policy That Organizes Helping**

In this section I argue that military policy, in the form of documents, organizes the type of help wives may receive from the military helpers, and that military policy excludes women's own experience. It is my contention that the social organization of military policy enables the military to rule military wives in their local settings from extra local positions in Ottawa. Here I employ the notion of text-mediated ruling practices that D. Smith (1990) formulates. It is possible to find text-based practices playing an important part in the relations between women and the military hierarchy. To explicate the organizing nature of military policy or 'text' I will focus on the Canadian Forces Administrative Order (CFAO)<sup>11</sup> which directs the military social workers' practices.

The social worker explains how military regulations position his work in relation to military wives:

Regulations say we are the primary counselling support for military families. A Canadian Forces Administrative Order, this lays out the role of the social worker. We are in fact the primary counselling and support for the military family. We are the only ones, in regulations, that say we are responsible for them. The padres do their part with the pastoral care but there is nothing in the directives that say they have to do it. To my knowledge we are the only ones in CFAOs that says "will be responsible for military families" (Military social worker, interview, December, 1993).

The regulations referred to by the social worker are extremely detailed in the

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<sup>11</sup> There are three main series of publications dealing with orders and regulations in the Canadian Forces. They are: Queen's Regulations and Orders (QR&Os), Canadian Forces Administrative Orders (CFAOs) and Force Mobile Command Orders (FMCOs). These orders and regulations are meant to enable a staff officer to "deal effectively with all aspects of administration, finance, discipline, policy and information". These publications follow a precedent that is similar to the military chain of command. The National Defence Act is the major source. QR&Os are issued to amplify and interpret the National Defence Act and CFAOs are issued to supplement and amplify QR&Os. The document titled Orders and Regulations states that "CFAOs contain administrative policy, procedures and information of continuing effect". (p. 2 - 7A - 3)

Canadian Armed Forces. The Canadian Forces Administrative Order (CFAO) he refers to directs the actual work practices of social workers.

Social workers learn to align people's problems with specific social work concepts. For instance, I have quoted one worker talking about "coping", "borderline people" and "marginal families" - concepts that some social workers use in making assessments. Military social workers must also learn to align military wives' problems with social work directives coming from Ottawa, specifically CFAO 56-15. To understand the way social workers practice this alignment I will look at experience at the local level, in the social worker's office. A social worker explained the types of problems he encounters when working with military wives:

I see an awful lot of marital discord, financial distress, communications, and anger and violence toward the spouse - that's in vogue at this particular moment. Stress is a big issue, it goes in cycles (Military social worker, interview, January, 1994).

In naming the types of problems as categories of marital discord, communications etc., he is speaking of the wives he works with. He sees them in the same terms which appear in the CFAO, the document that informs the social worker of problems he is able to provide help for. In the CFAO under the section titled Scope of Social Work Services it states the following as some of the problems the social workers can deal with:

9. SWOs (Social work officers) are professionally qualified to assess, diagnose, treat, undertake consultation and make recommendations concerning a variety of psychosocial problems. These include:
  - a. compassionate problems such as those involving an illness or handicap of a member, dependent, or other close relative;
  - b. marital discord, separation or divorce;
  - c. individual and family problems resulting from a wide variety of factors such as: misuse of alcohol and other drugs, unwanted pregnancies, child behaviour, family violence, and financial mismanagement;
  - d. problems arising from the stress of military life on members and their families.

Part of the job of the professional military social worker is to arrive at an understanding of the women's problems as categories through the process of assessment. The CFAO plays a role in reinforcing the social worker in the approach he learned in his academic training by directing him to "assess a situation and provide a social work report with recommendations" (Social Work Services Pamphlet).

Social workers know how to "assess". We explored how professional training provides experience in using theory and matching/constructing people's troubles into categories. Now, in addition, it appears that the CFAO organizes ways of viewing the problems of the military wife by suggesting particular categories. Categorization of wives' problems transforms the actualities of their lives into the mandated concepts of 'marital discord', 'communication problems', 'family violence', 'financial difficulties' and 'stress'. The action taken by the social worker turns the women's actual experiences into a set of conceptual practices and bureaucratic processes that work for the military. A military solution can then be applied. Programs are available to support military wives on a short term basis, to free husbands to do their job with the military. The social worker's function is to provide the wives with communication seminars, financial counselling, parenting groups, and support. Each category would have its appropriate social work solution. The military wife becomes an object of practice - help becomes help for 'military wives', a category of people, with typical problems. This approach renders social workers unable to see individual problems or hear the women's voices.

In the following excerpt a social worker tells of his experience with military wives:

My experience has been that where we deal with the majority of our people who have a transient situation, a situation of stress, short term financial difficulties, or a child's medical problems, the intervention is short term, often weeks and it's generally successful. Not because of what we do but because the people that we deal with have the ability to deal with the situations and all we do is coach them (Military social workers, interview, December, 1993).

Again, this social worker talks using the concepts of “stress” and “financial difficulties”, concepts taken directly from the administrative order. We are able to see how the social workers are involved in the social construction of reality through their military practices, directed through documents which hold a military standpoint. Women are acted upon in this process, but their everyday experience is excluded in the process of the social organization of the military ideology.

To further explore the idea of the objectification of women by the organization of military helping practices, I will examine a woman’s story in relation to social work practice. During a group interview she told the following story:

We were having really bad problems and I said I think we need to see a counsellor and so my husband went first to see the (military) social worker and he said (to my husband) “you don't have to be here if you don't want to.” He says “if your wife doesn't like what's going on and she knows she married someone in the military and this is what happens and that's that. She married into the military and that's all there is to it. The military has pressures and that's it.” In our case my husband doesn't deal with stress at all and he was coming very close - he's never hit me but he felt like he wanted to, and I said whoa, I will not put up with this. I said we need to get some help if you're feeling like this. I said you hit me and I'm gone, forget it, I'm not putting up with this (Military wife, interview, May, 1993).

In the process of assessment by the social worker the actuality of the husband threatening his wife with abuse was transformed and the problem became the wife’s problem. The organization of the woman’s problem by the military social worker is evident.

That the military is incapable of addressing certain problems encountered in the military community is a problem discussed by the wives. The women told me it is especially evident when their troubles involve child sexual abuse, as is evidenced by the following story:

We have problems in this area (sexual assault) and people aren't aware of them because the military won't say anything about the problems, especially the sexual assault ones, especially if it involves children then it's really scary. If it was a civilian man and he sexually assaulted a child he would be put in jail and justice would be done to him, but here they just post him somewhere else. That happened when we were living in \_\_\_\_\_, our next door neighbour's child was assaulted by a neighbour and all they did was post him somewhere else, they didn't deal with the problem. The mother was furious, she was fighting it, then she went and got a civilian lawyer and was fighting it, but we moved before anything happened. I don't know, they just post him away. So that's not dealing with the problem. He's going to go somewhere else and do the same thing to someone else (Military wife, group interview, April, 1993).

'Sexual assault' and 'child sexual abuse' are categories not found in the CFAO that directs the social workers' work. Yet my informants talked about these problems and others (e.g. Harrison and Laliberté, 1994) have identified alcoholism, wife battering and physical and sexual abuse of children as social problems that are covered up by the organization of the military. Harrison and Laliberté claim that the "military culture...creates severe social problems and despite formal policies and claims to the contrary, organizational military mechanisms work to cover these problems up. The result is that these problems are skilfully prevented from becoming public knowledge" (pp. 210-211). I see it somewhat differently, as a matter of a specialized work process that objectifies people and problems. My contention is that in a system that is set up to handle only objectified problems, if there is no framework to address issues such as sexual assault as child sexual abuse then these problems are rendered invisible. The process that I have analyzed, of social workers aligning women's problems with categories from military directives, transforms the women's problems. Through this work process, women become (known as) objects of the social worker's prescribed framework. If something doesn't fit it must remain unseen officially. There may be no place to talk officially about sexual assault or the sexual abuse of children in the military community.

### **Military Social Workers and Military Wives**

The women interviewed for the study said they don't see the social workers often, even if they are aware of the service. The following discussion suggests why military social workers are not useful to military wives.

What kind of help can social workers provide for the military wife? The description coming next of a particular case shows us the value the social worker places on short-term support for the military wife:

She called directly and wanted to talk to someone. Not a big intervention although she would like to get into doing a whole lot of therapy. The dilemma is that she is coping very well. If we get into a therapy process it's like pulling the bricks out, we in fact do her more harm than good. So rather than going over there and pulling bricks out in the treatment system we add a support system and she is coping very well. Once her husband comes home she will be fine. We're talking about a short-term thing. We support that process. We are the ones who are primarily responsible for this (Military social worker, interview, December, 1993).

