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# Exploring the effectness of the use of social media during deployment within military families: the case of Ba-Phalaborwa District Municipality, Limpopo Province in South Africa

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# EXPLORING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA DURING DEPLOYMENT WITHIN MILITARY FAMILIES: THE CASE OF BA-PHALABORWA DISTRICT MUNICIPALITY, LIMPOPO PROVINCE IN SOUTH AFRICA



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Research Report

by

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## DECLARATION

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I, Katlego Mogale (Student number: 1545650), am a student registered for Master of Arts (Occupational Social Work) in the year 2016. I hereby declare the following:

- I am aware that plagiarism (the use of someone else's work without their permission and/or without acknowledging the original source) is wrong.
- I confirm that ALL the work submitted for assessment for the above course is my own unaided work except where I have explicitly indicated otherwise.
- I have followed the required conventions in referencing the thoughts and ideas of others.
- I understand that the University of the Witwatersrand may take disciplinary action against me if there is a belief that this is not my own unaided work or that I have failed to acknowledge the source of the ideas or words in my writing.

Katlego Mokwape Jessica Mogale ..... 27-11-2020

**Full names** **Date**

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my sons Oratilwe Disego William and Lefa Modibe Clifford for having been my biggest source of strength. There were times when I thought I could not go on, but your adorable, innocent little smiles convinced me to press on.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To the many people who offered me support, love, care, inspiration and motivation throughout my study, I owe you a debt of gratitude. I particularly want to extend my heartfelt thanks to the following individuals who were instrumental in my success:

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- My parents, Malose and Mmakoma, for their care, love, support and understanding, and for being a source of strength throughout my life.
- My siblings, Koketjo, Molala and Makutu, for standing by me through thick and thin.
- My sons, Disego and Modibe, for always being my defenders, and for inspiring me to be the best mom I can be.
- Most importantly, the participants who shared their lived experiences with me so willingly and openly. Without them, this study would have not been possible.
- The South African National Defence Force authorities, for granting me permission to conduct this study among their employees and their employees' dependants.

## ABSTRACT

The deployment of soldiers on peacekeeping missions or to secure national borders has the potential to threaten the sustainability of military families, often leading to fragmentation of the family unit. However, the advent of social media may provide a solution for easier and more open communication. An exploratory qualitative research study was undertaken to acquire an understanding of the communication challenges faced by South African soldiers and their families during deployment and their strategies for tackling such challenges. Soldiers and their family members from the Ba-Phalaborwa district municipality, Limpopo province were identified and recruited using purposive sampling and snowball sampling. The sampling process yielded a total of 14 soldiers and their dependents. The sample comprised soldiers and the dependents' of soldiers who had been deployed within the past 24 to 36 months, either internally or externally, for a period of six months and longer. The inclusion criteria were males and females from 18 to 60 years of age. Semi-structured interviews, aided by an interview guide, were conducted with 14 soldiers and their dependents, and were then analysed thematically using Thomas' (2006) steps of qualitative data analysis and verified according to Guba and Lincoln's data verification strategies (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). Relevant ethical principles were applied throughout the process of this study.

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# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

## 1.1 Introduction

While soldiers play a vital role, particularly concerning peacekeeping operations and securing a country's borders, the primary role of family units as institutions of socialisation is diminished. As a result of deployment, families become fragmented and, in some instances, couples separate. Deployment often means long periods of absence from home or one's home country and minimal or no communication, jeopardising the sustainability of relationships. With the advent of social media, many challenges such as distance and separation emanating from deployment could be addressed or mitigated, although the extent of adoption of such platforms has not been established. Furthermore social media has proven to be one of the tools which are assisting with preserving the military families. In most instances family preservation services are used to strengthen and support family relationships, in the study social media was used in order to address challenges within the families as a result of deployment.

## 1.2 Problem Statement and Rationale for the Study

Deployment presents a significant challenge to families of military personnel, especially children (Alfano, Lau, Balderas, Bunnell, & Beidel, 2016). As defined by The Department of Defence (DOD) Dictionary of military and associated terms (2017), 'deployment' involves rotating soldiers in and out of their ordinary operational areas. The deployment of a spouse or a family member may result in fragmentation and disunity in the family, especially when for extended periods of six months or longer and often affects the mental health of one or all parties; (Gewirtz, Erbes, Polusny, Forgatch, & DeGarmo, 2011; Pincus, et al. 1996). While the partners of deployed soldiers often have no knowledge of the details of their return, their children's mental state is often affected negatively (Alfano, et al., 2016; Gewirtz, et al., 2011; (Trautmann, Alhusen, & Gross, 2015). The widespread impact of deployment on the family has prompted the saying, "When one person joins [the military], the whole family serves" (Alfano et al., 2016, p. 1). This study explored the available mechanisms to bridge the gap of separation and maintain family relationships. As defined by Walsh (in Van Breda 2011), family resilience, which is key to saving families from possible damage caused by deployment, refers to families being assisted to cope with the central processes that are effective in addressing challenges or persistent

stressors that emerged within or outside the family. According to Van Breda (2011), resilience in the military context included the ability of families to cope with the stressors influenced by military operations and to emerge stronger with the family support systems provided.

As a social worker employed by the South African National Defence Force (SANDF), the researcher observed that most marital or family disputes referred for social work interventions were attributed to a spouse's deployment. These cases sparked the researcher's curiosity, particularly with respect to how changes in communication patterns could contribute towards addressing some of these challenges or mitigate their impact on family systems. Although the patterns of communication may not necessarily be the only solution, they may be critical in addressing some of the challenges that families attribute to the deployment of soldiers.

Some soldiers (within SANDF) are deployed on missions outside the country as part of their work obligations. This work can be stressful and may contribute to dysfunctional aspects within their lives such as their families. According to Pitse (2010) a functional family unit is crucial in enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of soldiers in their work (Pitse, 2010). In 2014, South African Soldiers who were deployed to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) were attacked by rebel groups; however through the use of social media they have managed have access to notify their friends, families and loved ones that they were safe after their ordeal (Martin, 2014). The researcher is thus of the view that the use of social media for the deployed soldiers is essential as it is a way of communication between them and their families or dependants.

Bittner (2014) stated that the military had made advances in transforming the way families maintained their connections with deployed soldiers. Her study explored juxtaposing the issue of absence, distance and conflicting time zones with the convenience of using social media or electronic forms of communication. The study aimed at examining the various means, and extent in which social media is utilized to maintain connectedness and communication among family members during periods of deployment furthermore the findings from the study indicated that the utilization of social media and electronic communication in combination with traditional means of communication during periods of deployment are beneficial to maintaining connectedness between deployed service members and their family (Bittner 2014, 71).

While drawing from Bittner's study (2014) which was conducted in the United States (US), the current study focused on South Africans' experiences, with their diverse cultural, racial, socioeconomic status and ethnic backgrounds. Unlike in the US, where ensuring diversity in the workplace meant incorporating minority groups, the South African approach to diversity involved the inclusion of the majority population into the military which, prior to 1994, comprised predominantly white males. (Department of Defence 2006). These cultural, ethnic, socioeconomic status and racial variations also suggested the existence of disparities in the utilisation of social networks as a medium of communication, thus allowing the researcher to document these realities from a South African perspective. Outmoded communication methods such as letters and telephones were replaced by new mediums of communication that offered instant and interactive communication between deployed soldiers and their families (Bittner, 2014).

