



A systemic perspective on children's well-being in military families in different countries

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Children are influenced by different environments – home, friends, school, community, society, and the existence and availability of various services – and child well-being is the outcome of the interrelationships between the child and these environments. The military is one of the environments that shapes the well-being of children in military families, and the environments interact with each other. **Methods:** Our main assumption is that the effect of military environment on child well-being may vary in different societies depending on the general social security system. We describe how the military children's well-being is embedded in military systems, which in turn is embedded in welfare state. The main question is how the well-being of children from military families varies across countries and how much variation can be explained by the interplay between military systems and different welfare regimes. **Results:** We begin by describing the differences in welfare states and military systems, and then give a short overview of children's well-being in the context of different welfare regimes (e.g., availability of public child care, health care, and access to education and extracurricular activities). **Discussion:** Next, we look at the interplay between the military and welfare regimes and, finally, we show how the well-being of military children is supported across countries by their different welfare regimes.

Key words: military environment, military families, NATO, well-being of military children, welfare regime, welfare state

RÉSUMÉ

Introduction : Les enfants sont influencés par différents environnements – maison, amis, école, communauté, société, et l'existence et la disponibilité de différents services – et le bien-être de l'enfant est le résultat de l'interaction entre l'enfant et ces environnements. L'environnement militaire influence le bien-être des enfants de familles militaires. De plus, il est nécessaire de mentionner que les environnements s'influencent mutuellement. **Méthodes :** Notre principale hypothèse est que l'effet de l'environnement militaire sur le bien-être de l'enfant peut varier d'une société à l'autre, selon le système général de sécurité sociale. Nous décrivons comment le bien-être des enfants de militaires est intégré au système militaire, qui à son tour est intégré dans un État providence. La principale question est : quelles sont les différences dans le bien-être des enfants de familles militaires dans différents pays, et dans quelle mesure ces différences peuvent-elles être expliquées par l'interaction entre le système militaire et les différents régimes de bien-être? **Résultats et discussion:** En premier, nous décrivons les différences entre l'État providence et les systèmes militaires, ensuite nous présentons un aperçu du bien-être de l'enfant dans le cadre des différents régimes de bien-être (disponibilité des services publics pour les enfants, soins de santé et accès à l'éducation, activités parascolaires), ensuite nous mettons l'accent sur l'interaction entre l'environnement militaire et les régimes de bien-être, et finalement, nous démontrons comment le bien-être des enfants de militaires est géré dans différents pays, qui ont des régimes de bien-être différents.

Mots-clés : OTAN, familles militaires, bien-être des enfants militaires, environnement militaire, État providence, régime de bien-être.

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INTRODUCTION

This report focuses on the structure of societies and their cultural aspects. We describe how the well-being of children from military families may differ across countries due to different cultural and social environments (e.g., laws, social and family policy and services). We explain how the military supports the well-being of children in some countries while the state supports it in others. The article is based on country-specific information collected and provided by the members of the NATO Human Factors Medicine Research Task Group-258 (NATO HFM RTG-258). Task group members filled out a questionnaire covering the following topics: general child care arrangements (public, private), military support for child care, formal and informal education, military arrangements in providing and supporting education, health care, counselling, and children's position in a society and children's rights.

We begin with a short overview of children's well-being in the context of different welfare regimes, and then turn to the interplay between the military and welfare regimes and how the well-being of military children and their rights are supported in different countries. Thus, this article is about the external factors that influence children's well-being within Minkkinen's structural model of children's well-being.¹

In Minkkinen's model, children are embedded in and influenced by different actors and institutions in the child's environments – home, friends, school, community, society, and the existence and availability of various services. Thus, child well-being is the outcome of the interaction between the child and his or her environment.² For children in military families, the military will be one of the institutions that shapes their well-being. Our main contention is that the effect of the military environment on child well-being varies in different societies depending on and in relation to the general social welfare system. Children's well-being is embedded in the military system, which is in turn embedded in the welfare state. It is important to note that the welfare state should be understood as the state's involvement in the distribution and redistribution of wealth in a given country, taking democracy and the relatively high standard of living as a basis for the welfare state. According to the concept of welfare state, the state or a well-established network of social institutions plays a key role in the protection and promotion of the economic and social well-being of citizens. Hence, the question is, “Does

military children's well-being vary across countries and how much can this variation be explained by the interplay between the military system and different welfare systems?”

METHODS

Welfare state as the context of children's well-being

In recent decades, several studies have focused on children's well-being in the broader social context. The main conclusion is that children's well-being varies across countries and that this variation can be explained by different aspects of family policies³⁻⁵ and children's positions and rights in a given society.⁶ Thus, researchers have categorized countries into different types of welfare states or the welfare regime's dimensions.⁷⁻¹¹ Esping-Andersen⁹ distinguishes three types of welfare regimes: social democratic, liberal, and conservative (**Table 1**). In addition, the Eastern European countries have been seen as a separate regime called post-communist and having characteristics from both the liberal and conservative regimes, as well as having some features unique to post-communist societies.³

Korpi¹¹ has taken a closer look at family policies and suggests three types of family regimes: dual-earner support regimes, general family support regimes, and market-oriented regimes. Engster and Stensöta,⁸ following Korpi's approach, suggest that the market-oriented regimes could be re-named “low family support regimes” on the grounds that they include both liberal states that have a clear market orientation (e.g., the United States and the United Kingdom) as well as Southern European countries (Greece, Spain, Portugal) that depend largely on extended family networks to care for children. Thus, on the basis of different typologies, we can state that there are three main groups of states (**Table 1**): social democratic regimes, which are characterized by the dual-earner family support model; conservative regimes, where general family support approach applies; and liberal and Mediterranean countries, which could be described as low family support regimes.¹² However, the several conservative states, in particular France and Germany, are moving from the traditional male breadwinner/housewife model to a “male breadwinner/female part-time care model” or even to a “half-and-half breadwinner model where both partners work part-time.”¹³(p.332)