In this case the wife is assessed by the social worker as "coping very well" and therefore not eligible for more than minimum assistance. He will "add a support system" which is similar to what the padre would do in this case; refer to the Military Family Resource Centre, extended family or to an outside agency. The problem is conceptualized as coping or not coping and is understood as a product of the husband's absence. In the above data excerpt, the social worker tells of his ability to provide short term support while the husband is out of the picture. This is what one of the women in the previous chapter found so devastating about the organization of the support provided by the military; it was provided only when the service member was away. The women know in their lives there are times when they need more than short term support. This experiential knowledge is not considered and the women are expected to be supported on the military's schedule, not in response to their needs as people with normal lives.

The social workers play a role similar to the padre in their relationship with military wives, that of instructors for the military system. Their help seems restricted to teaching the wife the correct way to carry out her proper role. The story of the social worker's intervention continues:

Let's assume this lady is going into labour, say she's pregnant and she's due on a date when he's going to sea. The question we would ask is what preparation has been made for her, if he has to go to sea. Do you have someone who can come and be with you at the point of delivery? Another coach? Do you want your mother or is your sister willing to come? What other arrangements could be made to support you through this pregnancy other than your husband being here? (Military social worker, interview, December, 1993).

Again, we see more directives to the wife being given by the social worker. In the previous chapter my informants spoke angrily about the fact that they are expected to deliver their babies in the absence of their husbands. In the interview situation, the women wondered where they are supposed to get the money for extra help, especially if their extended family is from another province. This is another example of a gap between the military knowledge about what military wives need and the women's knowing about their lives and what they need to survive. A woman responds, "they say fly in a relative. Who are you going to get? If you just got posted in who are you going to know? Well you're not supposed to get pregnant in the first place!" (Military wife, group interview, April, 1993) My informants were exasperated by the unrealistic nature of what the military expected them to do and by how invisible the actualities of their day to day existence and situations seemed to be to the helpers. This example extends our insight into the way help is organized to benefit the military system without taking into account the women's struggles, or including their voice in interactions.

The social worker, as a trained professional, sees his/her interventions somewhat differently. S/he is in charge, determining what needs to be done, what the wife needs. The typical interview with the social worker is described below:

There's a two-fold process here, one is to ventilate the frustration and the stress going on. Often she talks to her friends about it but there is no real catharsis there. Just having someone professional listen to them, somebody who is removed from the situation, unbiased, perhaps with the potential to do something to help. The other part is to talk to someone who is in the position to help, somebody who has achieved professional qualifications (Military social worker, interview, January, 1994).

The social worker believes he is removed from the situation and is able to offer unbiased help. I argue that he is far from removed both from the military system that directs how help is provided and from his social work consciousness which is organized around certain ways of understanding the world.

As we saw with the padre's help, the help provided by social workers is not consistent. What *is* consistent is the military objective to be met by helping wives and the social work paradigm within which the helping is organized. The work is driven by military directives with the military mission in mind, and by social work knowledge. Both of these exclude the actual life experiences of the women seeking help.

Problem-solving by the social workers not only involves organized theory and knowledge, but working relations that subordinate the workers in the military system. When a social worker is confronted with a problem from a military wife, requesting her husband returned home to help with a family crisis, the worker must write a report and make a recommendation to the Commanding Officer. A social worker describes this process in the following way:

Our directives and what we understand - CFAOs - We are the investigative, I don't like to use that word, we are the assisting authority and the recommending authority. We don't have the ultimate power - the CO can say no he's not going or not coming home. But generally that's not the case. Generally, if we recommend he be returned for some reason, the CO knows that when we recommend we know what we are talking about. It's not just the lady's upset - she doesn't like being by herself or whatever - they know when we recommend the guy to come back there is a reason why. I am not adverse to bringing someone back - I recognize that we are not in a conflict situation (Military social

worker, interview, December 1993).

Another social worker tells of his experience of having his recommendation ignored by the Commanding Officer:

There is the frustration of making a recommendation (to the CO that) a member not sail and seeing them sail off. Trying to get something done, making a recommendation and seeing it not accepted. Our recommendations usually carry a lot of weight, we just need the CO to approve them (Military social worker, interview, January, 1994).

Military social workers' functions, in the final analysis, are subject to military control. Directed by social work theory and military regulations, dependent on working relations within the system, and relying on work practices that serve to exclude military wives, social workers are limited in their usefulness to a military wife experiencing a problem. Military controls on the social workers' decision-making are based on military judgement, not on the judgement of the social worker. This, then, is the set of relations that determine the help that wives will receive.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have shown that padres and military social workers can orient, adjust, and support wives to fit the military system, but they are unable to address the concerns and problems of the wives as the women themselves experience and understand them. The social work/padre interventions of marriage seminars, communication courses, peer counselling, and support groups serve to further construct the reality of the military wife. Marriage seminars act as part of the orientation and initiation process, communication courses facilitate a way of individualizing the problems, and peer counselling provides an avenue for the women to teach each other how the system works and how to survive in it.

In the process of being helped, the wives are objectified or categorized to facilitate the process of providing military directed help for the benefit of the military operation. The way military social workers do their helping objectifies military wives and categorises them in line with the established 'problems' for which they have answers. Thus, the focus remains on the women and obscures the relations that continue to create troubles for military families. To conclude this chapter we hear from a military wife angrily responding to her experience of being treated like a category or an object when she tries to impart her knowledge of her own life to helpers in the military:

If you have a very boisterous opinion on something as a mother because you are on the defense or you are trying to give these people (helpers) knowledge about what is going on, they shut you down. They take away your feelings. They tell you, you are wrong and don't know what you are doing because you are only a god damn military wife. That is exactly what I am, a military wife, and you want to call me a bitch. I have earned the right to be a bitch and I am proud of being who I am. But don't tell me I don't know what is going on when I have my eyes open and pay attention to my family every day - every second of every day (Military wife, interview, June, 1993).

## Chapter Five

### Military Family Support in Canada

#### Background

Military Family Resource Centres are a recent addition (1988) to the helping services provided by the Canadian military system. The Family Support Programme Project (FSPP) was established in April 1987, in an attempt to give family support national coordination and local infrastructure. (National Defence Headquarters Policy Directive, February, 1993)

The program of family support as it exists in Canada today began with the identification of the following issues raised at the 1977 regional social work conference on the Canadian military family: the quality of recruits was diminishing, retention was a problem, and the women's movement was having a negative impact not only on the traditional family but on the retention and readiness of members of the military. As suggested in chapter one, this was a period of widespread women's activism for equality and it was having an effect on Canadian military wives. Groups of wives began to meet informally to discuss problems on military bases. With the birth of OSSOMM, military wives' issues received notoriety in Parliament, and the national media focussed negative public attention on the military's attitude towards women married to servicemen. It may be that OSSOMM's efforts had something to do with the launch, in 1987, of the Military Family Support Programme Project (MFSP) pilot, a precursor to the nationwide program of 1991. Military Family Resource Centres, which were created as a result of the MFS program, were established to offer information, companionship, recreational diversion, childcare relief, short term loans and homemaker services (Harrison and Laliberté, 1994).

At the time of this study there were over 40 Family Resource Centres in Canada and overseas. The Director of the Military Family Support Program (MFSP) for the Canadian Forces discusses the origins of military family support in Canada in the following passage:

Four years ago the military decided to implement family support centres, after four years of research leading up to the inception of the Military Family Support Program. Out of that period of research came the Family Support Project and the Study Report on Family Support. In 1991, from that point in time, the military system agreed that it was appropriate to begin a program of support to families in their environments - that they controlled. There were a number of things that conspired at that time. Mary Collins being one, the Gulf War being another and the general civilian community saying what are you doing for families? (Director MFSP, April 1994).

Mary Collins was the Associate Minister of National Defence who took a special interest in military families and supported the ideas put forward by the military about family support (Harrison and Laliberté). A military social worker explained Collins' part in the inception of resource centres in the following way:

I can tell you why Military Family Resource Centres exist. They exist because one particular person in the political structure thought it would be a good way to do it. They wanted to placate a group of women who said we've got a problem. There was a group of military wives who formed OSOMM - I was involved with them, my wife actually. They went to the system through the press. It made the front pages of the paper. The system bought into that and a member of the political party took it under her wing and drove it (Military social worker, December, 1993).

As we can see from this quotation, military wives are credited with pushing the military to offer something better in the way of family support. The Director of MFSP described the models on which the program of support was based:

We based the program design on community organization and community development models - if you want to do anything in a community the best way to do that is to give ownership of that thing to the community itself. Each of the Family Resource Centres is managed by a board of directors which is a non-profit, provincially regulated institution which is on a piece of Federal property over

which the Base Commander has ultimate authority. Esquimalt<sup>12</sup> is not a good example - the navy hasn't quite gotten around to letting go (Director MFSP, April, 1994).