The literature shows that more frequent communication between couples during the period of deployment increases the likelihood of having satisfying relationships once the service member returns (Meadows, Sarah O., Terri Tanielian, and Benjamin Karney (Eds.), 2016). It was therefore incumbent on this study to explore the perceived changes that had occurred in terms of communication in the South African context and to relate such changes to the reviewed literature.

## 1.3. Relevance of the study for social work

Some of the key functions in the social work profession is to offer support and protect the people who are considered vulnerable in the communities through the use of the available systems. In this study the researcher aims at assisting soldiers and their families on maintaining the following guiding principles as discussed in the White Paper on Families in South Africa June 2013:

***Family resilience***

Families have inherent capacities and strengths that sustain them in times of prosperity, as well as adversity. Families are faced with challenges that are being brought by the lengthy deployments that their members have to undergo as an obligation of their duties. As a result these leaves the families fragmented.

***Promoting and strengthening marriages***

Stable marriages are essential for the stability of families and ultimately society's well-being. The challenges that are faced by married couples during deployments sometimes poses a threat that could ultimately collapse the whole union.

***Promoting and strengthening responsible parenting***

Family stability hinges on responsible parenting. Parents or caregivers will be encouraged to play their expected roles in the upbringing of their children. Where there is a case of parental breakdown or its absence, means will be sought of strengthening this area. Through the use of social media during deployment an element of co-parenting could be adopted and as a result the one parent would not feel overwhelmed with the responsibilities of having to parent the child/children alone while the other parent is away on deployment.

## 1.4. Purpose of Research

The main aim of this study was to explore the uptake and employment of social media as a means of communication between deployed soldiers based in the Phalaborwa military bases and their families during their deployment. Central to this study was determining whether absent spouses or deployees used social media to communicate with their loved ones and how such innovation had improved family relations and bridged the interaction gap caused by the deployment. The study was influenced by the challenges soldiers faced as individuals and those faced by their families in relation to the long periods of separation resulting from deployment. While the means of communication had transformed, there were still challenges with communication, which this study sought to explore.

## 1.5. Research Design and Methodology

This study was conducted using a qualitative approach. Burns and Grove (2011), defined qualitative research as a subjective research approach that is conducted systematically to describe and give meaning to life experiences and situations. In qualitative research, human behaviour is not explained or predicted, but is studied with the aim of describing and understanding it (Babbie & Mouton, 2010). Non-probability -purposive sampling method was used to select the research participants. The sample consisted of ten soldiers and four family members of soldiers serving under the Department of Defence, the participants are however not related in any way. What they

have in common is that it is either they are soldiers or family members of soldiers in the SANDF.

In defining data collection, Lewis (2015) referred to a sequence of interrelated actions designed for collecting information with the purpose of answering emerging research questions. For the purposes of this study, the researcher collected data by using semi-structured in-depth face-to-face interviews. Each interview lasted between 45 and 60 minutes. In analysing the data, the researcher followed a thematic analysis approach which, according to Hancock (2002), entails the researcher analysing the data by summarising a volume of collected data and presenting the findings by communicating its most crucial features. It is usual for qualitative researchers to collect and analyse data at the same time. The method of data analysis adopted for this study was a general inductive approach as proposed by Thomas (2006).

**Research question**

*The main research question which will guide the proposed study is:*

How is the use of social media beneficial in maintaining family units during deployment periods?

*Primary aims*

The primary aim of the study is to develop an understanding of the social media use patterns by soldiers and their families as a result of deployment.

*The objectives of this study are:*

- To explore the challenges in using social media by deployed soldiers and family members
- To describe the challenges discussed and resolved through social media by family members and the deployed soldiers
- To explore social media as a coping tool for family members and the deployed soldier in dealing with their challenges associated with deployment

## 1.6. Definitions of Key Concepts

### 1.6.1. Deployment

Deployment refers to the rotation of soldiers in and out of their normal operational areas for various missions (DOD Dictionary of military and associated terms, 2017, p. 68). For the purposes of this study, deployment referred to a situation in which a soldier was away from his family (regardless of the distance) and was not permitted to have physical contact with them for at least six months.

### 1.6.2. Dependents

"A dependent is a child who is unmarried and under 21 years of age or who, irrespective of age, is physically or mentally incapable of supporting him/herself, or a parent who is either a biological parent, a step parent or a legally adoptive parent of a soldier or spouse, who is physically or mentally incapable of supporting him/herself, or siblings who are unmarried and under 21 years of age or who, irrespective of age, are physically or mentally incapable of supporting themselves" (DOD Dictionary of military and associated terms, 2017, p. 68). For the purposes of the current study, a dependent was considered to be a spouse or a life partner of a deployed soldier.

### 1.6.3. Military families

Military families refer to "immediate family members related by blood, marriage, or adoption to a soldier or uniformed member who is currently employed by the military" (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2013, p. 2). The researcher considered the term to refer to a spouse, life partner or children.

### 1.6.4. Soldier

A soldier is a person who serves in the army and usually wears a uniform. The researcher considered the term 'soldier' to refer to an employee of the South African National Defence Force who wears uniform.

### 1.6.5. Support systems

Support systems refer to "a network aimed at providing support and preventing severe behavioural or

emotional disturbances, especially among children" (Sanders, Turner, & Markie-Dadds, 2002, p. 143). In the context of this study, the term 'support systems' was defined as family members and the multi-professional teams (chaplains, social workers, psychologists, trauma counsellors, etc.) who provided any kind of support to the soldiers and their families during the period of deployment.

### 1.6.6. Resilience

Resilience means continuing to develop normally despite difficult circumstances (Fonagy et al. 1994 as cited by Unwin & Hogg 2012, p.55). In this study the researcher considered the term to refer to one's ability to return to normality after having experienced some difficult circumstances resulting from deployment. Furthermore these looks at the ability for both the soldier who has been absent and the family/dependants that had to find a new way of living in the absence of the deployed member and to reintegrate after the whole ordeal.

### 1.6.7. Communication

Communication is a meaningful process of interaction among human beings to generate understanding (McFarland, 1994). In this study, the researcher considered the term to refer to the way in which soldiers interacted with their significant others.

### 1.6.8. Social media

Social media may be defined as "an electronic form of communication which includes the use of websites and microblogging to create online communities with which to share information, ideas, messages and other content" (Merriam-Webster's dictionary, 2017, p. 122). For the purposes of this study, social media refers to any internet-based mode of communication that incorporates the use of resources such as laptops, tablets and smart phones to help soldiers to initiate and maintain communication and interact with their families and significant others i.e. WhatsApp, Skype and Facebook.

## 1.7. Limitations of the Study

In defining the limitations of a study, Burns and Grove (2011) referred to some restrictions that may decrease the credibility of its research findings. Limitations of a study would include being unable to conclude the finding to a larger population. The sample of the study was procured from soldiers and their families in the Phalaborwa military units in Limpopo province. As the study

sample comprised only a few groups of people from a larger population of soldiers who were deployed across and outside the country, it was not possible to generalise the findings to the larger population.