Table 1. Typology of welfare states

	Social democratic	Liberal	Conservative	Post-communist
Dual-earner support regime	Denmark, Sweden, Norway			
General family-oriented regime			France; Belgium; Germany	Estonia, Slovenia, Romania, Czech Republic
Market-oriented/low family support regime		United Kingdom, United States, Canada		

Adapted from Science and Technology Organization, North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Impact of military life on children from military families [Internet]. Final report of NATO HFM RTG-258. AC/323(HFM-258)TP/859. Neuilly-sur-Seine Cedex, FR: NATO; 2019. Available from: <https://sto.nato.int/publications>. (Accessed September 12, 2019).

Note: Types of welfare states are not related to political movements or parties.

Sources: Esping-Andersen;⁹ Korpi;¹¹ Engster and Stensöta.⁸

There is little research on the association between welfare regimes and children's well-being. However, it can be assumed that children's well-being varies across welfare regimes due to the family policy that frames the everyday lives of families, including children. In the social democratic regimes, family policy is rather generous. There is a low-to-medium number of cash and tax benefits available for families with children, but a high level of public support is provided for in the form of parental leave and public child care.⁸ Regarding child care policies, Kröger points out that the best situation is in Nordic countries.¹⁴ In conservative regimes, the situation is the opposite: Cash and tax benefits for families with children are high, with medium levels of public support for paid parental leave and child care services, with child care services for children under 3 years of age being poorly supported.^{8,15} Engster and Stensöta⁸ conclude that so-called low family support regimes are characterized by overall low levels of family support. It means that the family cash and tax benefits are rather low, there is low-to-medium support for parental leave, and child care support is also rather modest. The more market-oriented countries tend to expect families to make their own care arrangements privately or through contracted labour. However, as León¹² points out, the need to follow the EU targets has in recent years forced countries with a liberal tradition to extend public child care and to regulate the private sector. Nevertheless, the personal strategies outside the reach of the state are still the main form of child care, albeit with different forms of state supervision. In the case of extended family regimes, the assumption is that the care provision is arranged through the family network.

Engster and Stensöta⁸ conclude that the children's well-being varies greatly between different welfare regimes and, thus, family policy matters for child well-being. Child poverty and child mortality rates are lower in social democratic regimes where the dual-earner family policy is prevalent. In these countries, moreover, children stay in the education system longer. The authors assume that the positive effect comes from the well-developed public child care and paid parenting leave policies. In addition, Moller and Misra¹⁶ point out that the incidence of child poverty is lower in countries where the mother's participation in paid work is supported through a combination of paid leave and child care services. We assume that in social democratic regimes, public child care as universal service for all children supports children's well-being more effectively. In the case of other regimes, the quality of child care (market-based or family-provided) varies more widely. It also suggests that children with a different social background have different opportunities for well-being. As stated by Saraceno,¹⁷ the policy packages (length and financial coverage of maternity and parental leave, public child care options) may have a different influence on children's well-being, depending on the family background. For instance, care allowances may increase social class differences; low-income mothers are more likely than high-income mothers to stay at home. It means that the opportunity structures vary across countries as well as across different social groups within a country.

To sum up, welfare regimes provide different contexts for children's well-being – that is, how the family copes with care obligations, who the main care provider is, and how the obligations are divided between the

family and the state (day care options, leave and allowances, quality of services, and so forth) and within a family (female care provider, dual-earner or dual-care provider family model). It means that the well-being of military families and their children is likewise embedded in different social contexts and that the role of the military varies across countries. We assume that in conservative and liberal regimes, the well-being of children from military families will depend more on arrangements made by the military than it does in social democratic regimes.

THE MILITARY SYSTEM

As stated above, children's well-being varies across welfare regimes. The question is whether the military provides additional support for the well-being of children from military families and how it is arranged. To answer this question, we will first briefly highlight the differences in militaries across countries. The Partnership for Peace (PfP) countries are very diverse in their sizes and populations and their legal, social, and economic situations. The size of a country is directly related to the size of military and on defence expenditures. The latest NATO data on defence expenditures of its members (2009–2016) from July 2016 shows the variability in defence expenditures and the numbers of military personnel across countries. In 2016, for example, the number of military personnel in the United States was 1,305,000 and 65,000 in Canada, compared to 6,000 in Estonia and 7,000 in Slovenia. The size of the military thus varies by a factor of more than 200 in some cases. Because of this, military expenditures are not directly comparable, but looking at the relative amount of spending compared with the gross domestic product, we see that the countries that spend more than 2% of gross domestic product (GDP) on defence are the United States, the United Kingdom, Poland, Greece, and Estonia. Available resources and needs also vary.

Type of military service

Military service is also heterogeneous. Smaller nations tend to have mandatory military service (conscription; see [Table 2](#)). Germany suspended conscription in 2011, limiting it (under Article 12a of German Basic Law) to times when its parliament declares that Germany is under attack or imminently threatened by armed forces. The United States has the Selective Service System that requires men between the ages of 18 and 25 to register with its armed forces. This creates a list of people

who can be conscripted if needed. Although Norway, Estonia, and Denmark have compulsory conscription, the actual situation differs extensively across countries. For instance, all 18-year-old Danish men are required to be conscripts, but due to a high proportion of volunteers, the actual number of conscripts called up is about 1%–4%. In Estonia, one third of conscripts are volunteers. Thus, the common aspect is that in all countries that use conscription, the conscripts are usually in the age range 18–27 years and many have volunteered. As a result, in the countries with mandatory military service, two different groups of military personnel and their families with different rights, needs, and obligations can be distinguished – conscripts and professional service men and women. For example, in Estonia it is possible to postpone compulsory military service due to family obligations (e.g., being the sole breadwinner and having dependent family members).