By "letting go" the director is referring to the different forms of organization found in the Family Resource Centres. The two navy centres in Canada, one in Victoria and one in Halifax, are staffed by a combination of military personnel and civilian personnel, unlike all the other centres which are staffed by civilian personnel. A staff member at the resource centre in Esquimalt describes the centres and how the one she works in is different from others:

The majority of the centres and the way they were designed to be set up was that they would all have a Board of Directors that would comprise a majority of spouses and some military representation, but the majority would be spouses. They would hire civilian staff to run the organization so it would be independent run by civilian staff with a Board of Directors. Halifax and Esquimalt had family resource centres before this whole format came out so they didn't re-organize to suit this. What they've tried to do is put advisory boards in place because we still have military directors and some military staff. Ours is a blend of military/civilian staff working with the community although still governed by the base, which we work for. There is an advisory board made up of civilian spouses who advise the Base Commander (MFRC staff member, February, 1994).

Although the majority of centres are staffed by civilian personnel, the Director of MFSP points out that the Commanding Officer (CO) has "ultimate authority" over the centres, whether they are navy or not. The contradiction of giving "ownership" to communities while the military CO retains "ultimate authority" over the running of the centres in a patriarchal form does not seem to be a problem for the military. What "ultimate authority" means, exactly, is explained by the Director of MFSP:

The Base Commander does have ultimate authority on his base. He

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<sup>12</sup> Esquimalt is where the Military Family Resource Centre in this study is located. At the time of this study, in Esquimalt there were 4,636 serving members, 2,637 wives, and 3,773 children associated with the base. (1995)

can't close you down - he can't take away your non-profit status - that's a provincial thing. But he can close your centre by denying access to his base. So, it's incumbent on the board and the base administration to work together. (Director MFSP, April, 1994)

### **The Military Family Resource Centre**

My involvement with the Esquimalt MFRC began in 1992 when I approached a staff member at the Centre and asked her if I could begin to gather information for my graduate studies assignments. I began by investigating the organization of the Centre. Up until that time my only contact with the Centre had been as a workshop facilitator at the annual Women's Conference. Over three years, I interviewed several of the staff, attended an annual MFRC Conference and, in 1995, was employed by the centre as the facilitator of a parents' discussion group. The analysis in this chapter arises out of my fieldwork and group facilitation at the MFRC. I also went to Ottawa in 1993 to investigate the development of military family policy. Information gathered through my extensive contact with the MFRC and my investigation of policy informs this chapter.

I argue that although family support is happening at the MFRC there are military practices that hinder the full community model from being developed. In the following sections I will explore the MFRC, the work that goes on there and the experiences of wives who gather there. I will then explore the military practices that organize the help at the MFRC.

I begin by examining what is generally offered by all MFRCs and then specifically examine the MFRC in Esquimalt. The following information about MFRCs is compiled from various military documents.

The goal of the Family Support Programme Project (FSPP) is to "develop a Canadian Forces family and community policy and to formulate plans for a co-ordinated consistent and effective community approach to military family support" (Military Family

Support Program Directive, 1993).<sup>13</sup> The purpose of the MFRC is to consolidate/co-ordinate the existing human services and resources existing in the Canadian Armed Forces. Since 1988 the Military Family Resource Centre has offered preventative and educational programs requested by the military family community as well as services and guidance to individual support groups. The centre is open to all serving members of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) and their families, including single persons and partners in common law relationships. The philosophy of the centre is "helping military families help themselves" (MFRC pamphlet).

Services provided by the centre in Esquimalt are as follows:

Information and referral - local businesses, local professionals, childcare referrals, recreational activities, churches, support groups, base units or services, and social service agencies.

Financial counselling - money management skills, budgeting, providing loans for qualified applicants, advising on insurance matters.

Volunteer program - volunteers may coordinate, organize, plan, facilitate or provide other services to the military community.

Crisis counsellor<sup>14</sup> - to assist with situations and problems that require more attention than the information and referral lines are able to deal with by referral.

Youth Programs

Childcare Programs and Services

Support network and preventative/education programs and workshops - for spouses and military families (MFRC Pamphlet).

While the philosophy of the Centre may officially be helping military families help themselves, this chapter begins to challenge that view. The MFRC provides military wives with support services or support systems talked about by the padres and the social workers in the previous chapter, particularly when the men are deployed. About these programs the staff member at the MFRC said:

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<sup>13</sup> The work at the MFRC is directed by a Military Family Support Policy Directive, the aim of which is "to establish the Canadian Forces policy on support to the military family community." (NDHQ Policy Directive February, 1993)

<sup>14</sup> At the time of data gathering the position of crisis counsellor had not been established at the MFRC. As of 1993 this position is filled by a civilian social worker who intervenes with families during a crisis situation. Her job is mainly referral into the military system or to outside community services.

Most of our programs are developed for the needs expressed by spouses, spouses are usually the wives. We don't have many husbands who are involved in the spouse role. Most of our programs are designed through feedback from spouses, from wives' groups and local community contacts. The wives are the initial body of people whom we are serving (MFRC staff member, interview, February, 1994).

The staff member clearly sees her role as providing support for military wives. Her access to the women, and her location enable the centre to become the focal point of the PMQs. Centre staff are actively involved in helping the community identify and develop programs. The staff member continues to describe her work:

We get tons of requests for assistance with lifestyle issues like childcare, relocation, usually people phone us as an initial point of contact. A lot of our work revolves around deployment groups (support groups) so there is a lot of contact with military wives on a weekly basis. There are all kinds of support networks. My job is that of facilitator, initial facilitator. We like to start the groups and get them going and then step back and serve as a resource to the women (MFRC staff member, February, 1994).

At the time of the interviews with the wives at the Centre, there were ten support networks, three moms and tots groups for a total of thirteen different functioning women's groups connected to the MFRC. Deployment issues are the ones dealt with most by the staff member at the MFRC:

There are always gripes about deployment. And one of the really valid gripes about deployment is quite often people aren't given enough time to prepare. These frequent deployments interfere with people learning to lead productive healthy lives and marriages, if they've constantly got something in there that's going to pull them (the military member) out for a period of time it's difficult to deal with a lot of issues. Childcare is always a problem. Raising children as a single parent the majority of the time is extremely difficult (MFRC staff member, February, 1994).

The MFRC staff member is familiar with the problems being faced by the military wives she sees on a daily basis. At the MFRC social work seems to be practiced differently. In her article about family-centred social work practice, Laird points out that,

“the postmodern movement has had a dramatic influence on the family therapy field and on social work, forcing a re-examination of long held assumptions about assessment and intervention” (p. 150). The practice I observed at the MFRC seemed dependent on collaboration and cooperation with the community, rather than assessment and intervention as practiced by the military social workers.

### **Women’s Experience of the MFRC**

While it is apparent from the existence of support groups that the MFRC is providing needed service, there are also times when women need help other than support groups. One woman, a volunteer at the MFRC, explains her decision not to approach the Centre when she needed help with her own crisis situation:

If I needed help I know that they would only recommend me to go to outside facilities. They aren’t governed by their job description to do any clinical work or anything. The embarrassment of my own position of being a volunteer chairperson for a support group blocked me from going to the MFRC for help. Here’s this strong, broad shouldered person that was sending everybody else to where they needed to go for help. I knew where to send them, I would tell them don’t talk to the corporal, talk to the duty officer, talk to an MP, don’t talk to the guy answering the phone, he’s the commissionaire. I learned this being involved with the system as a volunteer. Not so much as using it as a crisis need, but when the crisis need came I was very aware that the system was inadequate (Military wife, May, 1993).

Although this woman was a volunteer for the MFRC, she knew, in her time of need, that the service was inadequate. Her story highlights the contradictory experience she had working for the military as a volunteer teaching other women where to seek help. When she herself needs help she knows it is not available to her.

The wives I spoke with had their own explanations of why the MFRC didn’t work the way it should. A military wife talks about her experience:

I have seen a really big change in the last five years where they (staff of the MFRC) have bent over backwards with involvement in the military community and trying to let people know what is going on. The directives are there but it's the ivory tower that is having problems. Our Base Commander is one in a million and it seems like every second or third Base Commander has the same concerns for family unity, community unity. Communications are important and I think it depends who is sitting in our headquarters office within our community what you see available (Military wife, June, 1993).

This woman is aware of how dependent community services are on what the Base Commander (CO) sees as important. After all, he has ultimate authority over the MFRC and it is his job to make sure families receive support. As I have shown with social workers and padres, the type of support women receive in the community is dependent on the CO and his values and beliefs about family support. The woman takes her analysis beyond the role of the director of the MFRC up the chain-of-command all the way to Ottawa in the following passage:

The guys in Ottawa are a bunch of retired Admirals and dignitaries that have to get down to earth and come into the community and hear what we are saying. They have to understand there are resources and do a referral system. They could say we can't help you within the system but there is this or this available and open the bloody door. There is so much propaganda and politics involved at the next level that I feel myself as a spouse is the one that suffers. The door is shut and one person cannot open the door. Whether it is the director from MFRC or not, he has his orders. He has his recommendations and it comes through the chain-of-command. People think that a director may not be doing his job because the things that we need aren't there and we say "oh my god, he's not hearing us" but there is another side to that story. The chain-of-command works and when shit flows it always flows downhill. If one director stood up by himself and said "listen, this is what is going to happen." He is just as afraid of the repercussions to his job as I as a member's wife are afraid of the repercussions of going to somebody and saying I need my husband home (Military wife, interview, June 1993).