### 1.8. Organisation of the Report

This report is organised in the following way:

- Chapter 1 presented the background to the study and introduced to the study. The discussion focused on the presentation of the research problem and rationale for the study. The chapter also addressed the aim and scope of the study by outlining the research design and methodology upon which the study was based. It concluded by defining the key concepts that were central to the study, as well as the limitations of the study.
- Chapter 2 focuses is on the reviewed literature to support the study and the theoretical frameworks upon which the study was based.
- The research design and research methodology are presented in Chapter 3.
- Chapter 4 presents and discusses the research findings emanating from the data analysis.
- In Chapter 5, summaries of the main results are presented by drawing from the four themes. These summaries inform the conclusions that guide the recommendations for the DOD, social work practice and future research.

# CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

## 2.1. Introduction

Cell phone or telephone-based communication poses a massive challenge when one family member has been deployed and the frequency of calls cannot be sustained, giving rise to feelings of disappointment and resentment. Advances in technology over the past decade and widespread accessibility to social media allow people to initiate conversations without having to rely on traditional modes of communication such as letters and telephone calls (Pincus, House, Christenson, & Adler, 2001). According to Pincus, House, et al. (2001), telephone calls caused frustration and anxiety both to deployed soldiers and their spouses, mainly because calls had to be initiated by or at the convenience of the deployed soldier. Because fixed line telephone calls required an individual to remain at a set location, spouses felt stuck at home, worried that they might miss a call. Conversely, deployed soldiers might find that whenever they called, there was no one at home. These challenges have been addressed by innovations in smart phone technology and social media which are accessible at the sender or receiver's convenience.

The study sought to understand how the uptake of social media by deployed soldiers addressed some challenges faced by their families. This chapter examines relevant literature on social media usage, specifically regarding its reported advantages and disadvantages when used by deployed soldiers in other countries. The chapter concludes with the South African perspective on the usage of social media by deployed soldiers.

## 2.2. Theoretical framework

This study was guided by the Bowen's family systems theory. According to Brown (1999) the theory suggests that when families are too close or too far apart the levels of anxiety is heightened. During deployments soldiers are separated from their families and cannot keep physical contact with each other hence there would be challenges that are experienced. The theory suggests that goal of Bowenian therapy is to reduce chronic anxiety by facilitating awareness of how the emotional system functions and increasing levels of differentiation, where the focus is on making changes for the self rather than on trying to change others.

*Bowen's family systems theory*

The primary aim of this theory is to understand patterns that develop from within the family in order to diffuse anxiety (Brown, 1999). Anxiety as understood from this theoretical perspective is determined by the proximity of the relationship. In other words, one can say in the context of this study that for a soldier whose partner has been deployed, the psychosocial impact can be more intense and stressful. This may be the case for the deployee himself given the proximity of their relationship.

This theory is important for this study because it views the family as an emotional unit and uses systems thinking to describe the complex interactions in the unit (Kerr, 2000). Families are innately connected emotionally argues this theory. Despite people feeling distant or disconnected from their families, the fact remains they are just having an isolated moment. In which case, we can imagine the soldier who is deployed, they may for a moment think themselves isolated by distance but the emotional aspects of the family make them to belong to the unit. This theory is therefore important in discussing the emotional issues associated with deployment.

The disintegration of the family may be physical but the effects are both physical and emotional in nature. The theory is premised on the ability of families to affect their members' thoughts, feelings, and actions. This theory explains the symbiotic relationship that exists between family members aptly. This symbiotic relationship is often affected by the distance and thus the need for the theory in order to understand the deployment process.

With regards to attention, the use of social media to maintain contact could be effective to maintain influence and a family unit. Communication in this case ensures that there is constant family connection. While the family member may be physically removed from the family social media presents an opportunity to be present while in a different location because of its interactive nature. Family members require from each other; attention, approval, and support while also responding to each other's needs, expectations, and upsets (Kerr, 2000). It is therefore incumbent on the family to maintain connectedness in order to establish a functioning family. Change in one family member's emotional state precipitates mutual change in other family members functioning.

Emotional interdependence exists to encourage cohesion amongst family units. Any challenges threatening the unity and togetherness leads to problems so is the case when family members get anxious, anxiety becomes infectious. It is a reciprocal interaction (Kerr, 2000). This theory suggests that the emotional system affects most human activity and is the principal driving force in the development of clinical problems. The researcher submits that this theory is most relevant in the studying of the phenomenon of deployment and the use of social media by soldiers and their families. It is guided by steps that would help explore the underlying desire to maintain the family unit.

### 2.3. Social Media Use

Social media, sometimes referred to as social networking sites, are often used interchangeably, and are web-based services that allow the creation of an online community profile, and to invite other users with whom they share a connection. According to Boyd and Ellison (2007), whose study delved into the role of social media in relationships, people linked their list of potential connections with those they had already made through their connections within the system. Haythornthwaite (2005) suggested that online connections tended to sustain even offline relationships. People felt safer interacting with people who were already within their extended social network.

Social media presented opportunities to connect families and friends especially when geographically distant. While social media has rewritten the rules for communicating, the question remains as to whether it is permissible – or even desirable – for deployed soldiers (CNN, 2010). This study sought to ascertain its applicability in the South African context, with due consideration to the importance of maintaining a balance between family communication and protecting the military.

The use of social media by military members is well documented and practised in the United States (CNN, 2010) on condition that it does not compromise operational security or involve prohibited activities or websites. Although no information is readily available regarding its regulation in South Africa, certain pockets of the military make use social media.

## 2.4. Social Media and Military Families

According to Bittner (2014), families and deployed soldiers experienced separation and adjustment-related challenges. Her study showed that military families in the US overcame the stresses of long periods of deployment by communicating through social media. She noted that the use of social media to communicate during deployment increased steadily after the terror attacks of September 11, 2001. Bittner's study revealed that social media was preferred by the teenage children of military families.

Bittner's research (2014) also found that increased accessibility to social media allowed for the exchange of information, irrespective of distance or different time zones. Despite limited information on trends around the usage of social media as a means of communication during periods of deployment of South African soldiers, the literature indicates it has positive and negative implications. Bittner (2014) stated that soldiers and their families had come to expect access to social media to maintain contact.

Bittner (2014) pointed out that, despite increased reliance on social media for communication, its long term impact was not yet known. Because it is a relatively new area of focus in the military, limited research has been conducted to evaluate the extent and utilisation of social media communication by military families in the US during periods of deployment. However, it has been suggested that social media had played a pivotal role in maintaining relationships during extended periods of deployment.

The effects of social media on families are limited, many of them relating to the effects on individuals as opposed to families (Padilla-Walker, Coyne, & Fraser, 2012). Using family systems theory, the author mentioned that social media could facilitate interaction between individuals within a family; it may also promote the creation of an open and continual communication system. Parents and children often used social media to stay connected (Padilla-Walker, et al., 2012) and, as alluded earlier, there was a steady growth of families utilizing social media for staying connected with others. Studies show that using social networking sites increases the family unity and provides a means through which families can communicate across the world at minimal or no cost. Therefore, communicating via social media among military families may present a viable and sustainable option.

According to Chalmers (2011), social media had changed the way the world viewed deployment, and American military families indicated that social media assisted family members greatly in connecting with deployed members. Social media had a number of benefits, including relieving anxiety and stress (Matthews-Juarez, Juarez, & Faulkner, 2013).