Women in the military

Although gender equity and equality has increased in Western countries,¹⁸ women still mainly take care of children¹⁹ and, thus, have the main responsibility for children's well-being. The proportion of women in the military is increasing in most of the countries under study, and women can start military service on a voluntary basis (see [Table 2](#)). However, female volunteers usually have to pass training on conscript-like conditions and pass special tests – just as men do. In Norway, conscription is compulsory for men and women. When Norway introduced universal military service 2015, it was the first NATO country to give both men and women equal duty to protect their country. Further, in most countries, women can serve in all branches, including in front-line combat positions. The exceptions are the Czech Republic and the United Kingdom. The United States opened all positions for women in 2016 and the United Kingdom has declared its intention to move in this direction by the end of 2018. The share of female military personnel in the armed forces varies across countries from 5% in Romania to 17% in Norway.

Everyday military life

Social perceptions of the military and military personnel also differ across countries. In Europe, the tendency is to see military service much like any other occupation. As such, the question of where one lives and one's housing are seen as private issues, and the military family has to find the best solution. As [Table 2](#) shows, the prevailing

Table 2. Description of the military in different countries

	Military branches	Defence expenditures as share of GDP (%)	Military personnel (thousands)	Type of service, conscription	Women in service (yes or no); (% of women in the armed forces*	Women in front-line combat positions (yes or no)	Year mandatory military service was abolished	Housing for professionals working in military
Belgium	Belgian Armed Forces Land Operations Command Naval Operations Command Air Operations Command	0.85	29	No	Yes, voluntary military service; (7.7)	Yes	1992	
Canada	Canadian Forces Canadian Army Royal Canadian Navy Royal Canadian Air Force Canada Command (Homeland Security; 2011)	0.99	65	No	Yes, voluntary military service; (15)	Yes	Never had compulsory service in peacetime	
Czech Republic	Army of the Czech Republic (<i>Armada Ceske Republiky</i>) Joint Forces Command (<i>Spolocene Sily</i> ; incl. Land Forces [<i>Pozemni Sily</i>] & Air Forces [<i>Vzdušne Sily</i>])	1.04	22	No	Yes, voluntary military service; (13.1)	No	2004	
Denmark	Defence Command Army Operational Command Admiral Danish Fleet Arctic Command Tactical Air Command Home Guard	1.17	16	Conscription	Yes, voluntary military service; (6.2)	Yes	–	Own home
Estonia	Estonian Defence Forces (<i>Eesti Kaitsevägi</i>) Land Force (<i>Maavägi</i>) Navy (<i>Merevägi</i>) Air Force (<i>Ohuvägi</i>) Defence League	2.16	6	Conscription	Yes, voluntary military service; (9.7)	Yes	–	Own home

(Continued)

Table 2. (Continued)

	Military branches	Defence expenditures as share of GDP (%)	Military personnel (thousands)	Type of service, conscription	Women in service (yes or no); (%) of women in the armed forces*	Women in front-line combat positions (yes or no)	Year mandatory military service was abolished	Housing for professionals working in military
France	Army (<i>Armee de Terre</i> ; includes Marines, Foreign Legion, Army Light Aviation) Navy (<i>Marine Nationale</i>) Air Force (<i>Armee de l'Air</i> [AdIA]; includes Air Defence)	1.78	207	No	Yes, voluntary military service; (15.2)	Yes	1996	
Germany	Federal Armed Forces (<i>Bundeswehr</i>) Army (<i>Heer</i>) Navy (Deutsche Marine, includes naval air arm) Air Force (<i>Luftwaffe</i>) Joint Support Services (<i>Streitkraeftbasis</i> [SKB]) Central Medical Service (<i>Zentraler Sanitaetsdienst</i> [ZSanDstBw])	1.19	180	De jure conscription, de facto no	Yes, voluntary military service; (10.9)	Yes	Since 2011, conscription suspended	Own home; younger privates may stay in military housing
Norway	Norwegian Army (<i>Haeren</i>) Royal Norwegian Navy (<i>Kongelige Norske Sjoeforsvaret</i> [RNoN], includes Coastal Rangers and Coast Guard [<i>Kystvakt</i>]) Royal Norwegian Air Force (<i>Kongelige Norske Luftforsvaret</i> [RNoAF]) Home Guard (<i>Heimevernet</i> [HV])	1.54	17 employees; 9 conscriptions per year	Conscription	Conscription since 2015 for both men and women; (17) of the employed	Yes		Own home; younger privates may stay in military housing
Romania	Land Forces Naval Forces (<i>Fortele Naval</i> [FN]) Romanian Air Force (<i>Fortele Aeriene Romane</i> [FAR])	2	70	No	Yes, voluntary military service; (5)	Yes	2006	Combination of military housing & own home

(Continued)

Table 2. (Continued)