This woman believes that quality of help at the MFRC is dependent on who the

director is, his relations to the community and, more importantly, his relations to the people up the chain of command in Ottawa. She asserts that repercussions are felt and feared all the way down the chain-of-command and that suffering from them becomes an organizing factor in determining how help is dispensed at the MFRC. According to this woman the MFRC's capacity to respond to families is limited by the same political system as the rest of military assistance. Individuals are vulnerable, no matter how effective the individual staff members. We can speculate that once again, as was the case in seeking help from padres and social workers, wives' issues are not seen when organizational features of the military are given precedence over the actualities of women's everyday lives.

### **Military Control at the MFRC**

The wives' explanations are based on their experience. In the following sections I will explain how such experiences arise. I will describe a document created at the Centre to inform wives of the services provided by the military system; explore work relations at the Centre; look briefly at the way in which policy for the Centre is developed and delivered in a top down manner, not at the community level; and finally, discuss the wives' lack of trust in the services available at the MFRC.

### **Pacific Notes II**

In an effort to inform women about the military system, the Centre staff provide them with written materials about services available in the military community for families. For example, to try to overcome the lack of information about deployment, the Centre distributes a deployment guide called Pacific Notes II. The following section explores the part played by directives distributed by the MFRC in the socialization of women into the role of military wife.

I encountered a military wife at the centre today who has three

children under school age. She told me she had moved four times in four years to several different provinces. I asked her about her first encounter with the MFRC. She said that when she approached the MFRC for some help with her family (her husband was deployed) she was handed a phone list of numbers to call. She said angrily, “they are only interested in perpetuating their propaganda.” She said at the time she approached the centre she was in crisis and that she needed emergency childcare, not a phone list of available babysitters (Fieldnotes, January, 1994).

Part of the “propaganda” this woman is referring to is the book *Pacific Notes II*. She said she needed concrete help, like immediate child care, and felt she was being given something that was already in place at the MFRC, but not necessarily useful. It seems apparent that she needed more than information.

*Pacific Notes II Handbook* was produced by the personnel and volunteers of the Military Family Resource Centre (MFRC). This document, which describes helping services and personnel available to families, is specifically aimed at women married to service members. Each wife receives a copy of this book, either upon contact with the MFRC or by delivery to her door if she lives in the Married Quarters.

An MFRC staff member talks about the origins of the book:

We’ve always had a deployment guide. It has always been updated as we go along towards having a comprehensive guide, generic and usable for all deployments rather than just a particular deployment. A lot of the information is taken from the research and literature from the states, particularly the emotional aspects of deployment. The practical information is basic information everyone needs to know, powers of attorney, resources, information where to call if you have these types of problems. This particular book was put together by staff and volunteers, volunteer spouses who had an idea of what they would like to see in a book and how they would like to see that book presented. The book gives them (military wives) contact numbers whereby they can find information that they may need to help them with any issue (MFRC staff member, February, 1994).

On the first page a wife learns the standpoint of the book. It reads:

It is recognized that when a military partner and family know what to expect and are informed of the support services available to them

while the military partner is absent, they are better able to cope and the military member is less preoccupied with their welfare and better able to perform his/her job (Pacific Notes II, Introduction).

The wife understands by reading “less preoccupied with their (wives) welfare and better able to perform his/her job” that she must learn how to survive in the military in order to keep the institution working. Throughout this book women are taught the intricacies of becoming a military wife. They are also taught how to access help from the system properly. The first chapter, entitled Useful Information, contains information about the Military Family Resource Centre, Base Services, Health, Dependent Schooling, Service Air Travel, Information for Francophone Families, and Relocation. Chapter Two, Deployment, contains all the directives involved in the work the wife undertakes when her husband is away doing his job. Titles of sections of this chapter are, Stages of Deployment, Deployment and Children, Pre-deployment Checklist, A Military Wife’s Viewpoint, During Deployment, Keeping in Touch, When the Blues Get Bluer, When a Spouse is Deployed, Twenty Helpful Hints for Marital Survival, When Dad is Deployed at Time of Birth, Dealing With the Media and The Home Coming. Chapter Three is an historical chapter about the military, with a section about the History of the Navy, History of the Army, History of HS 443 Squadron and a section of pictures to identify the rank structure. Chapter Four contains Personal Budget Checklists.

Information about deployment is the largest section of the book. There are instructions about what the wife is expected to do with her family from the pre-deployment phase to the homecoming, including the emotions a wife should expect to experience in stages during deployment. These emotions run from “anticipation of loss”, through “shock and emotional disorganization” to “reintegration and stabilization”. (p. 26) There are instructions on how to write a letter to husbands. The wives are told that it takes a “special skill” to write a letter during deployment, “You must walk a fine line between

'Everything's falling apart and I cannot handle it without you', and 'Everything's falling apart but I do not need you anymore to fix it.'" (p. 48) The wives are cautioned against sending their letters too quickly. They are advised that, "there are times in every deployment when the pressures and disappointment build to a point that the spouse at home must verbalize or explode. This too is normal and can be managed if channelled properly." (p. 49) They are further instructed to hang on to "acid" letters for at least three days and reconsider the contents before mailing them. The wives are then supplied with an extensive list called A Letter Writer's Guide containing twelve ways to "enhance talking back and forth to each other by letter." (p. 49) These extensive instructions about letter writing appear to be not just help for women but an attempt by the military system to control the correspondence between a woman and her husband. One can speculate that the military operation would be jeopardized if all the wives reported accurately to their husbands about the hardships involved in their everyday lives.

The instructions in the book go so far as to question the women about the part they themselves play in being depressed over their lives with the military, a practice that, I contend, individualizes the problems faced by all military wives. In the section entitled When the Blues Get Bluer, the wives are provided with a list to check to see if they are depressed. They are advised that "The cure for depression is the same as the prevention. Take positive action. Behaviour is changed by thoughts and feelings." (p. 56) In a previous section called, A Military Wife's Viewpoint, the women are asked to examine their own attitudes toward deployment. They are told, "Negative attitudes make life difficult for everyone. Positive attitudes help everyone get the most out of life." They are told:

When the spouse goes away, you have to make a choice. You can apply a positive attitude and make the best of your time apart, or, you can apply a negative attitude, draw the drapes, withdraw and complain - until they come home. Given the two choices, the first one is healthier and much to your advantage (Pacific Notes II, p. 42).

Once they have an understanding of coping with deployment, the wives are given a list of alternatives to keep them busy while their husband is deployed: going back to school; *taking up a hobby, like quilting*; pursuing an aerobic or weight program; volunteering; participating in the Family Resource Centre [italics added] (p. 42). In the instructions provided to the women in this book we can see the military directing the women to make themselves available for the work of the military. The instructions are reminiscent of the directions I received from the padre twenty years ago.

Directives such as Pacific Notes II tell women that it is normal for husbands to be deployed during the birth of the couple's children and the book directs the women in the correct procedure for facing childbirth alone. New mothers are advised to, "call the MFRC, the Chaplain's office, or the Social Worker's office, to send a message to your spouse with a birth announcement and recommendation to take appropriate medical coverage action" (p. 63).

When military wives obtain a copy of Pacific Notes II it may be the only form of information about how to be a military wife they will receive. D. Smith (1987) says of the power of texts, "authority is a form of power that has a distinctive capacity to get things done in words" (p. 29). With the military standpoint represented in the information women receive, the construction of a life based on experience other than their own begins.

### **Chain-of-Command at the MFRC**

How does a family-oriented centre mandated to help military families become captured by the military mission? The social relations in the Centre consists of a chain-of-command structure that prevents the values of participation and community involvement in the MFRC from occurring.

At the time of data collection<sup>15</sup>, the seven military personnel staffing the MFRC

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<sup>15</sup> Staffing at the centre has changed considerably since the collection of the data for this study.

outnumbered the two civilian personnel. Military personnel are sent to work at the Centre from regular navy positions often as a 'shore posting' and are usually untrained in the area of social services. When I began my study, the staff member I interviewed was the only professionally trained person working at the Centre. In her monthly report for the Director of the Centre she wrote of her frustration in working in a human service organization that has no trained personnel:

If a crisis call comes into Information and Referral, because the staff are not trained to handle crisis calls they will turn it over to me. I end up doing crisis counselling work which is not reported as part of my daily work at the Centre (MFRC staff member, Nov. 1992).

Although the staff member identified this as a problem at the Centre and reported it in writing to the Director, she received no feedback. She said she knew that her concern was not reported by the Director to the Base Commander, his direct superior. She continues:

If a wife with a problem calls the MFRC and gets a military member on the phone, she may not want to discuss her problem, as she may believe she is phoning into the system (MFRC staff member, Jan. 1993).

