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Researchers embark on a project to further explore the experiences of children from military families

The [Northern Hub for Veterans and Military Families Research](#) at Northumbria University has received over £35,000 in funding from the [Forces Children's Trust](#) to further investigate the lived and emotional experiences of military connected children and young people.

This national pilot study will adapt existing evidence-based screening tools to allow military-connected children and young people to self-report their lived experiences. Using co-designed and preference-based research, the study will modify tools such as the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), Benevolent Childhood Experiences (BCEs), and Positive Childhood Experiences (PCEs) screening tools—currently used by practitioners—to make them more accessible and user-friendly for children and young people. These adaptations will ensure that the tools remain evidence-based while being better suited to the needs and experiences of this population.

The project will be led by [Dr Paul Watson](#), Assistant Director of the Northern Hub for Veterans and Military Families Research and Assistant Professor in Nursing at Northumbria University, along with Professor Derek Farrell MBE, Professor Darren Flynn and Claire Camara also from Northumbria University. It will also involve epidemiological expertise from Dr Roxana Delgado, a Professor and Military Research Scholar at the University of Texas Health Science Centre at San Antonio's (UT Health San Antonio) School of Nursing, Faye Acton from the Veterans and Families Institute for Military Social Research and representatives from Anglia Ruskin University.

Speaking about the project, Dr Paul Watson said: "The aim of this pilot study is to gain a fuller picture of the lived and emotional experiences of young

people from military families. We want to measure both adverse and positive experiences, alongside the emotional health and wellbeing of military connected children and young people in the UK to provide a balanced view of their lived experience.

“Traditionally we focus on ensuring we understand the negative or not so good experiences of young people from military families and providing interventions to support them, however, this project will also give us a better understanding of the positive experiences of this community allowing us to identify where we can create additional opportunities for them.

“Our plans to adapt the existing screening tools for children will give us an ideal opportunity to ensure we capture the voice of the child, as opposed to an adult’s interpretation of their experiences. It’s a great opportunity to further our understanding of where and how we can best support those living within the community, so we’re really excited about that.”

Children and young people from military families will be given the opportunity to self-report using the co-designed adapted tools, which will be shared through existing networks across the armed forces sector, ensuring the experiences are captured through first-hand accounts.

Speaking on the project, Dr. Delgado at UT Health San Antonio School of Nursing, said: “For the first time, we will be able to capture information that not only will have significant scientific contribution but will also support the development of programs that address the needs of military children. Coming together as research allies will help us serve the military connected community, specifically their children.”

The Forces Children’s Trust are a charity devoted to working together to assist any dependent children who are in need, whose father or mother has died or has sustained life-changing injuries whilst serving as a member of the Armed Forces. Find out more about their work by [visiting their website](#).

Speaking on the funding award, Denny Wise, Founder and CEO of the Forces Children’s Trust said: “We are delighted to have awarded Dr Paul Watson of the Northern Hub for Veterans and Family Research funding to undertake a pilot study to understand the relationships between adverse childhood experiences, benevolent childhood experiences and positive childhood experiences of military connected children and young people - from their

perspective”.

The Northern Hub for Veterans and Military Families Research is a multi-disciplinary team that conducts translational research in the Armed Forces Community covering health and social care, public health, psychology, social policy, human geography and nursing. The team work to facilitate collaboration across the armed forces sector and work with a variety of organisations including government, local authorities, the NHS and third sector to improve the lives of those they support. Find out more about the hub’s work by [visiting their web pages](#).

Northumbria University is dedicated to reducing health and social inequalities, contributing to the regional and national workforce and improving social, economic and health outcomes for the most marginalised in society. Through its new Centre for Health and Social Equity, researchers will be delivering world-leading health and social equity research and creating innovative, evidence-based policies and data-driven solutions to bring impactful change across the region, the UK and globally.☒☒☒

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