Slovenia	Slovenian Armed Forces (<i>Slovenska Vojska</i> [SV]) Forces Command (with ground units, naval element, air and air Defence brigade) Administration for Civil Protection and Disaster Relief (ACPDR)	0.94	7	No	Yes, voluntary military service; (16.1)	No	2003	Own home
Sweden	Swedish Armed Forces (<i>Försvarsmakten</i>) <i>Army (Arméen)</i> <i>Navy (Marinen)</i> <i>Air Force (Svenska Flygvapnet)</i> Home Guard	1.1	20 employees; 22 in Home Guard, 10 employed part-time	Yes, again with start 2018	Yes, has been voluntary military service (2011–2017). Since 2018, conscription for both men and women; (16) of the full-time employed	Yes	2011 conscription suspended, but 2017 law in force again	Own home
United Kingdom	Army Royal Navy (includes Royal Marines) Royal Air Force	2.21	161	No	Yes, voluntary military service; (10.1)	Yes	1963	Combination of military housing & own home
United States	United States Armed Forces US Army US Navy (includes Marine Corps) US Air Force US Coast Guard	3.61	1,305	No, but required to register with Selective Service System	Yes, voluntary military service; (15.5)	Yes	1973	Combination of military housing & own home

Adapted from Science and Technology Organization, North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Impact of military life on children from military families [Internet]. Final report of NATO HFM RTG-258. AC/323(HFM-258)TP/859. Neuilly-sur-Seine Cedex, FR: NATO; 2019. Available from: <https://sto.nato.int/publications>. (Accessed September 12, 2019).

Note: Coast Guard administered in peacetime by the Department of Homeland Security, but in wartime reports to the Department of the Navy.

* Active duty female military personnel, 2015.

Additional sources: NATO³⁸; NATO Press release: Defence expenditures of NATO countries (2009–2016). Communique PR/CP(2016)116. Brussels: NATO; 2016 Jul 4 [cited 2018 Oct 9]. Available from: http://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2016_07/20160704_160704-pr2016-116.pdf.

tendency in most of the countries is that military personnel should live in their own homes. However, it has been pointed out that having one's own home means a long-distance commute for a person serving in military (e.g., Slovenia, Sweden, and Estonia). It seems that in smaller countries, instead of relocating, families prefer to remain in their current homes. Although it reduces the risk of problems related to relocation (e.g., new schools, friends), it might affect everyday family life and relations between family members. For instance, the longer distance between home and the military installation means less time for family members and limited ability to participate in everyday family life (taking children to school or day care). Independent housing is also the prevalent trend in the United States: in 2010 almost two thirds of service men and women owned their own homes, 32% rented, and 22% lived in military housing.

RESULTS

The interplay between the welfare state and the military

Children's well-being can be affected by different institutions. Besides the family, children spend increasing amounts of time in other institutions: nurseries, day care centres, preschools, schools, and hobby groups. The availability and quality of these services vary from one country to the next. We now look at how child care, health care, and formal and informal education are arranged in different countries and who – family, state, or the military – supports the well-being of children from military families. Child care might be seen as an issue of social welfare needed by children in vulnerable situations, or as a matter of child development and needed by all children.²⁰ In a welfare state, both these aspects are living ideas. First, we will frame the discussion about child care in terms of equal opportunities and as a response to children's rights.

Children's rights and position in a society and military

Children's rights require a different approach that respects children and young people and their capacities, involving them as active participants in issues and decisions affecting them.⁶ The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)²¹ has been ratified by most of the countries in the world, but not by the United States.²² In the United States, the Constitution does not say anything specifically about children and youth, nor does it recognize any of the welfare rights

important to children.²³ On the other hand, due to an initiative of President Obama the care and support of US military children was made to a top national security priority.²⁴

The near universal ratification of UNCRC lends significant force to recognition of the new status of children.²⁵ The strong regional commitment of the Council of Europe to children's participation rights and the example of its European neighbours have resulted in a situation where, in a few short decades, children's rights under the UNCRC, including rights of participation, have become integrated into civic life in many countries and into binding national law in some.²² However, children's rights remains a complex and contentious topic, which includes controversial practices such as child labour and the involvement of minors in armed conflict – both of which remain widespread and persistent socio-economic realities for many young people around the world.²⁶

Three forms of children's rights

UNCRC is an important global frame of reference for conceptualizing childhood, giving children some legal, social, and cultural independence. UNCRC defines a child as a person below the age of 18, and the guiding principles include non-discrimination, adherence to the best interests of the child, the right to life, survival, and development, and the right to participate.²⁷ Three main forms of rights for children have been suggested, often called the three Ps²⁸:

- *Provision* of appropriate support and services
- *Protection* from exploitation and abuse
- *Participation* – the right to be involved and heard

The domains of prevention, provision, and participation reflexively co-create and influence one another, each valued for its complement to the others, but with none overriding the importance or influence of the others.²⁹ These are rights to the resources, skills, and contributions necessary for the survival and full development of the child.²⁷ They include rights and access to adequate housing and food, shelter, clean water, formal education, primary health care, leisure and recreation, cultural activities and information about their rights. Specific articles in the convention address the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral, and social development (Article 27). Governments are required to help families and guardians who cannot afford to

provide this, particularly with regard to food, clothing, and housing. In addition, the needs of child refugees (Article 23), children with disabilities (Article 22), and children of minority or indigenous groups (Article 30) are addressed.