Reporting at the MFRC is in the form of a chain-of-command, in other words, it is organized hierarchically, with the CO and Administration Officer at the top, the Director of the Centre in the middle, and the front-line staff member at the bottom of the reporting relation. The Director receives a monthly report from the staff member. He in turn produces a monthly report for the CO and the Administration Officer. The staff member described the process she uses to develop her report:

I report monthly to the Director. The headings for my report come from the Base Commander to the Director who tells me to report monthly in this format. I record activities as they come up at the Centre. For every program running I have a file which I update regularly. Then I construct my monthly report by reviewing the updates in the files and consulting my calendar, showing what I

have done on a daily basis. I get some of the information about what is needed in the community from a needs assessment done on a yearly basis, part of my role is to assess the community's needs (MFRC staff member, interview, Nov. 1992).

Some of the staff member's tasks at the Centre are not recorded. While her job is mainly program planning and development she is also involved in front line work with military wives, which consists of hours of support and discussion. She works with women who either come to the Centre with problems or phone the Centre's information and referral line. Some of these front-line duties are invisible as far as the Director of the Centre is concerned and are not accounted for in her monthly documentation. Because these duties are invisible at the local level in the Centre, they are also invisible at the extra-local level of base administration and base command. We can speculate that when front-line work is not reported up the chain-of-command, issues raised are not always addressed at the level at which funding decisions are being made.

The Director of the MFRC describes his orders regarding report procedures on Centre activities:

I attend bi-weekly staff meetings where I am briefed on specific areas of interest expressed by the Base Commander. The Base Commander makes decisions about what will be recorded at the Centre and what is not an issue. He bases his decisions on what is best for the community but, the bottom line is that the military is only interested in support that ensures the service member stays active and productive in his or her job. Operational effectiveness is the bottom line. All support from the Centre is aimed at helping the families so that the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) member can continue to work effectively in the military system (MFRC Director, interview, November, 1992).

I contend that some women's experience at the Centre is disregarded in report procedures organized at the MFRC. The staff member's monthly report is submitted to the Director of the Centre who then decides what points of importance can be integrated into his own report. He prepares his monthly report and submits it to the Base Administration

Officer and the Base Commander. The Base Commander, who stipulates the headings under which reports are written, receives the information. It is up to the Director to decide what information is passed on to the CO. By sending information up the chain-of-command, the essence of the issues can be lost or deleted altogether.

By examining the hierarchical processes of reporting at the MFRC we begin to see how problems experienced in the everyday lives of the wives of military members presented to the social worker at the Centre become invisible, by either never being documented or by being obscured in the process of report writing.

How does the Director decide what facts need to be reported to the Base Commander? The Director stated to me that he is guided by the headings for the report. One of the criteria used by the Director to decide if information generated by front line work should be included is “whether I think the information is needed by the Base Commander”. The Director bases his decisions on information and direction he received from above in the chain-of-command. The Director himself is part of the military chain-of-command and is as susceptible to repercussions to his career as any other member of the forces.

It appears that determining what information is reported from the Centre is based first on the reporting categories and then by the Director’s discretion, but overall by the CO’s ‘interests’. It becomes apparent that the Director uses his knowledge of military philosophy and his knowledge of how to report properly so, as he puts it, “not bore them at the meeting”. He determines what information is important to the military brass at the time. The Base Commander makes decisions as to what is to be recorded and what is not considered an issue. When the Base Commander and the Base Administration Officer develop the headings for the Director’s report they must think about the long term goal of support. They must think of how the MFRC can support families while keeping the military member functioning. They need to ‘know’ families/wives to ensure that support is provided in a way beneficial to the overall military operation. I contend that this serves to

further military interest in keeping wives busy with their work for the military. Through the process of reporting under such headings the original information from the staff member is structured, first by the pre-determined categories, then by the Director of the Centre and finally in the meeting with the Administration Officer and the CO. The re-constructions in reporting re-create the military wives' experience into a form which enables the military to accomplish the goal discussed in the Study Report on Family Support mentioned earlier in this chapter; that of improved morale, job commitment, retention and overall operational effectiveness. The information gathered by the Base Commander serves to enable the military to meet the need to provide support as the military defines it and not as the needs of the women in the community arise. In the Director's words:

I am accepting and supportive of the staff member's work as long as she understands the bottom line and works according to the military philosophy. If she has an idea for a program I will discuss it with her and if I think it has a chance with the CO I will ask her for a proposal. She is aware of what I am looking for (MFRC Director, Jan. 1993).

Here, we see the importance of working relations in the Centre. All staff must work for the same bottom line, for military 'operational effectiveness'. The Director stated he receives no "downward feedback", other than categories for reporting, about the MFRC from the upper echelon of the military. He will support ideas up the chain-of-command only if he thinks they may be accepted. This is a structural process based on the needs of the military and not the needs of the community as expressed by the staff member.

The staff member learns quickly that she must report in a certain way in order to work with the military community. However, she also knows that what she identifies as a problem may never reach the Base Commander for resolution. The staff member commented on her own report writing, "I guess I write for the military now." Here we see the organizational consciousness of the staff member reporting in a certain way in order to accommodate military procedures set forth by the Base Commander. We can see the

exclusion of the front line worker's experience as well as the wives' issues in the writing of the 'military' report. This creates the invisibility of both experiences. The categories of reports are structuring devices, the staff member and the Director are writing what the Base Commander wants to hear; he is given information constructed in a way acceptable to the military.

In summary, the Base Commander is given ultimate control of the Centre by a military policy directive from Ottawa. The directive is informed by military research which sets a goal for support that ultimately works towards military operational effectiveness. The Base Commander creates the categories for reports at the MFRC and gives them to the Director. The Director submits these to the front-line staff member who constructs her report from the given categories. There is no place for her to document work that does not fit into these pre-determined categories. She learns to write for the military. The Director receives the staff member's report and mediates the information using the criterion to support the CO's agenda and the military member's efficiency. This organizational loop excludes the wives' issues and obscures the needs identified by the front line staff member who is in everyday contact with the wives at the MFRC. I contend that this loop is a military framework that benefits the military organization.

The notion of 'operational effectiveness' occurs recursively in the social organization of the MFRC, in other words, the notion iterates at several levels of the military structure; extra-local and local. The Military Family Support Program arose from several factors, one being the Study Report on Family Support. In the report, the goal of military family support is stated in the following way:

The long term goal of military family support is to promote military family and community well-being. Family and community well-being are correlated to morale, retention and commitment. Enhanced family well-being should decrease family dissatisfaction with the Canadian Forces, should increase job commitment, retention and morale for members, and thereby increase overall operational effectiveness (p. 75).

Support given to families in the Canadian Forces is seen by the military as a way to retain members and to increase overall operational effectiveness. The military directive guiding the work of the local MFRC is informed by the Study Report on Family Support; “the Study Report on Family Support...provides the rationale behind the policy expressed in the directive” (p. 1). The policy directive is the vehicle by which individual Base Commanders receive their instructions regarding responsibility for the welfare of families on their base. In it they are given ultimate authority over the workings of the MFRC. The Base Commander is responsible for the entire population of the base. The information he receives from the staff of the MFRC is one of the ways way he monitors family life on the base. I contend that the information he receives, in documentary form from the MFRC, is part of an organizational loop, that enables the military to exclude the actual experiences of the wives who bring their problems to the Centre, and excludes the experience of the front-line social worker employed by the Centre to provide support to families. The Base Commander thus *knows* the wives in a way that the military and he himself constructs, in a way that the military can support.

### **Military Policy and the MFRC**

This final piece of analysis illustrates the military’s ruling apparatus overwhelming the local efforts to help women. The following section is taken from an account of my observations at a Military Family Resource Centre Conference, October, 1993, at the Directorate of Military Family Support, Ottawa, and in discussions with policy makers in Ottawa. The two day Conference was an annual event hosted by the Esquimalt MFRC, with staff representation from MFRCs in Aldergrove, Chilliwack, Comox and Massett, all located in British Columbia. Also in attendance was a Major from Ottawa, representing the Directorate of Military Family Support.

The first day consisted of information sharing by an officer from Ottawa regarding current services offered to Canadian military families and current program development, for example, a National Information Line for families of the regular or reserve force. The staff of the Centres were informed about a change in funding. Until this point the Directorate for family support was in control of the funding. However, in 1993 this had been transferred to the Commands to delegate at the discretion of Base Commanders. It was stressed to the Centres' staff that because of changes in funding they would need to become more competitive and "make strong cases for their programs in order to get them funded" (Major). The rest of the day consisted of information sharing with centres as to services offered to the military community.