Social media use in the South African military is not explicitly restricted in terms of policy, but the fact that deployed soldiers are permitted to own and use a smartphone implies approval. In other parts of the world, the use of social media by deployed soldiers and their families has gone from being banned to having full access to embrace, use and promote it (Williams & Merten, 2011). Such bans were experienced in the US where, in 2007, the Pentagon blocked access to social media sites in an attempt to safeguard information about troops. However, before long, the ban was retracted and deployed soldiers were again permitted to use Twitter, Facebook and other social media platforms because their benefits outweighed any security concerns (Matthews-Juarez, et al., 2013).

The South African Air Force's publication, Ad Astra, stated that the internet had been a valuable resource for the military (as cited in DefenceWeb, 2014). Despite security concerns and intelligence surrounding the military, no policy document was in place to condone or condemn the usage of social media for private purposes by military families or their deployed soldiers (DefenceWeb, 2014). As noted that although some documented reports show the utilisation of social media for military intelligence, the M23 rebels in the DRC gained notoriety for using Twitter.

"Deployed soldiers and military families now use social media to connect, share and participate in real-time events anywhere in the world and social media has become the primary means by which military families stay connected during deployment – family life is highlighted through shared pictures and conversations" Matthews-Juarez, et al. (2013). The same social media allowed families to exchange intimate moments and real time events, strengthening family relationships and enabling them to survive extended periods of absence. Social media was not only about sharing good news, but was a valuable tool for alerting each other of a death in the family, discussing issues such as finances and accommodation, and ways of raising children. According to Matthews-Juarez, et al. (2013), "Social media may help in times of depression,

loneliness and other feelings of discontent, but may also trigger such feelings in the first place In some cases, connecting with families during deployments could be more stressful owing to social media's pseudo human contact, which is open to exploitation or misinterpretation of messages that would otherwise have been clearly explained in a face-to-face encounter".

Matthews-Juarez, et al. (2013) were of the opinion that social media could be used to sustain military personnel facing challenges and issues related to their deployment and absence from home through video calling services such as Skype, WhatsApp or FaceTime, which made face-to-face communication possible across thousands of kilometres. These video calling services permitted individuals to link with their families and enabled social settings that helped in generating support. Although not yet fully explored scientifically, the use of social media had the potential to reduce isolation and expand networks (Matthews-Juarez, et al., 2013, 219).

As suggested by Matthews-Juarez, et al. (2013), the attractiveness of social media should not cloud the innate nature of a family's relations. If families had strong bonds, they were likely to maintain unity despite deployment, and if family bonds were weak, social media might serve only to sustain their animosity.

The military's volatile situation and demands presented a unique situation for each military family and could cause emotional strain on either side of the deployment. Of utmost importance to any member of the military family was the ability to actively become and remain part of the family system, and to take part in the decision making and other life events (Matthews-Juarez, et al., 2013). Over and above relying on social media, there was a need to empower families and family members to build relationships sustained by healthy communication, even before deployment.

## 2.5. Military Couples and Deployments

Military service members spent a lot of time away from their families, on active-duty, for extended periods every year, often causing them to experience high levels of stress and resorting to dangerous coping mechanisms such as alcohol or substance abuse (Hoshmand & Hoshmand, 2007). Although many military families appear to be coping well, prolonged absences could have an impact on their overall health and well-being. While deployment as a condition of service for soldiers may be considered an occupational hazard, it also has a negative impact on

military families.

Pincus, Leiner, Black and Ward Singh (1996) defined deployment as "the term used when military personnel leave their usual daily workstations to train for or to perform a mission". However, Akgün & Tansel (2007) considered deployment to be "the physical movement of military units stationed at geographically dispersed locations, from their home units to their designated (internal or external) destinations. Soldiers at the SADF were also deployed either within or outside the country's borders".

Deployment of soldiers could be for peace-keeping or peace enforcing operations, or for border guards to prevent illegal goods from being brought into or taken out of a country. Operations differed in duration and structure; from training to humanitarian assistance to combat. Pincus, et.al. (1996) maintained that "deployment had an effect on the soldiers themselves, the member's unit, the units that remained to continue with existing tasks, affiliated support systems in the community, and the member's family".

For the purposes of this study, the different types of deployment were not considered but the focus was on the absence of the soldier from the family, irrespective of the duration, type or reason. The reason for this was that the primary focus of the study was on the importance of communication given any type of separation and not necessarily on the reason for deployment.

### 2.5.1. The impact of deployment on the deployed soldiers and their families

The soldier and his/her family had a symbiotic relationship. According to Esposito-Smythers, et al. (2011), deployment had negative consequences, such as depression, anxiety and other behavioural problems in children, and it distressed the spouses of military personnel. Similarly, if family members were not well, military personnel also suffered and their work lagged behind. These effects on military personnel or his/her family posed the question of whether regular communication could bring about some change and reverse the negative impact.

A study by Mogil (2012), discussing the effects of deployment on the deployed soldier and the military family, highlighted the unavailability of spousal communication, support and the shielding of children from parent's sadness. The researcher wanted to gain a greater understanding of these painful effects of deployment and the role that social media could or did

play in mitigating the burden of being away from one's partner.

### 2.5.2. The stages of deployment

Pincus, et.al (1996) set forth five stages of deployment, each involving emotional and organisational elements affecting individual service members and their families. Anxiety and uncertainty were experienced, even among individuals who had been deployed more than once. The stages are discussed below:

#### *2.5.2.1. Pre-deployment*

This stage is characterised by denial followed by the anxious anticipation of separation as the departure date draws near. Anxiety was experienced mostly by the spouse or partner remaining behind. As alluded to by Pincus, et.al. (1996:489), "the spouse would often ask if the service members really must go", and would express more concern about the uncertainties of their relationships, especially with deployments of longer duration. At this stage, the children were also more anxious about the separation and the adjustments that would need to be made in the absence of the other parent. While the family was anxious about loss and separation, the deployed soldier would probably be more concerned about the upcoming mission, the unit relationship, and bonding and cohesion among colleagues.

#### *2.5.2.2. Deployment*

The first month after the deployed soldier has left, Pincus, et.al (1996) stated that the family would experience mixed emotions, and the spouse or partner may express feelings of being disoriented or overwhelmed, or may feel relieved that they no longer had to appear brave and strong. The soldier's departure created a gap that could cause the other spouse to feel numb, sad, lonely or abandoned. Family members may also experience residual anger due to tasks left undone by the deployed soldier. It was common for family members to experience difficulty sleeping or coping with everyday challenges and to become worried about personal safety and security.

Pincus, et.al (1996) pointed out that spouses or partners of deployed soldiers experienced the difficulties of separation, irrespective of their gender. "It was common for husbands to feel overwhelmed by the responsibility of taking care of children, monitoring their school attendance and homework, providing meals and going shopping, attending to their medical and dental care,

addressing their extracurricular activities, and supporting them through their relationships with peers and friends" (Pincus, et.al., 1996, p 491).

"Parents found it difficult to care for and support their teenage children, especially when the other parent was absent for an extended period and when new caregivers were brought in to assist families in the absence of the deployed parent, feelings of uncertainty could develop among children as they attempted to integrate another deployment-related change into their lives" (NSW Department of Education and Training, 2009).