The term *child protection* refers to prevention and response to violence, exploitation, and abuse of children in all contexts.³⁰ This includes reaching children who are especially vulnerable to these threats, such as those living without family care, on the streets, or in situations of conflict or natural disasters. Child protection aims to prevent and address all forms of ill treatment that harm or is likely to affect negatively a child's or young person's safety, well-being, development, or human dignity in all settings, regardless of who commits that act and intentionality:⁶ "The aim is not to minimise the danger to children but to maximise their welfare."^{31(p.1)}

The UNCRC proclaims children's right to enjoy leisure, recreation, and cultural activities; their right to enjoy and to practice their own culture, religion, and language without fear of persecution or discrimination; and their right to privacy, protection, and autonomy.³² The right of participation extends to all actions and decisions that affect children's lives – in family, in school, in local communities, at the national level.³³ Specifically, children have both the right to be listened to and to be taken seriously. Children's rights are both about the right to be informed or consulted in decision making and the right to autonomy, that is, to make decisions.³⁴ The child should be heard and his or her point of view be considered, particularly in judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child as well as in the process of service delivery.^{35,36} This includes considering children as vital to dialogue around human rights and in a human development agenda.²²

UNCRC acknowledges the child as a member of her or his family and a member of a community, affirming the rights and duties of the child's parents, legal guardians and other responsible for looking after the child's interest and providing for the child's needs. The child is understood as a subject of rights and a social actor.^{25,37} In particular, Article 12 gives children the right to participate and be heard. This adds a unique dimension to the concept of children's well-being, particularly when linked to the other general principles of the UNCRC, namely, non-discrimination (Article 2), considering the best interest of the child (Article 3), and the right to a harmonious development (Article 6).²⁵

Children's rights and children's well-being

Research has shown that children and young people often wish to and are able to participate in issues related to their own protection and well-being and that this can have positive effects on their subjective well-being and safety and stability of care arrangements.³⁸ Child protection can be improved through meaningful and effective engagement of children to ascertain their wants and needs.⁶ The child is in reflexive interplay with family members and with others in the child's network, developing new social-emotional capacities as actors.^{39–40} With this emerging view on children as agents, it has become important to involve children in the process and decisions regarding their well-being.^{41,42} Any child who is capable of forming his or her own views has the right to express those views and get support to manage to do so, in all matters concerning the child.³³ The child's view and participation should be given due weight in accordance with the child's age and maturity and balanced against what is considered to be in the child's best interest:

There is no lower age limit imposed on the exercise of the right to participate. It extends therefore to any child who has a view on a matter of concern to them. Very small children and some children with disabilities may experience difficulties in articulating their views through speech but can be encouraged to do so through art, poetry, play, writing, computers, or signing.^{33(p.2)}

By involving the children, the child's participation may improve the decisions taken, increase the success of care arrangements and increase feelings of well-being for children involved.⁴³ Children report higher self-esteem, fewer behaviour problems, and better resist peer pressure to use illegal substances when living in family perceived as a democracy.⁴⁴ A child who becomes invited to participate in decisions might also feel more connected to the decisions and the emerging processes.^{45,46} Listening to children is about respecting them and helping them learn to value the importance of respecting others.³³ Children should be led to believe that they have a right to have a voice, and their families should be involved in these processes.³³ This requires that adults see and approach children as partners rather than subordinates in planning for their well-being.⁴⁷ Caution must be taken to avoid manipulation or tokenism.⁴⁸ For children, a good relationship with parents and other adults

involved is important in order to create a situation in which children feel free to say what they want and to feel that they are being taken seriously.⁴⁹

Appropriate services, care, and support, including from family relations matters for every child and even more for children in military families because they face multiple stressors, transitions, deployments, and other changes related to military life.^{50,51} Even if military children are doing well on average, the subset who suffer adverse effects from parental deployment need support.⁵² Engaging in military-sponsored activities and programs could serve as a resource for well-being.^{53,54} However, new research has also revealed clear implications for establishing and sustaining programs that build on natural, informal networks in communities providing children in military families opportunities to develop relationships “characterized by reliable alliance, sense of attachment, guidance, social integration, reassurance of worth, and opportunity for nurturance.”^{55(p.24)}

Child care policies

A recent report by the NATO Committee on Gender Perspectives³⁸ briefly summarizes the main work–life balance initiatives of NATO member nations. Based on national reports, the conclusion is that 61.5% of nations have specific programs or policies to maintain work–life balance, half of the nations have implemented measures to support parents when both are members of the armed forces (e.g., not deploying them at the same time). About 60% of nations allow part-time employment, and there are some measures to provide support to single parents. Most of the countries (88.5%) have child care policies that include day care facilities for children, breastfeeding breaks, or flexible working hours.

Maternity and parental leave

In all countries under study, the mothers can go on pregnancy leave or maternity leave, and in most of the countries it is paid. In the United States, however, mothers only can have up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave. Generally, women in the United States use a combination of sick and vacation leave to take time off work after the birth of a child.

In Denmark, mothers can have pregnancy leave before the child is born from 4–8 months. In Sweden, a pregnant woman working in a hard or risky work has a right to a maximum of 12 paid weeks (80% of income in previous period) before the estimated time of the birth. Both Denmark and Sweden allow the father of a newborn child 10 paid days. In Denmark, maternity leave is 14

weeks followed by parental leave for 32 weeks. For parental leave the parents decide how to divide the time between themselves. In Norway, the maternity/parental leave could either be 35 weeks paid at the rate of 100% of income or 45 weeks paid at 80%. The longest period of paid parental leave is provided in Sweden. The parents have together 480 days (69 weeks) paid parental leave. The parent on leave gets 80% of their previous income and a maximum 95 Euros [CAD\$140] per day for 390 days. The parents have to share remaining 90 days at a lower payment level.

