

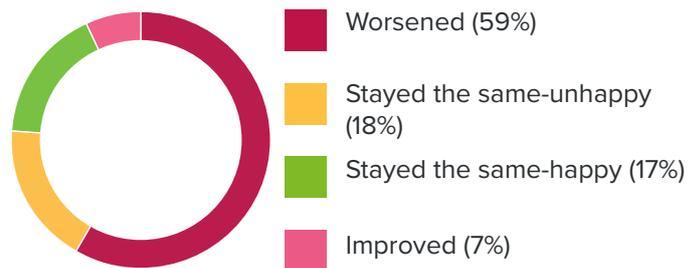
With the Army's Flexible Engagement System due to begin in April 2019, AFF invited Army spouses and partners to give their views on their soldier's work/life balance, and the impact it has on their family. **1,417** spouses and partners took the survey.

Working hours and balance

In the last two years, have your soldier's working hours:
Respondents 1,278



In the last two years, do you feel your soldier's work/life balance has:
Respondents 1,264



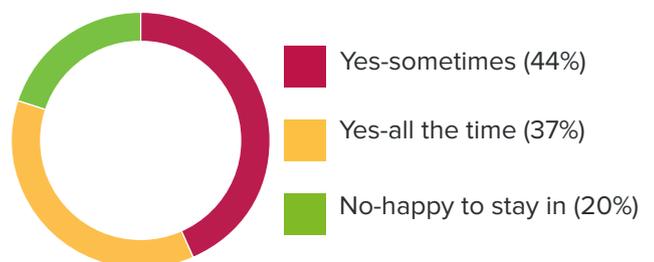
- Families currently perceive that the general tempo of work has noticeably increased, but have no narrative as to why that is the case.
- Top three most commonly identified barriers to a good work/life balance were:
 - short notice tasks
 - amount of time away from family
 - not being able to disconnect from work.
- Families also identified that workload was a significant barrier, with lack of personnel contributing towards this.

"Exercises and courses have meant that my partner has been away 75% of the time during this current posting. The last minute changes and amount of tasks taken on have meant when he is here, he is working late into the evenings and weekends at home. There is little time for normal life balance. It impacts my life greatly too as all home burdens fall on me and I can never rely or depend on my husband to be around."

Impact of work/life balance on families

- 81% of respondents stated that the work/life balance of their soldier has made them reconsider remaining as an Army family (1,268 respondents).
- Families were concerned about impact on:
 - wellbeing of the spouse/partner
 - wellbeing of the Service person and children
 - the cohesion of their family unit.
- Spouses also expressed concern about maintaining spousal employment with:
 - many short notice tasks
 - long working hours
 - time away from family
 - cultural attitude of the Army that soldier's career comes first.

Has the work/life balance of your soldier made you reconsider whether you will remain as an Army family?
Respondents 1,268



"I have a career and work shifts. I only ask for a couple of weeks' notice for a lengthy exercise or deployment and still only get three days' notice for three weeks away. It is unfair that I have then to find childcare at such short notice. It places lots of stress on me and I've considered quitting my job. Wives should be able to work, but this issue places a huge barrier."

"At that stage where I wonder if a divorce will make life easier for myself and my children."

Out of hours working

- Two thirds (66%) of spouses/partners said their soldier works either regularly or occasionally from home out of hours (1,274 respondents).
- This was particularly an issue for officers, with over half regularly working from home out of hours.
- Being expected to work regularly out of hours, and workload, were two of the top three barriers to officers maintaining a good work/life balance.
- Families were deeply concerned with the use of WhatsApp, with 'not being able to disconnect from work' being one of the top three barriers to a good work life balance.
- Spouses/partners stated that they feel Army personnel are constantly accessible; messages constantly come in whilst personnel are home and significantly extend the working day, as personnel feel they have to respond.

"My spouse frequently works late into the evenings. Also rising at 4am to 'get ahead' for the day. This coupled with no support staff...I see my spouse working more and more for a peacetime Army that shows no respite. Weekends are ruined with the stress of looming tasks in the week ahead.... We are seriously considering other options outside the Army!"

"Workload is such that, while no-one expects him to work from home, everyone knows that to do a good job you have to."

Solutions

Top three most commonly identified things the Army could do to improve work/life balance were:

1

More tolerance of unforeseen family emergencies

2

Ability to take TOIL for extra time worked

3

Opportunity to work more flexibly

- For other ranks' partners, the assistance requested was more based around support with childcare, either during emergencies or routine school or nursery runs.
- For officers' partners, it was about mitigating against having to work out of hours to complete work, and work more flexibly at home.
- Families wanted more flexibility to enable their soldier to:
 - support their childcare needs
 - support their employment
 - attend school events
 - be able to have a sustainable work/life balance.
- As well as practical solutions, families spoke about needing a change of culture, where the chain of command recognise the need for a change in how personnel work, and the needs of modern family life.
- Families welcomed the idea of new flexible working systems, but remained concerned how they would work in practice, and about the reliance on the willingness and personality of the chain of command to implement them.

"Investment has to be made in cultural change. Even if all these good ideas are put into practice, without a change in attitudes and behaviour from the top, they will remain just good ideas: soldiers won't feel truly empowered or supported to take advantage of them."

"I think it has to be top down driven and constantly nag my husband about this. I think anyone in a senior position has a responsibility to set a good example; i.e. not texting and sending e mails 24/7."

AFF view

AFF is concerned that such a significant amount of respondents felt their soldier's work/life balance had worsened in the last two years, with families citing a significant impact on the children's, partner's and Service person's wellbeing and family cohesion.

AFF would like the MOD and chain of command to recognise the changing nature of the modern Army family, and allow greater flexibility to meet their needs. The new flexible working arrangements will assist with this, but as well as practical changes, families also need a greater cultural change that recognises the need for the Service person to support their family's commitments.

Another area needing further examination is the apparent expectation that the Service person will work beyond their contracted hours - two thirds of partners said their soldier works either regularly or occasionally from home out of hours, and the use of WhatsApp groups contributes to the extension of the working day. AFF will be writing a paper to support raising these issues with the chain of command, to ensure that there is not an increasing negative impact on families' wellbeing.

"WhatsApp is now the bane of my life. Although my husband is home often, I get sick of his phone constantly beeping with WhatsApp messages, and most of the time they are not urgent, or could have been dealt with by either an end of day brief or a brief the morning after."