#### *2.5.2.3. The sustainment stage*

Sustainment was defined by Pincus, et.al (1996, p.491) as "the time of establishing new sources of support and new routines. Many military families relied on support groups to cope with the absence of the deployed family member. Support groups comprised a close network of community spouses and families who would meet on a regular basis to provide help with problems and disseminate information. The military also provided support services to both the family and the deployed soldier. Many military spouses or partners were comfortable receiving support from their families, friends, churches, or other cultural, community, ethnic, or religious institutions as their primary means of emotional support. As challenges occurred, most spouses or partners found that support groups equipped them to cope better with crises and make important decisions on their own".

An important consideration during each stage of the deployment, particularly the sustainment stage, was the "frequency, method and content of communication between deployed soldiers and their families" (Pincus, et.al 1996, p.491). Relaying of incorrect or unintentional messages, owing to infrequent access, could cause conflict between family members whose relations were already strained. Limited access to communication devices as a result of, e.g. blackouts, could give rise to misunderstandings and frustrations (Hinojosa, Hinojosa, & Högnäs, 2012). "When expectations regarding the frequency of calls were unmet, resentment and anger may result" (Pincus, et al, 1996). Therefore, irregular exchange of information and conflicts during communication could be stressful for both the deployed soldier and his/her family, owing to the physical distance and subsequent feelings of disconnectedness and powerlessness in certain situations (Greene, Buckman, Dandeker, & Greenberg, 2010).

#### *2.5.2.4. The late deployment stage*

The late deployment stage takes place a month before the deployment ends and the deployed soldier returns home, and while it is generally a time of eager anticipation, feelings of anxiety are also part of this stage of deployment. Logan (cited in Pincus, et al., 1996: 492) stated, "there could be a rush of conflicting emotions: excitement that the soldier is coming home, apprehension, concern that spouses may not agree with how things have been managed, worry about whether independence will be lost or how roles will shift, and concern about whether family members will get along". With the knowledge that the separation is almost over, there could come renewed difficulty in making decisions and many other spouses experienced higher energy levels and rush to complete tasks around the home.

#### *2.5.2.5. The post-deployment stage*

According to Pincus, et al. (1996, p 491), the post deployment stage is "the actual homecoming, which is often ceremonial and can be a joyous occasion with other members of the family invited to join in the celebrations. In the US, upon deployed soldiers' arrival, the unit commander calls the unit to attention, praises unit members for their service, and then dismisses them. The weapons and equipment would have been returned, and further demobilisation tasks (including health evaluations, mental health surveys, and family health surveys) would have been completed. Children rush to the returning parent and the reunited couple embrace".

"Although families reunite during this stage, they may soon find themselves feeling emotionally distant. Some spouses describe awkwardness in addition to excitement, especially in re-establishing intimacy after so many months of separation. Emotional reconnection may take time before they become comfortable with sexual intimacy. Eventually, returning soldiers reassert their roles as spouses or parents within the family. The deployed soldiers may feel pressure to make up for lost time and missed milestones; they may want to quickly re-establish the authority they had before", as Logan (cited in Pincus, et al. 1996:492) pointed out. "Some things will have changed in their absence: spouses typically become more autonomous during deployments, children have grown, and individual personal priorities in life may be different. It is not realistic to expect everything to be the same as before the deployment. Despite ongoing training, uncertainty is likely to remain regarding future deployment and the associated mission challenges, the family's capacity to manage the separation, and the ever-present risk of injury or

death."

### 2.5.3. Impact of deployment on families

Van Breda (2011) stated that, even when a country was not at war, military families often had to deal with stresses such as frequent moves or the absence of a parent or spouse. The author asserted that the family was a "network of significant and meaningful relationships between a group of individuals who experience a sense of emotional affiliation and mutual obligation". Thompson (2012) categorised family into three groups, the immediate family, family of origin and offspring. "Immediate family is characterised as people who are related or who share a household. Family of origin refers to the family into which one was born and grew up, and only includes children and their parents. Offspring family is a newly established family, with children who are born to a specific couple" (National Performance Measures Instructions 2013, p. 2).

For the purposes of this study, a military family was considered to be the family of origin. According to (Thompson, 2012), a family was considered an important part of socialisation. Confusion often arose in relation to the discourses because change in family organisation was often considered negative (Thompson, 2012, p. 93). Deployment created some instability within the family as the remaining family members had to reposition themselves to occupy the position left by the deployed soldier (Pincus, et.al., 1996).

Deployment to war created additional issues for a family. While the deployed soldier struggled to find his/her way back into civilian life after returning from combat, children were also affected (Card, et al., 2011). "To support this Creech, Hadley & Borsari (2014), Creech et al., postulated that children from military families suffered more than children from non-military families from mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, externalising behaviour problems, suicidal thoughts and substance use, which could continue even after the deployed parent returned". Children react differently towards deployment, especially when their parents were being deployed to war areas. Lincoln and Sweeten (2011) argued that some children exhibited high levels of resilience, while others would struggle with the impact of a parent who has gone to war. The researcher refers to children in these study is defined with the legal definition of a children's act 38 of 2005 (any person under the age of 18 years), further more the issue of having a sister or brother does not come to play.

According to Chartrand, et al. (2008, cited in Trautmann, et al., 2015, p.671) "more frequent and lengthier deployment appears to be associated with greater levels of parental stress and depressive symptoms". Allen, et al. (2011, cited in Trautmann, et al. 2015) maintained that deployment had a negative impact on family relationships, particularly with respect to poorer family relationships and couple functioning. Deployment carried short- and long-term effects on families, even after the return of the family member (Chandra, Burns, Tanielian, Jaycox, & Scott, 2008). Mogil (2012) stated that some the challenges faced by military families included:

- Extended and repeated separations from a primary caregiver in the context of danger
- Altered family roles and responsibilities
- Increased stress on the caretaking parent
- Media and communication exposure
- Community-level stress/loss
- Impact of combat exposure on the returning parent
- Possible parental mental health problems, physical injury or loss.

### 2.5.4. The impact of deployment on the marital relationship

Although the above challenges were experienced by the family as a whole, Karney, Loughran and Pollard (2012) highlighted the challenges impacting on marital issues as follows:

- Struggles related to service or operation caused by post-traumatic stress disorder
- Depression or anxiety
- Caregiving challenges and adjustments if a soldier is injured
- Feelings of isolation or resentment on the part of spouse at home
- Infidelity related to long separations
- The "rollercoaster effect" of the movements (transfers and reassignments) related to deployment.

Karney, et al. (2012) examined the findings of a study into the divorce rate among soldiers, which found that comparing the rate of divorce among military couples to the civilian divorce rate was difficult because they were recorded differently by different agencies, and did not specify whether it was a military couple who had divorced (Karney, et al. 2012).They argued that "military couples were probably not more likely to divorce than civilian couples, and might be

less likely to split up".

However, other studies have suggested that "there was an increase in divorce after the military spouse left the military. Divorce rates also varied depending on branch of the military, age and rank. Although the overall statistics indicate no difference between military and non-military divorce rates, the figures among certain subgroups of the military are not less encouraging. For instance, when the spouse in the military is a female, the divorce figures tend to climb. Some studies show that the divorce rate for couples with a female soldier is twice that of couples with a male soldier. However, these figures seem to be improving, although for reasons that have yet to be determined. Marriages that experience longer deployments are more likely to end in divorce, probably because the increased time apart eventually becomes too much of a hardship for the couples" (Karney, et.al. 2012).