In the United Kingdom, maternity/parental leave is 52 weeks, but only the first 6 weeks are paid at 90% of average weekly earnings; for the next 33 weeks, the payment is 139.58 pounds or 90% of average weekly earnings, whichever is lower. Although the duration of paid parental leave is lower in Estonia, Denmark, Slovenia, Germany, and France (between 14 and 20 weeks), the coverage is 100% of earnings. In Slovenia, maternity leave is 15 weeks (at 100%), followed by a period of parental leave (37 weeks), which is paid at 90% of salary; however, the child must be in homecare.

Thus, in most of the countries a maternity leave is followed by parental leave. The paid period of parental leave is the longest in Estonia, Sweden, and Norway, and the benefit is linked to previous income. If the parent has not had previous income, the parent gets a flat-rate benefit during the parental leave (e.g., in Sweden the parent gets 25 Euros [CAD\$37] per day, 7 days per week). France, the Czech Republic, and Belgium also pay out a flat-rate benefit. In the Danish labour market model, employee and employer determine the amount for the leave benefits by collective agreements, individual contracts, or workplace agreements; the state provides flat-rate benefits for maternity, parental, and paternity leaves (554 Euros [CAD\$820] per week in 2015). It should also be mentioned that there are different rules for being on parental leave and employed at the same time. For instance, Germany has introduced a new leave scheme called Parental Allowance Plus, which combines part-time work and a parental allowance. In Estonia, during the period of paid parental leave, additional income is capped at 1659,9 Euros (CAD\$2444). If the income is higher, then the parental allowance will be reduced accordingly.

Child care arrangements for children under 3 years of age

In most of the countries, children are cared for during parental leave period by their parents. During paid

parental leave, most of the newborn children are cared for by their parents at home. In Sweden parents are encouraged to bring their older children to child care/preschool when parents are on parental leave. By law, the children have the right to be in preschool for at least 3 hours per day or 15 hours per week. Some municipalities offer more. In the Czech Republic, there is a restriction on access to institutional child care during the paid parental leave period: Children under 2 years of age can attend a nursery or other facilities for preschool children for a maximum of 46 hours per month. The duration of leave and the amount of allowances and benefits vary widely; moreover, there are different rules that may restrict the options for child care provision for children under 3 years of age. An analysis by Mills et al.⁵⁶ showed that, in 2010, the 33% Barcelona target for children under 3 years of age was met in Denmark, Sweden, France, Slovenia, Belgium, and the United Kingdom. Nonetheless, the authors highlighted considerable cross-country variation regarding hours used. In some countries, such as Denmark, Slovenia, and Estonia, the use of the formal child care provision is predominantly full-time (over 30 hours per week), whereas in the United Kingdom and the Czech Republic parents mostly use child care part-time (under 30 hours per week).⁵⁶ To sum up, child care provision in Europe is heterogeneous: In Scandinavian countries, the dominant model of child care is provided in formal settings, but Central and Eastern European countries tend to rely on long parental leave schemes.⁵⁷

In the United States, the federal government provides money to states to fund preschool programs for low-income families (children from birth up to 5 years of age qualify). Further, 40 out of the 50 states provide preschool programs (some with income qualifications) for children, generally starting at 4 years of age. Consequently, most child care is private with parents paying. Thus, for children under 5 years of age, the most common type of child care arrangement is relative care (about 42% of children), followed by organized care facility (about 23.5% in day care centres, nursery or preschool, Head Start/school) and non-relative care (about 11.2% with nannies, child-minders, and such).⁵⁸ According to Sinha,⁵⁹ Canadian parents primarily rely on three types of child care arrangements for their children aged 4 years and under: day care centres (33%), home day care (31%), and private arrangements (nannies, relatives at 28%). In general, 70% of parents used full-time care (at least 30 hours per week) for children aged 4 years and under. The use of child care arrangements – as well as

child care programs and subsidies – can vary widely by province, influencing the actual cost to parents.

As described above, formal care and financial support to parents is very limited in the United States, which might be one reason why the military's role in child care provision is more significant. The Department of Defence has over 800 Child Development Centers (CDCs) around the world. Child care is typically available through these centres for children aged 6 weeks to 12 years. The centres are generally open from Monday through Friday between the hours of 6:00 a.m. and 6:30 p.m., although some installations have centres with extended hours or centres open around the clock. Fees are charged but vary by family income level. Each service branch has an child care provider program that certifies child care providers. These homes can either be in or outside military installations. Fees are generally the same as the CDCs. Subsidies are provided for private child care in cases where the CDCs are full or not available for families (<http://www.military.com/spouse/military-life/military-resources/military-child-care.html>). CDCs also provide before- and after-school care for a fee for children of school age. Moreover, there is additional support provided for families with a service member in the Wounded Warrior Transition Unit. Because most of the care is privately arranged, the families can find babysitters and nannies through websites, which may offer military discounts. With regard to European countries, the UK military arranges some extra child care support for children from military families. Some camps in the United Kingdom and overseas provide publicly supported child care, but these spaces are limited. Some places subsidize onsite child care offered by private or charitable organizations. In recent years, child care issues have become important in Germany. At the moment, there are four nurseries arranged by the military (in München, Bonn, Koblenz, and Ulm), with special agreements between the military and public or private child care facilities, which have provided 300 places for children from military families.⁶⁰

Child care arrangements for children 3 years of age to mandatory school age

Older children, aged between 3 years and mandatory school age, are mostly enrolled in public child care. It is important to emphasize that the mandatory school age varies widely across countries. It is 5 years of age in the United States and United Kingdom, 6 years of age in Belgium, the Czech Republic, France, Germany,

Slovenia, Norway, Romania, and Denmark, and 7 years of age in Estonia and Sweden. Looking at the percentage of children in this age-group who are cared for by formal arrangements, Belgium, France, Sweden, Germany, Estonia, Slovenia, Denmark, and the United Kingdom have met or surpassed 90% coverage, and Norway is very close to it. Romania and the Czech Republic have a coverage rate between 60% and 70%.¹ However, it should be noted that in countries with social democratic welfare regimes, public child care is funded by state or local authorities, but free child care is limited (e.g., in the United Kingdom). It means that all 3- to 4-year-old children are entitled to 15 hours per week of free early education for 38 weeks per year. However, if both parents are employed, they child gets a further 15 hours per week. In the countries where the mandatory school age is lower and children start their formal education at a younger age, the public child care options are more limited than in countries where children start school when they are older. To conclude, in European countries the parental leave schemes and public child care establishments are open to both civilian and military families – there are no special child care facilities for children from military families. It is the opposite in the United States, where support for child care is provided by the military; the military thus fills the gap.

