

How drop-in services provide preventative help for military-connected families with young children

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Introduction

Features of military life, including deployment, can cause additional stress for families, which can potentially undermine parenting and child wellbeing (Alfano et al., 2016).

There is evidence that preventative interventions for military-connected families with young children can promote resilience, help parents overcome stress, anxiety and depression and encourage child-centred parenting. However, few studies are located within the UK (Nolan & Misca, 2018).

This study aimed to identify the extent to which drop-in services are meeting desired outcomes and provide learning that will benefit others working with military-connected families.



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Method

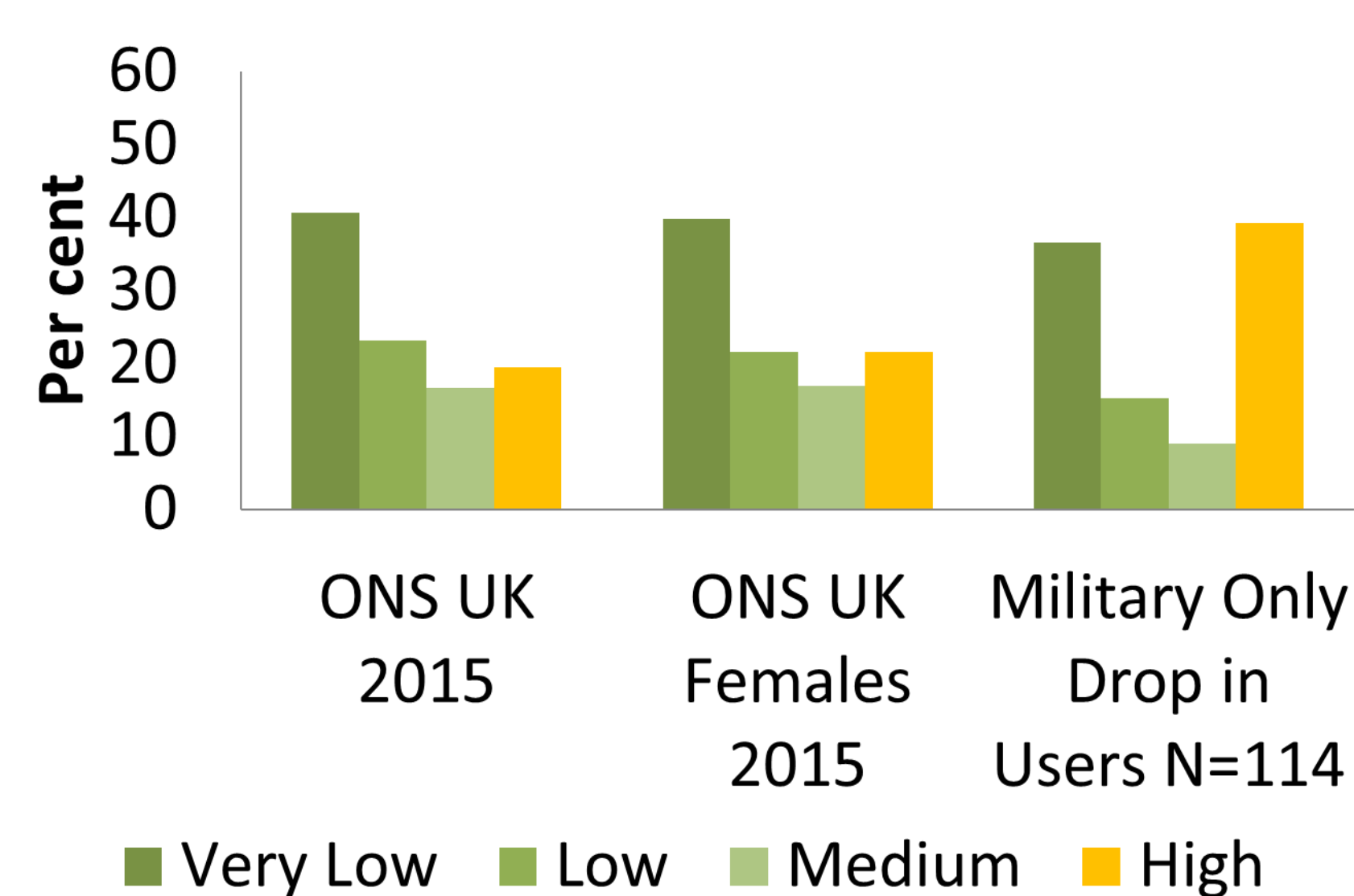
Drop-in services delivered at two British army garrisons aim to build five protective factors: parental resilience, social connections, knowledge of parenting and child development, support in times of need, and the social and emotional competence of children (Harper Browne, 2014).

Interviews and focus groups were held with local professionals and parents who attend the drop-ins. Analysis of the qualitative data informed the development of an online survey completed by 137 parents/carers (87% of drop-in users) that asked about wellbeing and protective factors (ONS, 2018; Kiplinger & Harper-Browne, 2014). Fifteen parents who were new to the drop-in completed a follow-up survey three months later.