Deployment may cause soldiers to separate their professional and family life, resulting in unwanted effects on their family or career. Reunions may be characterised by a perceived negative reception, which could spill over to children as parents equivocated about their differences. There was the risk of fragmentation of the family system or divorce (Kgosana & Van Dyk, 2014).

## 2.6. Communication between Military Couples during Deployments

Deployed soldiers faced constant stresses, such as witnessing killings and being unable to talk about their experiences with their family members. Durham (2010) suggested that "communication with spouses or partners and family members while on deployment could reduce boredom and isolation while maintaining morale". However, when constrained from divulging intelligence to protect the security of an operation, they had to internalise many of their emotions. The author stated that a spouse wanted to hear that a deployed spouse was doing well and was safe, but this was not possible when the deployed spouse was prohibited from speaking openly about his/her challenges. The availability of social media and mobile phones was often expected to facilitate communications which would provide emotional support and advice on general issues they were facing in their lives (Durham, 2010)

"Voice messages and video calls were beneficial in that social cues such as facial expressions and tone of voice helped couples to make sense of the meaning within messages beyond the

actual words being spoken (Perry, 2010). Maintaining contact with family members for key family events, such as birthdays, weddings and funerals also made it easier for deployed soldiers to cope with separation from their families and alleviated the loss of marital intimacy. For married deployed soldiers, family members had high expectations regarding the use of social media and communication". Faber, Willerton, Clyner, Macdermid, and Weiss, (2008) emphasised that "contact with the family members was important, particularly for those who were married. Contrary to this expectation, the amount of communication they desired was not received. In some instances contact with the family members could increase personal stress between couples. Home-front stressors were the main contributing factor to stress for family members of the deployed soldier, and uncertainty over the length of separation was common".

"Although easy access to communication with family members was beneficial when relationships were strong, it could have strong negative effects when problems arose. Easy access to communication increased immediacy and proximity to negative events at home for deployed military soldiers, while emphasising their limited ability to solve problems or provide effective support because of their physical distance from home" (Faber, et al., 2008).

## 2.7. Conclusion

The researcher noted that the deployment of soldiers has an impact on the military couples and their families on the different stages however social media has become a means in which to facilitate decision making, offer support, and maintain connectedness within families during lengthy periods of absence and physical distance of soldiers and their families often endure during periods of deployment through the utilization of social media such as WhatsApp, Skype and Facebook.

Having access to the use of social media during have proven to be very useful as couples or family members are able to communicate daily with one another if there are no interruptions such as no network coverage or the service members being committed at work. The frequent communication assist in terms of dealing with issues right on the spot unlike having to wait probably for months or a year for the soldier to return home and it also make it possible for the couple to see each other daily through video calls despite the distance to try and ease up the separation anxiety.

## CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 3.1. Introduction

This chapter discusses the methodology applied to the study, paying particular attention to the research approach, research design, data collection tools and methods, research population, sampling strategy and ethical principles. It also includes a discussion of the research questions, the pilot study and data analysis. The discussion of the methodology is directed by the theoretical framework and study's key principles, taking into consideration the fundamental outlook relevant to the study.

Primary aims and secondary objectives

The primary aim of the study is to develop an understanding of the social media use patterns by soldiers and their families as a result of deployment.

The objectives of this study are:

- To explore the challenges in using social media by deployed soldiers and family members
- To describe the challenges discussed and resolved through social media by family members and the deployed soldiers
- To explore social media as a coping tool for family members and the deployed soldier in dealing with their challenges associated with deployment

### 3.2. Research Approach

This research study used a qualitative research approach. As described by Burns and Grove (2011), a qualitative research approach was both a structured and subjective approach to describing life experiences and giving meaning to the stories told. Qualitative research studies aimed to understand the life experiences and contextual meanings that participants gave to their life situations. Babbie and Mouton (2010) stated that in qualitative research, attempts were made to study human action with the goal of describing and understanding human behaviour. A qualitative research approach was concerned with understanding the phenomenon under investigation by allowing participants to describe their experiences from their own viewpoint.

Lichtman (2014) stated that qualitative research was concerned with social and human interactions happening in their contexts, in which the researcher interpreted the findings and gave them meaning. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) identified qualitative research as interpretive material that was made visible by turning it into a series of interpretations.

Yin (2011) noted the main focus of qualitative research as being on the "what" and "why" of human behaviour. By its very nature, qualitative research was flexible, often evolving as the research process unfolded. Qualitative researchers used inductive thinking. In the case of this study, the participants' narratives were clustered together in categories which were also grouped together according to themes. According to Yin (2011), qualitative research was holistic in nature as it looked at the whole phenomenon as opposed to its components. The role of the researcher was critical and required substantial reflexivity throughout the process of data collection. While examining a particular phenomenon, qualitative researchers did not overlook other aspects which may have influenced the phenomenon (e.g. considering the participants' demographic information while studying the experiences of soldier deployment).

During qualitative research, a reality is identified by the researcher which then results in multiple interpretations. In this study, the researcher interpreted the participants' narrations. Because the researcher's viewpoint is encouraged for this type of research, she developed her own interpretation from these narrations, thus giving rise to multiple interpretations. The main concern in qualitative research is to study a small number of individuals in detail. Qualitative data is usually presented in words or pictures, and the researcher searches for themes and narratives around the data. There is no strict way of presenting the research findings, and researchers are encouraged to use alternative styles.

Ritchie (2003) contended that qualitative research was used when a phenomenon under investigation did not have conclusive definitions. It was especially used when a phenomenon was deeply rooted in the participants' personal knowledge and understanding, or when the subject matter was of a sensitive nature. This approach was considered ideal for this study since the phenomenon under investigation was complex and could not be conceptually defined. The information that would enable the researcher to understand the phenomenon could only be collected from people who were knowledgeable.

The researcher aimed to develop an in-depth understanding of the challenges raised concerning deployment and participants' experiences. By applying qualitative research, the researcher aimed to explore the meaning that military families attached to their experiences of deployment. Qualitative research allowed the researcher to interact with the participants at a location that was convenient and comfortable to them, thereby allowing the researcher to collect data from wherever the participants could be reached (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

### 3.3. Research Design

Bryman (2012) defined research design as a strategy or tool that serves as a framework to guide the process of collecting and analysing the data. Yin (2015) reasoned that research design served as a logical set of plans to guide study, a statement backed up by Clarke who said it was "a predictable set of questions, issues and information that you need to address in order to successfully undertake a research question" (Clarke, 2005, p. 54). As Yegidis and Weinbach (2006) emphasised, research design helped a researcher to identify the best method for a thorough interpretation of a phenomenon. The researcher was then capacitated to decide on the implementation of the method to answer the study questions (Monette, Sullivan, & De Jong, 2011). The context of research indicated that the aim of a research design was to ensure that the evidence obtained enabled the researcher to respond to the initial question as unambiguously as possible (Rukwaru, 2015). To achieve this study's overall purpose and to attend to the research questions, the researcher decided to adopt an exploratory research design.

#### 3.3.1. Exploratory research design

According to Fox and Bayat (2007), research studies were conducted with the purpose of exploring a particular topic to create some awareness around it. Exploratory research was used when understanding of an issue was limited, and was adopted in cases where none of the available literature addressed the phenomenon under investigation (Brown & Hale, 2014). In such instances, exploratory research was ground-breaking and drew the attention of researchers and practitioners towards the phenomenon. As the challenges faced by families of deployed soldiers had not been given the necessary research attention, this study called for the phenomenon to be investigated using exploratory design.

