



Families Continuous Attitudes Survey 2013

Background

The Families Continuous Attitudes Survey (FAMCAS) seeks the views of Armed Forces families on a range of issues including Service life, education and employment. The information was collected between February and April 2013.

The FAMCAS team noted that the response rate was disappointing and less than achieved in previous years. 23% of officers' spouses and 15% of Other Rank's (OR) responded in 2013.

Please note: This briefing is based on the executive summary provided by the MOD, we were not given the raw data. In addition, only levels of satisfaction and dissatisfaction were stated in the report; most questions offered a neutral or not applicable response option but these have not been included to ensure brevity of their report.

Key findings and trends

- More than half of Army families consider that their lifestyle compares reasonably with civilian counterparts (63% of officers' spouses and 59% of OR's spouses in agreement). Just under a third (29%) of both officers' and OR's spouses consider it to be better.
- A third of Army spouses work full-time (34%), whilst a quarter (26%) work part-time
- A third of Army spouses (32%) have difficulty in finding a job due to reasons related to their partner's Service
- An increasing proportion of families had difficulty securing a place for their children at a childcare facility of their choice (15% up from 8% in 2012). 15% had difficulty obtaining adequate information about childcare facilities prior to their change of posting.
- There has been no significant change in families obtaining places at a school of their choice
- 84% of officers' and 64% of OR's spouses consider CEA to be an important element of their soldier's conditions of employment, even if they are unlikely to ever claim it
- The majority of Army spouses live in SFA during the week (73%, up from 69% in 2012)
- A third of Army families have moved house in the last 12 months for Service reasons (31%). A quarter (25%) of officers' and 16% of OR's families own and live in their own houses.

Report Areas
Expectations

Army spouses generally feel that being an Army spouse is no better or worse than the expected, with the majority not asking their serving partner to leave the Army.

- Two thirds of officers’ (63%) and OR’s (59%) spouses feel that being an Army spouse is no better or worse than they expected
- A third of officers’ spouses and OR’s spouses (29%) consider that their life is better than that of civilian friends. This is a rise of 7 points from 2012 for officers’ spouses and a drop of 1 point for OR’s spouses.
- The majority of officers’ (53%) and OR’s (59%) spouses have never encouraged their serving partner to leave the Army. Two thirds of officers’ (63%) and OR’s (67%) spouses have encouraged their serving partner to remain in the Army. This is a drop from 66% and 70% since 2012.
- Around half of officers’ (54%) and OR’s (47%) spouses indicated that they would not be any happier if their partner chose to leave the Army sooner than planned.

Attitudes towards Army life

Whilst officers’ spouses and OR’s ranks spouses agreed on the key areas of disadvantage of Army life, there were some differences on the positives. The drop in officers’ spouses citing friendship and support from other military families is an interesting one, as is the drop in housing as a positive for OR’s.

The effect on Army spouses’ careers was the most significant disadvantage, more so than separation from their serving partner. The significant rise in the effect on OR’s spouses’ careers is worth noting.

It was worrying that OR’s spouses rated recognition in society as one of their key disadvantages.

Positives about Army life

- The top 5 positive about Army life were:

Officers	Other Ranks
Job security (38%)	Friendship/support from other military families (50%)
Friendship/support from other military families (36%)	Job security (38%)
Housing (35%)	Opportunities for travel (36%)
Opportunities for travel (35%)	Financial benefits/allowances (30%)
Financial benefits/allowances (32%)	Housing (26%)

- There has been a marked change in the number of OR’s spouses citing housing as a top positive about Army life - dropping from 45% in 2012 to 26%.
- There has been a marked change in the number of officers’ spouses citing friendship/support from other military families as a top positive about Army life - dropping from 47% in 2012 to 36%.

Negatives about Army life

- The top 5 negatives about Army life were:

Officers	Other Ranks
Effect on own career (68%) Amount of separation from spouse (64%) Emotional impact on children (63%) Frequency of house moves (50%) Children's education (44%) Job security (44%) Relationship with immediate family (38%)	Effect on own career (73%) Amount of separation from spouse (63%) Emotional impact on children (63%) Frequency of house moves (59%) Children's education (48%) Job security (46%) Relationship with immediate family (31%)

- There has been a marked rise in the number of OR's spouses citing effect on own career as a key negative about Army life - rising from 60% in 2012 to 73%. For officer's spouses, this marks a slight drop - from 72% in 2012 to 68%.

Dissatisfaction with Service life

- The top disadvantages about Army life were:

Officers	Other Ranks
Separation from spouse Education Family life Housing Healthcare Recognition Terms & Conditions of Service	Family life/Separation from spouse Housing/Recognition Education Housing Healthcare/Terms & Conditions of Service

- Over half of officers' (around 51%) and OR's spouses (around 48%) gave separation as their top disadvantage of Army life. A third of OR's ranks (30%) stated that lack of recognition was a significant disadvantage to Army life.