The second day of the Conference offered an opportunity for the Major from the Directorate to present centre staff with a policy issue which had been identified by the military social workers at a recent conference in Halifax. She began with a short history of social workers in the Canadian military and explained the background of MFRCs. She said that "Military Family Resource Centres were born out of grassroots womens' groups and had a focus of prevention, fostering health and family life." She went on to explain the relationship between the social workers and the MFRCs as forming "a close partnership and working relationships", and that, in Ottawa this had developed into a protocol between social workers and the MFRC crisis counsellor. Military social workers were concerned about issues of "referral criteria and case management" of military families. It is "military social workers who look after military matters" and "every MFRC should have the military social worker on its Board of Directors." She then read the protocol that had been developed in Ottawa to direct the work of the crisis counsellor at the MFRCs. The following is an excerpt:

The crisis counsellor is only in place for short term counselling. S/he will provide three to four sessions and then refer the case out of the centre. All career matters will be referred to the social worker

on the base and any written reports will go to the military through the social work office” (DMFS Major, Oct. 1992).

There was considerable tension in the room after the Major had delivered this piece of policy to the staff of the centres. There ensued a discussion where the issue of military family confidentiality was raised. One Director of a Centre asked, “what if they (military families) don’t want to deal with the military social worker?” Another staff person said, “is it not unethical to pass families around from one helper to another?” Finally one Director asked, “what about wives with issues of abuse where the military system may be the problem?” All these questions and areas of discussion fell upon deaf ears. It was obvious to me, and to the others at the Conference, that military protocol developed in Ottawa was not to be discussed. The room was full of local experts from individual communities yet their expert knowledge was not solicited in the process of extra-local policy making.

When the policy delivery segment of the day ended a civilian social worker said to me, “it is all territorial, the military social workers are scared they will be out of a job.” As I continued my data collection I made a point of asking military social workers about their relationship to the MFRC. The comments I heard at the Conference around “territoriality” as an issue between military social workers and the MFRC are explored in the next section. A military social worker explained the relationship between the crisis counsellor at the MFRC and his office:

Our relationship is strained at best. It is a newly implemented resource for families and we really haven’t worked the bugs out yet. For example, what strains the relationship - a fellow comes in - a military member. They are having trouble with their relationship and he has difficulties with anger management - he’s been abusive and he wants help. We start talking about it. I do an assessment and I ask that his spouse comes in. He comes back and says “no, my wife has gone to see the crisis counsellor at the MFRC for counselling”. Now we have a problem. That is not what the crisis worker is for. Her mandate is crisis work. She is there to take someone who is in real crisis - make an assessment and put that person out to an appropriate resource. The crisis counselling model is an intervention model - I know of no model that will support any work beyond 4 or

6 sessions. *We* have a mandate for crisis intervention that goes beyond that to both brief and long term therapy. Conflict comes between our office and hers when, for example a wife goes there - gets the therapy there - and that case isn't kicked back over to us or to someone else. There is very little communication between us - we just haven't developed a protocol yet [italics added] (Military social worker, interview, January, 1994).

This social worker appears more interested in the appropriate model of work the crisis counsellor is undertaking at the Centre than with the welfare of the wife, who as we saw in chapter three, is highly unlikely to approach the military social work office in her time of need. The military social worker speculates on the difficulty of relations with the crisis counsellor at the MFRC:

The MFRC crisis worker, in my mind, is everything a military social worker would like to do but doesn't have the time or resources to do it. So in order to provide the services to military families that the social workers feel are necessary and beneficial and essential to the well-being of the military family we came up with the MFRC model as a separate entity. What we've tried to do is separate prevention from treatment and we've simply done that to sell it to the government, to the military hierarchy, because we got funding for it. It's the Directorate of Military Family Support and is separate and apart from the Directorate of Health Treatment Services which social work is part of. Why doesn't she (crisis counsellor) or the MFRC in general have a mandate to see military members? As soon as her mandate includes seeing military members, that separation ceases to exist. The facade of there being a separate directorate falls. If the MFRCs start assessing families - why couldn't they go forth and make a recommendation (to the Base Commander). If they start to do that, where does it leave the social work branch of the military? A civilian with an MSW in the crisis workers' position is now doing the social workers' job. What do you need a military officer for? (Military social worker, interview, January, 1994).

These comments by the military social worker clearly show the importance the social worker places on military organizational aspects of helping military families as opposed to delivery of actual services provided. The military is downsizing in Canada and many military service members are concerned about losing their jobs. Military social

workers are no exception. I contend that the types of military power relations highlighted in this section; top-down policy delivery and territoriality issues between helpers, disable the work at the MFRC.

### **MFRC and Trust**

Of all helpers interviewed for this study, MFRC staff have the most access to military wives. The Centre is located in the Married Quarters and the staff see many women on a daily basis. As revealed in her interview, the staff member performing front line work at the MFRC understands the problems the women contend with in their work for the military. Her standpoint is different from the other helpers. Being a military wife herself she brings a unique perspective to her job. She too performs the duties of a military wife. The following excerpt exemplifies:

My own insight into the lifestyle makes working with the women comfortable. I am able to understand a little bit what they're feeling and what they're going through. I don't have to wonder or not understand or figure out what's happening because I've probably already been there in certain situations - not all situations. I feel comfortable in dealing with people and issues whether or not they are angry - I can understand where that comes from (MFRC staff member, interview, February, 1994).

Although the MFRC programs are attended by many military wives, the staff member reflected on the difficulty the staff face in being perceived as linked to the military system:

The difficult part for me is my basic philosophy. My basic reason for being here is to provide services to the community. The difficulty I get are the times when the trust isn't there. They say "you're still part of the military system" and I say "no, I work for the Family Resource Centre, which means my job is to work with families which means my first priority is to the community, not to the military." The trust isn't there. The Centre is still new and we're still visibly and officially seen as part of the system. That is really difficult (MFRC staff member, interview, February, 1994).

In this discussion of the women's lack of trust in the Centre, we are reminded of

the words of Director of MFSP about how the ultimate control of the Centre lies in the hands of the Base Commander. It appears that the women's perceptions of the Centre as part of the system are substantiated and they are right to approach the services cautiously.

The staff member continues:

It's that trust thing again. The concern is that if they seek help it's going to affect their husband's career and no matter what you tell people it is honestly what they think. That somehow the word is going to get back - that it is too small of a community. Even the Resource Centres that are totally civilian are finding that (MFRC staff member, interview, February, 1994).

As we saw in chapter two, the notion of repercussions to their husband's career becomes an organizing factor in whether women will go to the MFRC for help. The staff member explains further:

I don't think we're (MFRC staff) seen as a potential helper in a lot of situations. We're still seen as part of the military. When people tend to come to us with an issue, they still see you in the military format and people are quite angry when they initially come here. I think it is usually because they think it's partly our fault what's happened to them. Because you are representing the military and usually it is something the military has caused (MFRC staff member, interview, February, 1994).

As with military social workers it is a matter of not trusting the entire military helping system. Military wives I interviewed concurred. The MFRC staff member is optimistic about the future relationship between families and the MFRC, as the following suggests:

It comes down to experience. I think it's a time thing. People are going to have to have had enough good experiences through here - like any other trust building relationship you are in, you have to have enough good experiences and visibility about and information about to be able to feel that perhaps this agency is worthy of trust - of being able to assist me. I think we are still in a fishbowl - people are looking, waiting and watching - checking us out. That can take years - some of the attitudes may change. (MFRC staff member, interview, February, 1994)

The question I am left with is, can there ever be enough positive experiences when the military system ruling the MFRC is organized in a way that excludes and controls not only families' experiences, but those of the staff as well? Although there is a philosophy of community organization and a structure which proposes to create an MFRC with a separate entity and its own Advisory Board, wives persist in their mistrust of military service provision.

### **Conclusion**

As the MFRC staff member pointed out, problems arise at the Centre because staff are perceived as part of the military system. The social worker felt that this was a misapprehension. She explains her understanding of her obligation to the military system:

We're here to provide services to the families. We are under no obligation to report anything other than the general information on the programs and activities, that I need to report to my supervisor. I don't have any personal accountability to the base - like telling me how to do my job. I don't have a lot of contact with the military hierarchy (MFRC staff member, interview, February, 1994).

Although the MFRC social worker believes she has little accountability to the base, the military base *is* actively involved in what happens at the MFRC. Whether in the form of distribution of directive documents, chain-of-command reporting relations at the Centre, policy making practices that are top down and do not include the communities' local knowledge, or the fact that wives mistrust the help they receive from the Centres - all of these organized military practices disable helping services in the local MFRC. The MFRC staff member, although sometimes frustrated in her everyday work at the Centre, firmly believes the Centre to be a place for women:

The MFRCs can be great advocates for women - having a Centre here made up of spouses on the Advisory Board - most of the

volunteer work is done by the spouses - the Centre is here for spouses. I don't think we are at a point yet where people are comfortable enough to see the full potential of the Centre (MFRC staff member, interview, February, 1994).