In exploratory research, probable future research opportunities were created (Yegidis &

Weinbach, 2006). Underlying exploratory design was a desire to amass more knowledge before attempting to tackle an issue (Creswell J. W., 2009).

### 3.3.2. Population, sample and sampling procedures

#### *3.3.2.1.Population*

A population is defined as a criterion that "sets boundaries on the study units" (De Vos & Strydom, 2011, p. 223). Neuman (2000) said that population assumed the sample, the location and the margins of the population. Kumar (2005) defined a population as "people from whom a sample was drawn". Kerlinger and Lee, cited in Burns and Grove (2011, p. 51), referred to population as elements that meet certain criteria for inclusion in a study". For Grinnell and Unrau (2008), a population was the people who concerned the researcher, who constituted the body from which the sample was to be taken. The researcher's population was the dependents of the soldiers who had been deployed either internally or externally within the past 36 months.

#### *3.3.2.2.Sample and sampling procedures*

Sampling involved the selection of the subset of items from the population for the purposes of their participation in the study (Guest, Namey, & Mitchell, 2013). In another definition, Johnson and Christensen (2008) referred to a sample as a group of people, objects or elements that were taken from the larger population to be studied (Johnson & Christensen, 2008), i.e. the researcher first determined the population and selected the sample from this population. For this study, the researcher conducted interviews with 14 soldiers and the dependents of other soldiers who had been deployed within the past 24 to 36 months, either internally or externally, for a period of six months and longer. The study included female and male participants of all races and ranging from 18 to 60 years of age.

There are two main methods of sampling: probability sampling and non-probability sampling (Brown & Hale, 2014). In this study, non-probability sampling was used, along with purposive sampling to identify and recruit the research participants. Purposive sample meant that researchers had a particular intention that developed from their expert opinion when they identified and selected participants (Brown & Hale, 2014; Fox & Bayat, 2007). As defined by Brown and Hale (2014, p. 297), purposive sample referred to an "intentional non-random selection of population units for study". In another definition, purposive sampling was described

as a non-probability procedure where the researcher selected participants because they contained the most characteristics or attributes of the population that best served the objectives of the study (Grinnell & Unrau, 2008).

In the case of this study, the researcher implemented purposive sample by using her expertise as a social worker employed by the Department of Defence (DOD) to identify and approach prospective participants from her unit.

In qualitative research, the sample size was not determined at the outset; rather the volume and quality of data determined the size of the sample. This point is better explained by Fox and Bayat (2007, p. 61) who stated that "it is not possible to state categorically what the size of a sample should be." In another instance, Macnee and McCabe (2008) explained that the researcher continued to collect data until data saturation occurred. By data saturation, Macnee and McCabe (2008) were referring to the point in data collection at which the data became repetitive and no new information was added. In the context of the study, this meant that the researcher would cease to collect the data once she started hearing the same messages being repeated.

### 3.3.3. Research instruments

The researcher conducted a semi-structured interview, using an interview guide, to collect the data from the participants (Appendix B). Legard, Keegan and Ward (2003) stated that semi-structured interview guides comprised a list of questions that guided the researcher in conducting an interview. The questions were open-ended to afford both the researcher and the participants the opportunity to explore the subject under investigation further. The interview guide also included a demographics sheet (Appendix C), which was not used to discriminate against any participant but was purely for statistical purposes.

### 3.3.4. Pilot testing

Pilot testing involved the "administration of the data collection instrument with a small set of participants from the population. The purpose of pilot-testing was to identify problems and gaps with the data collection instrument and find possible solutions" (Collins, 2003). The research instrument was piloted on four participants who met the study criteria, and none of the information on the research instrument needed amending. The researcher used pilot testing in the study to identify gabs with the data collection tool and to also evaluate the willingness of the

participants to take part in the study. As a result, the data collection tool was well understood and straight to the point. The participants in the pilot testing did not form part of the participants in the study as they fall within the desired criteria.

### 3.4. Data Collection

Lewis (2015) defined data collection as "a series of interrelated activities, specifically designed for gathering information to answer the research questions". Interviews were chosen as a method of data collection because of their flexibility and their ability to allow the researcher an opportunity to incorporate more open-ended questions, to probe, seek clarity and also allow the participants to openly share their views" (De Vos & Strydom, 2011; Grinnell, 1993). Semi-structured interviews, along with an interview guide, were used to collect the data.

The interview guide comprised a set of pre-determined questions which directed the interview process with the participants. Interviews were conducted at a place and time convenient to the participants e.g. some participants were interviewed at their work place while others were interviewed at their places of residence. Interviews were conducted in English however where participants could not understand or express themselves were allowed to use their preferred official South African language e.g. Afrikaans and Sepedi. Each interview lasted approximately 45–60 minutes, was audio-taped, transcribed verbatim and the interviews were once off for each participant.

### 3.5. Data Analysis

Data analysis is the process whereby the researcher inspects and understands the meaning of the data (Blandford, 2013). Bless, Higson-Smith and Kagee (2006) indicated that data analysis allowed the researcher to detect consistent patterns within the data. According to Hancock (2002, p. 8), "analysis of data in a research project involves summarising the mass amount of collected data and presenting the findings in a way that communicates the most important features." In this study, the researcher used a general inductive approach for the thematic analysis of the collected qualitative data as proposed by Thomas (2006, p. 241).Thematic analysis was chosen primarily for its ability to allow the researcher flexibility in analysing the data, to summarise larger volumes of data and to generate knowledge. Some disadvantages of thematic analysis included the fact that it was time consuming and that emerging themes sometimes overlapped (Braun &

Clarke, 2006). The procedure used for inductive analysis, as proposed by Thomas (2006), was as follows:

- Data preparation: The researcher began by formatting the raw data through the font size, margins and highlighted the interviewer comments, which was printed to create a backup.
- Reading the text: After completion of the data preparation stage, the researcher read through the raw data in detail until she became familiar with its content, its underlying themes and the events covered.
- Categorising: Once she was familiar with the data, the researcher began to identify and define the categories or themes using the aims of the study and *Nvivo* coding.
- Coding and uncoding the text: The process of creating categories resulted in some data overlapping across categories, while some remained uncoded as it was not relevant to the research aim.
- Revising and refining categories: She continued to read through the categories to identify contradictory messages and obtain new insights.
- Conveying the core theme: The research selected appropriate quotations that conveyed the core theme or essence of the category and, where necessary, combined those with similar meanings.