Healthcare

There has been a significant increase in access to GP and dental services for Army spouses. There has been a decrease in any additional hospital waiting time as a result of moving.

- There has been a significant increase in the percentage of Army spouses able to access to dental treatment in the last 12 months (from 83% in 2012 to 92% in 2013)
- The ability for Army spouses to access GP services has increased by 11% from 80% in 2012 to 91% in 2013.
- More Army spouses reported being able to access mental health support if needed (an increase from 11% in 2012 to 16% in 2013).
- About a quarter (23%) of Army spouses reported a detrimental increase in hospital waiting times as a result of moving. This is a decrease from just over a third (34%) in 2012.

Education

The significant support for the CEA is interesting to note, particularly as even those spouses who had not used it felt that this is a key part of their serving partner's employment package. There was a lack of knowledge of how the Service Pupil Premium is used to benefit their child and their school. There has been a significant rise in the amount of Army spouses having difficulty obtaining a place in the childcare of their choice.

Schooling

- Three quarters (78%) of Army spouses who responded have at least one child. Just over half (58%) stated that their child(ren) had to change schools following their last move due to Army reasons.
- 18% of children experienced a difference in syllabus when changing schools, a rise of 3 points from 2012.
- 10% of Army spouses experienced difficulties in obtaining a place at the school of their choice
- 84% of officers' spouses and 64% of OR's spouses stated that, whether they had used it or not, Continuity of Education Allowance was an important part of the Army employment package. This is consistent with 2012 figures.
- 77% of Army families' children are registered as Service children at their school. However, 15% of officers' spouses and a third (31%) of OR's spouses were not aware of or had not heard of what benefits their child or their school had experienced through receipt of the Service Pupil Premium.

Special Educational Needs (SEN)

- 9% of Army spouses stated that their child(ren) qualify for SEN. 70% of those were registered with the Children's Education Advisory Service (CEAS).
- Of those respondents with children requiring SEN, half of officers' (53%) and 37% of OR's spouses felt that the Army lifestyle made the development or progress of their child(ren) more difficult.

Childcare

- 15% of Army spouses had difficulty obtaining a place for their children at a childcare facility of their choice, whilst 15% had difficulty obtaining adequate information about childcare facilities prior to a posting. This represents a significant 7 point increase in both areas from 2012.

Housing

The speed of non-emergency repairs was a common theme of dissatisfaction. The E1132 application system was a source of satisfaction for OR's spouses. There has been a drop in the number of Army spouses wishing to live in their own houses and a rise in those preferring to live in SFA.

- The majority of Army spouses (73%) live in Service Families Accommodation (SFA) during the week - a small increase from 69% in 2012.

Officers' Spouses

- Satisfaction with SFA:
 - Overall standard
 - Maintenance
 - Speed of emergency repairs

- Speed of other repairs/Quality of repairs
 - System for reporting issues
 - Choice
 - Application via E1132
 - Application via HASC
- The greatest area of dissatisfaction was quality of repairs, followed by choice, speed of non-emergency repairs and maintenance.

OR's Spouses

- Satisfaction with SFA:
 - Application via E1132
 - Application via HASC
 - System for reporting issues
 - Choice
 - Quality of repairs
 - Speed of other repairs
 - Maintenance
 - Overall standard
- The greatest area of dissatisfaction was the application via HASC and the speed of non-emergency repairs, followed by overall standard.

Mobility

- 37% of officers' spouses and a third (30%) of OR's spouses stated that they had moved in the last 12 months for Service reasons
- Just under half of officers' spouses (47%) and 37% of OR's spouses indicated they would prefer to live in their own home during the week. This is a significant drop from 2012 when 59% of officers' spouses and 45% of OR's spouses indicated a wish to live in their own home.
- Half of officers' spouses (49%) and nearly two thirds (58%) of OR's spouses expressed a preference to live in SFA. This is a significant increase from 2012 when 35% of officers' spouses and 48% of OR's spouses expressed a preference to live in SFA.
- 20% of officers' spouses live separately from their serving partner during the week. On average, those who are unaccompanied see their spouses at least every 2 weeks (76%).

Home Ownership

The most significant reason for not buying their own home was the inability to afford a suitable house. The majority of Army spouses who bought their own home did so to provide stability but officers' spouses also did so to provide an investment.

- Just over a quarter (28%) of officers' spouses and 16% of OR's spouses own their own home and are living in it. This has decreased from 33% of officers' spouses and by 20% of OR's spouses since 2012.