I have found through my investigations at the MFRC, that women married to servicemen have tried to be part of the development of an experienced based centre without satisfactory results. Women have identified the need for a centre in their community, however the military cannot abandon its patriarchal organizational structure to enable women to identify and work for their own well-being in their own communities. The military has a certain view of military wives; that they perform duties for the military (as we have seen in chapter two and throughout this study). It is with this view in mind that the military continues to rule and control military wives for the benefit of the military agenda. The Director of MFSP tells of future plans for the MFRC program, "by 1996 it will have been a five year implementation and we will view the program as *steady state operations* - it's here to stay" [italics added] (Director MFSP, interview, June, 1994). The Director's use of military social work terminology - "steady state operations" - to describe a program based on a community development model reinforces how the military organization views the Family Support Program as part of the military's agenda for helping families in their work for the military. In social work terms "steady state" is defined as follows, "to have the stability that comes from being able to predict within some acceptable limits the behaviour of elements within the system" (Compton and Galloway, 1989, p. 134). I contend that the acceptable limits of the work of military family support systems are organized and controlled by the military so that they are predictable to the military system.

## Chapter Six

### Conclusion

#### Summary

Perhaps more than in any previous era, we are living at a time when women can draw on their own experiences with the military to expose the military for the contradictory and vulnerable patriarchal institution it is and always has been (Enloe, 1983, p. 220).

I began this study with my military wife experience and a curiosity about how service provision works for wives of military members. I explored the current Canadian literature with a particular interest in how knowledge about military wives is created. I discovered that while problems with the military lifestyle are identified in research results by military families and wives, what gets acted on are the issues identified by the military and that meet military needs. The military standpoint that underpins the research guarantees that the needs of the organization are met. The 'knowledge' created in military research about military wives does not contain their voice. The discourse on military wives and families offers a way of 'knowing' and 'understanding' that is based on assumptions about military wives, assumptions that rely on ideological concepts, such as, 'stress' and 'well-being'. I argue that this way of 'knowing' wives excludes their everyday experiences and is not informed by their actual lives.

Upon learning that military research studies were devoid of womens' voices, I undertook my study using principles of feminist research, specifically a method called institutional ethnography. This method enabled an understanding and explication of the power relations and ruling experienced by military wives in their relation to the military helping professions. With the notion of social relations in mind I uncovered the complex of relations that mold and shape the lives of military wives.

In exploring the social construction of military wives, I obtained women's words as

the point of entry into the study. I argue that women marrying military members become 'objects' of organizational action; they must learn how to behave as military wives. Control of military wives happens through the process of this construction. I found that military practices such as: frequent re-location of families, paternalism, wives' access to information, military decision making practices, and deployments create a dependency for women on the military system and create problems for the women in their everyday work for the military. I discovered the processes the women undertake known as "learning the channels" as a way to access help and how they come to understand about repercussions if they don't get it right. I show how the military helping response to women is related to operational effectiveness of the organization.

Once women are in the role of military wife, I argue that help provided by military padres and social workers is directed and organized to benefit the military and not help the wives. By explicating work practices and undertaking textual analysis of military documents I show how the military directs the help. I determined that help is organized by the dove-tailing of the military mission and professional knowledge. I uncovered how military helpers orient, adjust, and support wives, and I argue that wives are categorized and objectified in the process. Exploration of a particular MFRC revealed several hindrances to family support in the military community. For example: documents that direct/teach the women in their work for the military are distributed by the Centre staff; a chain-of-command structure at the MFRC works in the interest of the military and not the wives; and policy making is undertaken in a top down manner to maintain military control over the helping mission. These aspects of the MFRC create a lack of trust on the part of the wives for the system, which they rightly identify as being part of the military even if organizationally distinct.

Examination of the military helping services found that the organization is so tightly organized that parts of it had to be pried apart analytically. At times during the research

process this task seemed insurmountable and the institution seemed unapproachable. However, as this study reveals, the organization can be seen and explicated. I found that the helping services are organized in such a way as to maintain the military standpoint and to work for the military organization. I came to see how women are discouraged from using military helping services and sometimes when they do use them they are found to be not useful. I contend that air tight organizational structures and knowledge about military wives based on military ideology keeps women's oppression by the military a secret. It seems that if women are set up as 'military wives' and they buy the 'package' then the military can supply the 'pre-packaged help'. That approach can be claimed by the military to be adequate family support. But, women continue to handle their own problems that arise from doing work for the military, rendering their concerns and daily struggles invisible.

In answering my research question posed at the beginning of the thesis, I have shown how military wives' experiences of seeking help are transformed and managed by the military in order to retain military wives in their jobs.

### **Reflections**

In her book about institutionalized power and gender power relations, Lips (1991) points out, "even if no one wants to maintain things as they are... institutionalized power relations help to maintain a general system of power, such as gender power relations, because they help to make the system invisible, like water to a fish" (p. 11). This study attempts to make the organization of military social services visible to military wives and to professionals involved in the provision of those services. I have shown how the military creates problems for families and then implements a military style support system. There was a common frustration amongst the military helpers I interviewed; the difficulty of providing help as part of the same system that may be creating the problems. One helper

explains how she experiences the women who are ruled by the military structure:

The military community is a very unique community with a lot of wonderful women. The sad part is that you can't always see how wonderful these women are - or you can't even get to know some of the wonderful ones because of the military structure. The XO's (Executive Officer) wife can't get to know the seaman's wife because it is not done. As a woman watching women interact, they're very concerned about how their husband fits in here and not about being themselves as women. It's the disempowered thing - women aren't allowed to live to the fullest that they want to be (MFRC staff member, interview, February, 1994).

If the military believes in families, they should consider pulling out of the social service business and contract with civilian social service agencies to provide services to their families. This would not mean getting rid of existing resources for military wives, but creating a way for the women to be more actively and authentically involved in the creation of those resources. This would mean the military surrendering 'ultimate control' of the Family Resource Centres. These centres could then network with civilian community agencies. A military wife offers the following suggestion:

There are so many programs in the civilian society that have offered to network with the military and the military says "we'll do it ourselves". Well if you're going to do it yourselves, don't talk out of both sides of your mouth, widen the focus of what is needed for the military community (Military wife, interview, June, 1993).

The observation made by this woman that the military helpers talk out of both sides of their mouths points to the untenable position military social workers are in when they attempt to provide help for families. The definitive nature of military social work policies, as shown in this study, are such that military social workers are required to advance the interests of the military rather than the interests of military wives. This creates such conflict for some workers, I have been told, that they leave the military system. Yet for many, the organizational source of the problem remains hidden. They blame themselves.

Providing adequate support for wives is now widely accepted as being the best

way to keep military members fully operational, able to be deployed and to carry out their duties without the concern of family responsibilities. Considerable effort and finances go into military social work programs and Military Family Resource Centres to help wives cope. I propose, from my observations and analysis, that these resources are not bringing the most effective returns for the military. If operational effectiveness depends on controlling wives, the military needs to ask itself, are members really functioning at optimum level considering the lack of assistance given by the military to their wives or, because of fear of repercussions and poor experiences of the military helping services, are women sacrificing their health and well-being to military efficiency by repressing problems and not seeking support? I contend that enhancing the military mission is incompatible with helping families. In a time of scarce resources, how money is being spent on military social services needs to be examined. Commanders at the operational level could learn from this study. While the intentions and stated mission of supporting military families may be exemplary, the way in which services are organized in the end may not enhance the military mission by keeping military members morale up when they are deployed. The kind of knowledge created by this study allows the military to rethink its routine ways of managing families; it identifies the military practices which are the basis of not just wives' troubles but eventually of increased costs and inefficiency for the military.

I began this project with the hope that information revealed would begin to change oppressive structures; we can't change them until we can see them. Although the organizational structure was overwhelming, feminist method provided a way to understand its effects on women. "*Patriarchy is not simply hierarchical organization, but hierarchy in which particular people fill particular places*" (Hartmann, cited in Kramarae and Treichler, 1992, p. 323). While women married to service members are outside the actual structure of the military and they are marginal to the organizational loops that comprise the workings of the military, when they are needed, they are constructed into the category of 'military wife',

at which time they become useful to the operation of the military. I have shown that women's ideas and actions can inform the organization of the help - help which they will continue to need as long as they are living in the military system. The military should learn to listen to the wives. I contend that women's issues will always be bubbling, not from the bottom of the hierarchy, but from outside the realm of the 'work' the women are expected to undertake for the military. For example, a recent story of a military wife in Brandon, Manitoba was reported in the Victoria daily newspaper. The headline read, "Woman Seeks Apology for Dearth of Sympathy From Military Officials." The woman in the story had been assaulted by her husband and was trying to gather enough resources to leave the abusive situation. The article read in part:

Scraping together the money to flee her husband turned into another trap for James. Manitoba welfare authorities wouldn't help her without a referral from the (military) social worker at Shilo. Reluctantly, James went to see the social worker, who was married to her husband's boss. The next day, her husband came home in a rage, having heard from his boss she was trying to escape. He beat and choked her so that she required treatment for broken ribs and a sore neck. More than four years later, James is demanding an apology for how she was treated and has launched a one-woman campaign to help other battered military wives. She is now lobbying to have the military hire social work staff from off their bases (Times Colonist, May 13, 1994).