Findings

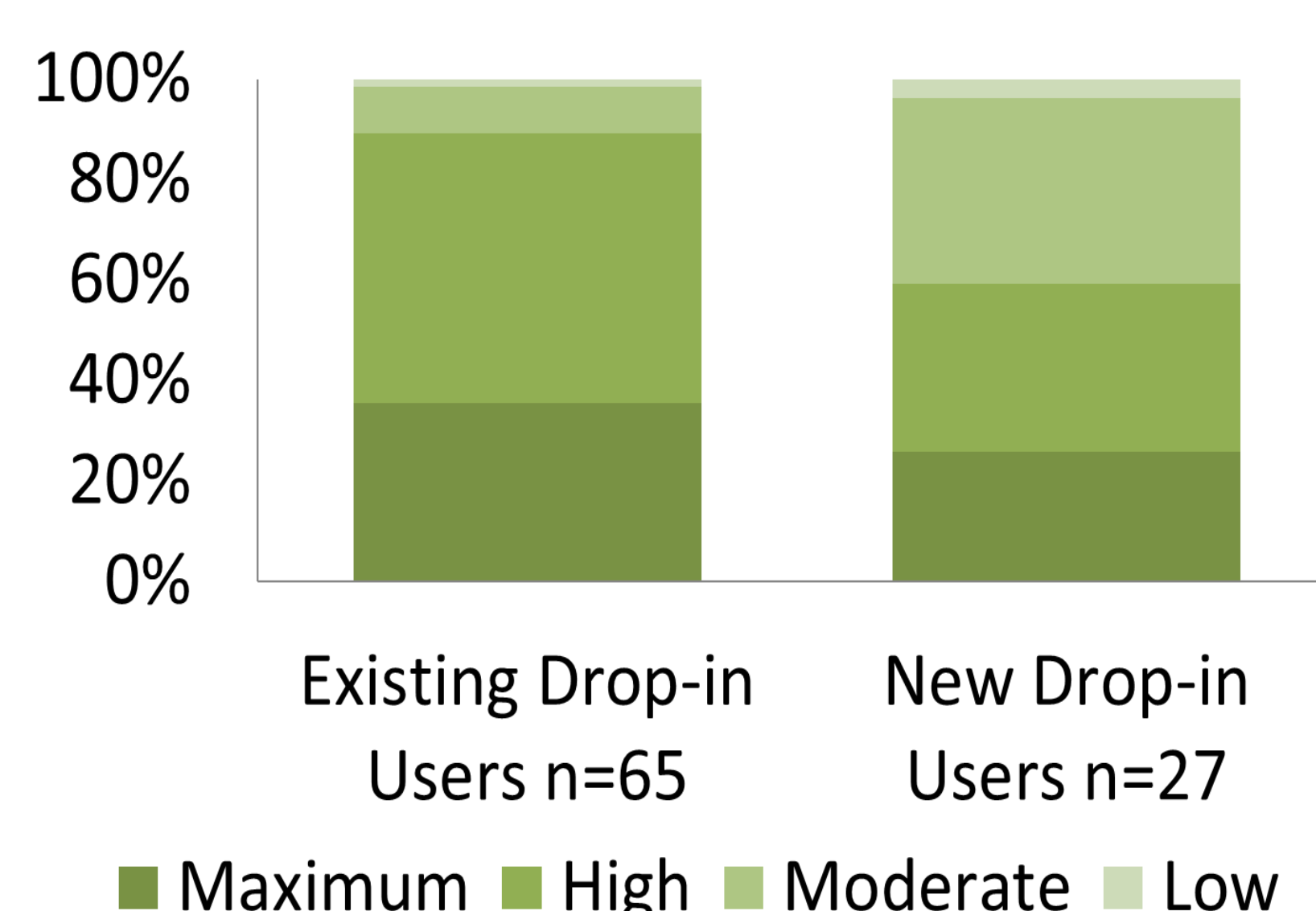
- Relocation and deployment of serving parents was frequent and periods spent away from home were often lengthy.
- Parents and professionals described how military life can include barriers to seeking help and an increased risk of social isolation and anxiety for family members.
- Parents attending the drop-in services reported higher levels of anxiety than the general population in the UK.

Comparison of reported levels of anxiety among the drop-in users compared with UK populations.



- Parents completing the follow-up survey reported reduced anxiety.
- Parents who regularly used the services reported significantly greater social connections and greater confidence in their parenting abilities.
- The number of parents reporting they had support at times of need was significantly higher if they had been attending for three months or more.

New and existing drop-in users' assessments of their support in times of need using the Parental Assessment of Protective Factors (n=92)



Conclusion

The findings provide promising evidence that it is appropriate and viable to target early help services specifically for military-connected families, who experience higher anxiety and additional stressors compared to the general population.

References

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Further information

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