Reasons for buying

- The main reasons for buying their own house for officer's families are to provide stability (around 36%) or as an investment (around 36%). The main reason for OR's families buying their own home is stability (around 26%).

- The main reason for Army families buying in a particular area was to be close to friends and family. This was more significant for OR's families with around 72% stating this as their main reason, compared to around 25% of officer's families. In addition, 40% of OR's spouses stated that job opportunities was a key reason for moving to a particular area, compared to around 16% of officers' spouses.

Reasons for not buying

- Two thirds of Army spouses who do not own their own home give the affordability of a suitable house (60%) as the main reason why
- The other key reasons given were that they felt SFA was better suited to family lifestyle and that they wished to move with their spouse

Separation

The majority of Army spouses were aware of where to go for support whilst separated from their partner. The majority of spouses felt that both the frequency and length of operational tours were about right.

Welfare support during separation

- Just under three quarters (72%) of Army spouses know where to go for Service provided welfare support and information whilst separated from their serving partner

Operational tours

- Around three quarters (74%) of officers' spouses and 69% of OR's spouses feel that the frequency of operational tours is "about right", which are similar figures to 2012.
- 69% of officers' spouses and 54% of OR's spouses feel that the tour lengths are "about right", which are similar figures to 2012

Employment

Two thirds of Army spouses are in some form of employment. The main reason given for being in employment was for career reasons. A third of Army spouses experienced difficulties gaining a job because their serving partner was often away and a quarter experienced difficulties because of their employment history.

- Just over a third (34%) of Army spouses are in full-time employment. A quarter (26%) are in part-time employment. A third (31%) are home makers/parents at home. This is a small increase since 2012 when 29% of Army spouses were in full-time employment, 24% were in part-time employment and 25% were home makers/parents at home.
- The majority of Army spouses stated that they chose to be employed for career reasons (around 41%), with around 16% saying it was for financial reasons.
- A third (32%) of Army spouses have experienced difficulty in finding a job due to their spouse often being away. This is a rise from 25% in 2012.
- A quarter (26%) of Army spouses experience difficulty because of their employment history (ie moving jobs frequently). This is a rise from 21% in 2012.
- 87% of Army spouses stated that if the MOD offered courses to assist them in finding employment, they would use them. A third (30%) of spouses believed they

would find a range of support to be helpful in them finding employment, such as CV writing, interview skills and small business start up courses.

Employment overseas

- 19% of Army spouses and/or their family accompanied their serving partner on an overseas assignment in the last 12 months. Just under half (46%) of officers' spouses and half (50%) of OR's spouses found paid employment overseas. This reflects a small rise from 45% for officer's spouses and 48% for OR's spouses in 2012.

Welfare Support

A third of Army spouses were satisfied with communication with their serving partner's unit.

- A third (32%) of Army spouses are satisfied with communications and contact with their Unit Welfare Officer and other members of their serving partner's unit (eg via families briefings, information from Welfare Office, personal visits)
- Of those families who had used the various advice and information services in the last 12 months (eg CEAS, AWS, HIVE), they were generally satisfied with the service they received

Summary

Whilst it is positive that Army spouses generally feel that Army spouse is no better or worse than they expected, there are a number of significant areas to consider:

- Although it is positive that two thirds of Army spouses are in some form of employment, it is concerning to note that a third have experienced difficulties in finding employment due to their serving partner being away a lot and a quarter experiencing difficulties due to their employment history which has been affected by moving around. The positive reaction to the MOD offering courses to assist spouses in finding employment is something that should be further investigated.
- In addition, the finding of the key disadvantage of Army life for spouses being the effect on their own career highlights the importance of employment for spouses. The fact that the key reason given for being in employment was for career reasons, rather than financial reasons, highlights that this is about spouse fulfilment. The significant rise in OR's spouses stating that the effect on their career is a disadvantage is a key one.
- As the majority of Army spouses stated that not being able to afford a suitable house was the key reason for not buying their own, this highlights that the NEM should consider this inability to afford to buy when considering the nature of the future structure. In addition, the rise in numbers preferring to be in SFA, the fact that three quarters of Army spouses live in SFA and that one of the key positives of Army life was the friendship and support from other military families demonstrates the importance of SFA and of families being housed together.
- The high value of CEA to Army spouses, regardless of whether they use it or not, demonstrates the importance of this provision.
- The increase in Army spouses being able to obtain a place at their childcare facility of their choice is concerning, as it can have an impact on returning to work and general morale.

- The lack of recognition by society being given as a key area of dissatisfaction for OR's spouses is worrying and noteworthy in the context of the Armed Forces Covenant.
- The lack of knowledge of what their child's Service Pupil Premium is being used highlights that schools should be clear about what projects this is used for.