The bad publicity the military receives and the ensuing embarrassment experienced by the Department of National Defence when women do not bring their problems forward until they face crisis situations could be avoided if military officials re-examined the way in which the military relates to families. Understanding how the military creates problems for families, as is shown in this study, is a step towards a different way of working with military families that could benefit both the family and the military.

A related line of thinking asks how the civilian social work profession could be involved 'on the side of' these women. Civilian social workers who encounter military wives could learn from this study about how the military organizes helping services to

benefit the military and they could come to understand the dilemma faced by a military wife seeking help. The woman may not be helped in the military system and may be shunned by civilian workers who do not understand the organizational control exerted over the woman's life by the military.

As a feminist I have a political commitment to ending women's oppression. I believe that "a sociology for women has emancipatory possibilities for the researchers as well as the researched" (Acker et. al. 1983. p.135). In this study I suggest that the relationship between the Canadian Armed Forces and the military wife is an oppressive relationship. Frye says, "oppression involves a system of interrelated barriers and forces which reduce, immobilize and mold people who belong to a certain group, and effect their subordination to another group" (Frye, cited in Krameria and Treichler, 1992, p. 314). Rowbotham (1973) adds that "in order to discover its own identity (in this case the identity of military wives) as distinct from that of the oppressor it has to become visible to itself" (p. 27). I believe this research will be a step towards that visibility. By looking closely at how knowledge is created about military wives, we begin to see the part research plays in the organization of wives into a military standpoint which ultimately benefits the military. Subsequently, programs and support are created by the military - neither of which are informed by the people needing the services. If the military is serious about helping families the women must be treated as subjects in the creation of knowledge about their lives. As this study reveals, military wives know about their lives and see themselves as strong and independent women, not weak and dependent as some existing research suggests.

In the final section of this study I return to words of women who so courageously informed it. The following information was gathered from a group of twenty women who came together at a workshop to examine the stereotypes of the typical 'military wife', and to re-create that image using their own knowledge and voice. The ensuing words represent

some of the descriptors used by the women to define who they are: “self-aware, special, innovative, vibrant, spontaneous, strong, independent, supportive, flexible, adaptable, assertive, determined and dependable” (Military wives, Women’s Conference, 1992). These are not words you might associate with military wives, particularly if you relied on the current military research.

After interviewing the women, I asked each of them how they felt to be part of my study. One woman said:

I believe it (the study) is a validation of what a military wife is, because we are just human, we are just normal women and I feel doing this study with you that it is a real clear validation for myself. Not only because I know that you understand and you hear the same thing from a lot of people, but because it’s nice to be able to say it out loud and not be judged because of what I am truly feeling and how I see things. My opinion is accepted through this process, so I do appreciate you letting me be a part of it (Military wife, interview, June, 1993).

“There is the capacity of women themselves to analyze their own conditions and to make common cause with other women despite awesome barriers intended to divide them” (Enloe, 1983, p. 220). A military wife describes how she perceives women are adversely divided by the military structure and concludes the study with a question:

The military structure puts us against each other. For me, we have always been our own worst critics. I always hear military wives say, “Oh she’s a typical military wife” well, I ask, “who are you?” We do that to each other. It is as if you stick a bunch of hens in with a rooster and don’t give them any place to go - they are going to fight each other. Maybe that used to work, but this is the nineties and that’s not going to work anymore. If you give women an opportunity to have an MFRC, it can be an advocate for them. They are not going to be able to keep the masses down. The military has to adapt and change. But, is the military ready for that? (Military wife, interview, February, 1994).

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**APPENDIX ONE**

## Letter of Informed Consent: Military Wife

This research is being undertaken as part of a graduate level thesis at the University of Victoria. The purpose of the study is to understand the life of the military wife, from your point of view. This research is separate from the military structure.

If you agree to participate in this study I would interview you about your experiences as a military wife, on one occasion. My goal is to learn about your experience of being a military wife.

The interviews will be approximately two hours long and will be arranged at a time and location convenient to you. I will tape the interviews. The tape and transcript will be destroyed upon completion of my thesis. All information you give me will be kept strictly confidential and your name will never be used.

If you choose to participate in the study, you may withdraw at any time. Should you have a complaint about any aspect of the research, ..... at ..... has agreed to provide assistance in resolving the problem. If you have any questions or need to contact me I can be reached at .....

Your signature below will indicate that you understand and agree to the terms of participation in the study. Please sign two copies and keep one.

Name.....

Signature.....

### Letter of Informed Consent: Military Wives

This research is being undertaken as part of a graduate level thesis at the University of Victoria. The purpose is to understand the life of the military wife, from your point of view. This research is not part of the military structure.

If you agree to participate in this study I would audiotape this group session in which we discuss my research project. My goal is to learn about your experience of being a military wife.

Although I may have some particular questions to ask, the session will be more like a conversation. On your request, I will exclude any parts of the conversation from the study. The tape and transcript will be destroyed upon completion of my thesis. All information you give me will be kept strictly confidential and your name will never be used.

If you choose to participate in the study, you may withdraw at any time. Should you have a complaint about any aspect of the research, ..... at ..... has agreed to provide assistance in resolving the problem. If you have any questions or need to contact me I can be reached at .....

Your signature below will indicate that you understand and agree to the terms of participation in the study.

Signatures:

## Letter of Informed Consent: Social Worker

This research is being undertaken as part of a graduate level thesis at the University of Victoria. The purpose is to understand the life of the military wife from their point of view. This research is not part of the military structure. Participation in this research study will in no way affect your career in the military.

If you agree to participate I would like to interview you on one or more occasions. All interviews will focus on your role as a social worker who works with military wives.

The interviews will be approximately one hour in length and will take place at a time and place of your choice. I will tape the interview. The tape and the transcript will be destroyed upon completion of the thesis. All information given to me will be kept strictly confidential and your name will never be used.

If you choose to participate you may withdraw at any time. Should you have a complaint about any aspect of the research, ..... at ..... has agreed to provide assistance in resolving the problem. If you have any questions or need to contact me, my home telephone number is .....

Your signature below will indicate that you understand and agree to the terms of participation in the study. Please sign two copies and keep one.

Name.....

Signature.....

## Letter of Informed Consent: Padre/Chaplain

This research is being undertaken as part of a graduate level thesis at the University of Victoria. The purpose is to understand the life of the military wife from their point of view. This research is not part of the military structure. Participation in this research study will in no way affect your career in the military.

If you agree to participate I would like to interview you on one or more occasions. All interviews will focus on your role as a padre/chaplain who works with military wives.

The interviews will be approximately one hour in length and will take place at a time and place of your choice. I will tape the interview. The tape and the transcript will be destroyed upon completion of the thesis. All information given to me will be kept strictly confidential and your name will never be used.

If you choose to participate you may withdraw at any time. Should you have a complaint about any aspect of the research, ..... at ..... has agreed to provide assistance in resolving the problem. If you have any questions or need to contact me, my home telephone number is .....

Your signature below will indicate that you understand and agree to the terms of participation in the study. Please sign two copies and keep one.

Name.....

Signature.....

**APPENDIX TWO**

### Sample Questions For Military Wives

1. How long have you been married to someone in the military?
2. Tell me about your life as a military wife.
3. What problems have you had to deal with?
4. How did you decide what to do about your problem?
5. Where do you get information about the helping professions available to you in the community?
6. What makes your relationship with the social worker comfortable/difficult?
7. Describe a problem/story.
8. What would you like to have seen happen?
9. Is there anything else I should know about your life?

### Sample Questions For Social Workers

1. How long have you been employed as a social worker in the Canadian Armed Forces?
2. Tell me about a typical interaction with a military wife.
3. How would you describe your role in relation to the military wives?
4. How do the wives access your services?
5. How would you describe the life of a military wife?
6. How do you know when a military wife has a problem? Could you give me an example of that?
7. What makes your relationship with military wives comfortable/difficult?
8. What kinds of problems do the wives report to you? Which problems do you see as the most important?
9. Describe a problem/story.
10. Is there anything else you want to tell me?

### Sample Questions For Padre/Chaplain

1. How long have you been employed as a padre in the Canadian Armed Forces?
2. Tell me about a typical interaction with a military wife.
3. How would you describe your role in relation to the military wives?
4. How do the wives access your services?
5. How would you describe the life of a military wife?
6. How do you know when a military wife has a problem? Could you give me an example of that?
7. What makes your relationship with military wives comfortable/difficult?
8. What kinds of problems do the wives report to you? Which problems do you see as the most important?
9. Describe a problem/story.
10. Is there anything else you want to tell me?

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