Formal and informal education

Regarding formal education, children from military families in most of the countries under study attended public or private schools on the same grounds as children from civilian families. However, there are some exceptions. In the United States, the Department of Defence Education Activity runs 194 schools in the United States and in other countries for military children. About 86,000 of an estimated 1.2 million school-aged children of military families attend such schools; 75,000 attend public schools on military installations, and the rest attend public or private schools off military installations or are home schooled. In the case of overseas installations, the UK military also has its own schools. Moreover, it should be borne in mind that public schools near military installations can be described as military-heavy school districts. This is not only the case in the United States; it is a phenomenon also seen in other countries.

Extracurricular activities (before- and after-school programs, all-day schools, hobby groups, and so forth) have been seen as a microsystem in children's lives,

embedded in the mesosystems of schools and families.³⁵ The main assumption is that participation in extracurricular activities positively develops children and adolescents. Before- and after-school programs are offered in all countries, but access and availability vary. In the United States, the government and private entities fund some after-school care programs, but they are means-tested. Most civilian families pay for these programs themselves if they choose to use them. However, all military families have access to recreational facilities, such as libraries, bowling alleys, movie theatres, pools, gyms, vacation resorts, and so forth, for free or reduced prices.

In social democratic countries, the after-school programs are subsidized by government or local municipalities. Voluntary organizations provide after-school programs, which are sometimes undertaken in collaboration with public institutions. In Slovenia and Estonia, the schools offer their own programs for free, but there are also activities and programs that are organized by private companies and organizations for a fee.

The role of the military in providing extracurricular education for military children is rather modest. As described before, in Scandinavian countries, a wide range of after-school activities have been arranged and they are universal for all children, including children from military families. However, there could be some extra support if the family is joining the deployed person abroad. In the case of Sweden, the military will cover the costs of education for children during deployment. In the United Kingdom, the activities offered depend on the location (e.g., youth clubs). A different example comes from Estonia. The Defence League (a voluntary organization), which is a part of the Defence Forces, has its own children's/youth organizations (Young Eagles and Home Daughters). However, these organizations are open to all children and not only to children from military families. They organize free-time activities, training, and camping.

Health care and counselling

In most of the countries, children have free access to the health care and health services provided by the public health care system (taxpayer funded health insurance): Estonia, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Slovenia, Romania, and the United Kingdom. Thus, additional health services for military children are not so widely needed. In the United States, the publicly funded health care (Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program) is provided only to children from low-income families.

Children from military families are covered by the Military Health System (TRICARE). The US military health care system provides care for children either through military treatment facilities or through private facilities. If the care comes through military facilities, there is no cost, but there are some costs if private care is used.

In the United Kingdom, the military provides care for children from military families who are located overseas and, occasionally, where capacity exists in the UK military medical centres (i.e., where such services support clinical training). Although most countries provide state-funded health care for all children, there are special cases when the military gives some extra support. For instance, in the case of a parent's death or injury, all countries' militaries provide or organize counselling for the family. However, the military counselling system in the United States is more developed in that the military provides licensed child and youth behavioural and family life counsellors to all military children. In the case of a parent's death, the grief counselling (through Military One Source) and bereavement counselling (through the Veterans Administration) is provided. In Denmark counselling and support is organized by the Danish Veteran Centre. The centre offers support, counselling, help by social workers, and psychological treatment for Veterans and their families with problems that arise in connection with deployment. It is a lifelong service to cover challenges that only become apparent later in life.⁶¹

Deployment and children's well-being

Finally, we will look at military-specific situations, relocations, and deployments, which may have a significant influence on children's well-being.⁶² The question is how seriously the military takes the effects of deployments and relocations on children's well-being. In post-communist countries (Estonia, Slovenia, Romania), it is quite common that parents with small children can postpone deployment or refuse to be deployed if children are preschool age. This is regulated by general public legislation. For instance, in Estonia parents with child/children up to 3 years of age cannot be deployed without their consent. In Slovenia, the parent has right to decline working more than 8 hours per day until the child is 3 years of age or until the end of the first school year of the youngest child (aged 6–7 years) in families with more than one child; similarly, service members can choose not to be deployed. In Denmark and Germany, the general rules of maternity and parental leave

apply also to military personnel. If service members have the right to maternity or paternity leave during a given period, they can stay on leave but have to arrange their future work situation with their supervisor. The supervisor decides whether to accept the wish to stay on maternity/paternity leave during the deployment period. Although there is no rule or legislation, the application to stay on maternity/parental leave is usually accepted and a person is replaced by another service member. In some countries, there is differentiation by gender. In the United Kingdom, for example, a female service member who is still breastfeeding or has a child aged under 6 months will not be deployed, but this does not apply to male service members. Moreover, dual-serving couples who have children are generally not deployed at the same time. In Sweden, Norway, the United States, and Canada, members with children are not exempted from deployment. In the United States, dual-military parents and single parents are obliged to have a Family Care Plan in case of deployment, meaning that families have to plan and arrange the care of children for the period of deployment, but they cannot defer deployment. A different example comes from Sweden, where the soldier, being deployed aboard, has the right to compensation for additional costs at home (about 320 Euros [CAD\$473] per month), including for children at home (425 Euros [CAD\$628] per month).

To sum up, a clear pattern has emerged. On one side are Eastern European countries where service members with small children have similar rights as parents in any other occupation, which are regulated by national legislation. On the other side are countries where being a parent does not bring with them any more rights than service members without children.

DISCUSSION

This article was guided by the structural model of children's well-being. We described the social and legal contexts that shape the well-being of children from military families across different countries. We showed how children's well-being is supported by different institutions – welfare state, military, voluntary organizations, and the family – and that support is very differently divided between these institutions in different nations. We focused on structural factors that could influence children's well-being: general legal context, child care, health care, and formal and informal education. And we tried to describe the roles of military institutions and the general social security system in these domains. Thus, of the

three main forms of rights of children, we concentrated mostly on aspects of provision.

Different types of welfare state and military legal systems create the context for children's well-being in military families

At the start of the article, we indicated that our analysis would be guided by the typologies of the welfare state. Children's well-being, including children from military families, may vary across nations because of different family policies (including child care arrangements, parental leave schemes, and such) and social security systems. The comparison of European military law systems showed that there are great variations across countries in the civilianization of the armed forces.⁶³ As pointed out by Nolte and his colleagues, the military's approach to working time is permanent availability of military personnel. However, the extent to which different nations adhere to this concept varies. On the one hand, some countries' military working time was comparable to that of their civil services (e.g., Denmark, the Netherlands, Germany); on the other hand, some countries had no laws regulating the service hours or compensation of overtime work (e.g., France and Spain).⁶³ Thus, in addition to family and child-related policies, the military's legal system should be taken into account in understanding children's well-being because different countries have different laws that affect military personnel and their families.

Policies framing children's well-being are not static, but dynamic

Legislation and policy (e.g., social policy, Veteran's policy) are not fixed but are constantly developing, and this change is enlivened by the international flow of ideas.⁶⁴ This means the division of countries by the typology of welfare regimes depends on the indicators used at particular points in time. For instance, Germany has recently introduced new legislation to reconcile military service and family life (e.g., a bill regulating the time for family care obligations in 2016). Our analysis points to some patterns among the variation across nations. Looking at the interplay between the welfare state and the military in the case of child care, we can highlight the following patterns.

In social democratic and post-communist countries, children from military and civilian families are equal

The social democratic welfare regimes – Norway, Sweden, and Denmark – and the post-communist countries – Estonia, Slovenia, the Czech Republic, and

Romania – provide publicly funded child care, and children from military and civilian families are treated equally. The relatively good availability of public child care services means the military need not provide extra services. Nevertheless, the other reason might be that in post-communist countries the social security system and the military have been created since the beginning of 1990s. And both processes have taken place at the same time, which means that the family members of military personnel are seen to belong to civilian world, and their well-being is supported by universal social security system. However, if we look at the parental rights of military personnel in cases of deployment, military parents have no more rights than non-parents in Norway and Sweden.

In liberal welfare regimes the military plays an important role in children's well-being

On the other end of the spectrum are the liberal welfare regimes – Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States – where state-funded child care is rather limited, and this must be compensated for with a higher provision of care by the military. Moreover, parental status is not seen by the law as a reason to refuse deployment. Finally, among the conservative welfare regimes (i.e., Germany, France, and Belgium), only France and Belgium have met the Barcelona target for child care in both age categories.

Recognizing the importance of suitable child care in creating equal opportunities in employment between men and women, the European Council, during the 2002 Barcelona Summit, set the target of providing child care by 2010 to (1) at least 90% of children between 3 years of age and the mandatory school age, and (2) at least 33% of children under 3 years of age. Therefore, the meeting of the Barcelona target suggests a good availability of child care for children from military families. As described above, in the case of Germany, the military supports the child care arrangements of military families to some extent. To sum up, the military has a larger role in children's well-being in liberal welfare regimes, while services in social democratic regimes are universal. Social democratic regimes have services dedicated only to the children from military families, but these services are extra support and related to the specific aspects of military life (e.g., long parental deployments, and so forth) and do not replace the services and support provided by the general social security system.

Analyzing and supporting the well-being of children from military families depends on accounting for the institutional and cultural factors that shape the military and the families of military personnel

As stated by Nolte,⁶³ the differences in military laws will become especially visible during international military operations when personnel from different nations are serving together. Involvement in international operations and membership in NATO will influence military laws, including the development of services. In Estonia, for instance, a Veteran's policy was first adopted in 2012, and one reason behind it was international experience. Considering the differences of social security systems framing the everyday lives of children, including children from military families, we might witness a movement toward harmonization of policies and practices; for example, different EU targets. However, as we pointed out, people arrange child care, health care, and education in different ways in different countries. Thus, in some cases, there is no need for the support from the military side; in other cases, it could be the only option for military families.

CONCLUSIONS

To conclude, we found patterns matching the typology of welfare regimes, but each country has its own peculiarities associated with its historical background, cultural values, and even with the size of its population, which in turn create a context for the interplay between military and civilian worlds. Thus, the grouping of countries could be understood as a generalization for analytical purposes, and we do not claim that these countries are identical; rather, they share some similar traits that create an environment for the well-being of children from military families.

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