The researcher interviewed 14 participants, comprising nine males and five females. Ten were soldiers and four were dependents. The participants were between 26 and 51 years old. The following themes and sub-themes emerged from the process of data analysis:

***Theme 1:*** Frequency and use of social media for communication during deployment

Sub-theme 1.1: Daily

Sub-theme 1.2: Sometimes

Sub-theme 1.2: Type of social media used

Sub-theme 1.3: Method used to communicate

Sub-theme 1.3: Affordability

***Theme 2: Challenges or difficulties experienced during deployment***

Sub-theme 2.1: Separation challenges

Sub-theme 2.2: Loneliness

Sub-theme 2.3: Responsibilities (parental/spousal)

Sub-theme 2.4: Social media challenges

Sub-theme 2.5: Connectivity/network coverage

Sub-theme 2.6: Availability/accessibility

***Theme 3: Importance of social media in maintaining or sustaining relationships***

Sub-theme 3.1: Improved communication

Sub-theme 3.2: Maintained contact

### 3.6. Trustworthiness of the Study

The writings of Schwandt, Lincoln and Guba (2007) have been in the evaluation of trustworthiness in qualitative research. According to Guba and Lincoln (in Thomas 2006), trustworthiness of qualitative research could be evaluated by applying the principles of confirmability, transferability and credibility strategies that were adopted for the purposes of this study. *Credibility* referred to the "confidence that can be placed in the truth of the research findings" (Anney, 2014). To ensure credibility, the researcher engaged in prolonged engagement, and used member checks, peer debriefing, triangulation, negative case analysis and persistent observation. In terms of *transferability*, trustworthiness was evaluated by transferring the study to other contexts with other participants who met the same set inclusion criteria. *Confirmability* emphasizes the need to ask whether or not the findings of the study could be confirmed by another (Lincoln Guba, 1985). The researcher involved a peer researcher to assist with interpretation of the data collected so to improve the analysis and understanding of the interpretation. In this study the researcher recorded the interviews. The recordings were then played and the data was transcribed word for word, as that was taking place the researcher was making notes of the data being transcribed. The transcripts were read over a couple of times to get the gist of the data.

### 3.7. Ethical Considerations

Guest, et al. (2013) urged researchers to gain an understanding of the basic ethical dimensions of qualitative research before conducting their studies. This research followed relevant ethics protocols, which included obtaining permission from the DOD to conduct the study prior the commencement of data collection, ensuring that participants were not forced in any way to take

part in this study, protecting the participants' rights to dignity and confidentiality, obtaining informed consent and avoiding any form of harm. These ethical protocols are explained in the sub-sections below.

### 3.7.1. Obtaining permission from Department of Defence

The researcher requested permission to conduct the study from the DOD Research Committee, which was eventually granted before commencing with data collection (Appendix F). She requested permission from the gate-keepers, who were unit managers, which was also granted. Participation was entirely voluntary and none of the participants were coerced into the study. Data collection commenced only after ethical clearance had been received.

Recorded and transcribed material and information was kept in a locked cabinet where it would be stored for two years following any publications, or for six years if no publications emanated from the study. In the event of emotional distress arising from participating in the study, free counselling was organised for the participants through a social worker Mr Chesly Shabangu whose details were given to each participant.

### 3.7.2. Protecting the rights of the participants

The dignity of all participants was preserved by ensuring that the collection of data did not in any way violate their rights. The researcher guaranteed the protection of individuals' rights by ensuring that their identity was concealed, and adhering to the principle of confidentiality. The participants were given the assurance that they were free to withdraw their participation from the research study without having to provide any reasons for doing so. The researcher informed the participants that they would not be penalised in any way should they decide to withdraw.

### 3.7.3. Privacy and confidentiality

In qualitative research, the main risk of harm relates to confidentiality (Guest, et al. 2013). Failure to ensure confidentiality meant the researcher ran the risk of harming participants. To avert this risk, the researcher ensured that participants' personal and sensitive information was not made available to anyone. Codes were used on the interview transcripts and the guide to protect their identity. Data collected from the participants was kept in a secure place and would not be accessible to anyone other than the researcher and supervisor.

### 3.7.4. Informed consent

The aim of informed consent is to ensure that participants are adequately informed about the study so that they can decide, consciously and deliberately, whether or not to participate (Guest, et al. 2013). The researcher took time to explain the process of the study to participants so that they could make an informed decision, after which they were then given the opportunity to provide written consent (Appendix D).

### 3.7.5. Avoiding harm

Burns and Grove (2011) asserted that harm could take any form, whether emotional, physical, economic, social, or any combination of the four. This study was not concerned about inflicting any physical harm because it was non-invasive. The emotional harm that was experienced by some participants was during the deployment period and not during the data collection process. The participants further assured the researcher that they did not need to be referred to the social worker when they were asked if they need such a service.

In cases where participants would have had emotional outbursts during data collection, they would have been referred to a social worker for further assessment and intervention, however none of the participants had requested for such services.

# CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

## 4.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the empirical findings of the study. The participants' demographic, information, presented in tabular form, captures their pseudonyms to protect their identities, and provides their ages, gender, positions and qualifications. The themes and sub-themes that emerged during data analysis are presented initially in a table, followed later by a detailed discussion which is supported by quotes taken directly from the participants. Where applicable, the results and participants' voices have been juxtaposed with the relevant literature.

## 4.2. Demographic Information of Study Participants

The researcher interviewed 14 participants, whose demographic information is summarised in Table 4.1 below. The demographic information is presented in such a way that they protect the identities of the participants in compliance with the principles of anonymity and confidentiality.

**Table 0.1: Demographic information**

| Code | Age | Gender | Language | Race | Religious Affiliation | Relationship |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **A** | 29 | Female | Sesotho | African | Christian | Dependent |
| **B** | 30 | Female | XiTsonga | African | Christian | Dependent |
| **C** | 27 | Female | Afrikaans | Coloured | Christian | Soldier |
| **D** | 30 | Male | Sepedi | African | Christian | Soldier |
| **E** | 26 | Male | English | Indian | Christian | Soldier |
| **K** | 51 | Male | XiTsonga | African | Christian | Soldier |
| **L** | 49 | Male | XiTsonga | African | Christian | Soldier |
| **M** | 30 | Female | IsiNdebele | African | Christian | Dependent |
| **N** | 33 | Female | English | African | Christian | Dependent |
| **Z** | 33 | Male | English | White | Christian | Soldier |
| **S** | 37 | Male | XiTsonga | African | Christian | Soldier |
| **T** | 34 | Male | Venda | African | Christian | Soldier |
| **X** | 32 | Male | Venda | African | Christian | Soldier |
| **Q** | 49 | Male | XiTsonga | African | Christian | Soldier |

### 4.3. Main Themes Arising from Data Collected

Although data from soldiers and their dependents was processed and organised separately during data analysis, the themes that emerged from these two groups were combined, with differences and similarities highlighted where possible through the participants' voices.

#### 4.3.1. Summary of major themes and sub-themes

The themes and sub-themes were in line with the objectives of this study as outlined in Table 0.2.

**Table 0.2: Themes and sub-themes**

| Number | Themes | Sub-themes |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Frequency and use of social media for communication during deployment | • Daily<br>• Sometimes<br>• Type of social media used<br>• Method used to communicate<br>• Affordability |
| 2 | Challenges or difficulties experienced during deployment | • Separation challenges<br>o Loneliness<br>o Responsibilities (parental/spousal)<br>• Social media challenges<br>o Connectivity/network coverage<br>o Availability/accessibility |
| 3 | Importance of social media in maintaining or sustaining relationships | • Improved communication<br>• Maintained contact |

#### 4.3.2. Theme 1: Frequency and use of social media for communication during deployment

During the course of the study the researcher asked the participants how often they used social media with their significant others and the use of social media between deployed soldiers and their dependents who were left back home. The findings were based on what led the participants to rely on the use of social media for communication. The following sub-themes under this

theme were: daily and sometimes, method used to communicate and affordability.

a) Sub-theme 1.1: Daily

"Hah (laughing) every day, but sometimes there is no network and we can't talk." (B, 30 years old, female, dependent)

"Every day." (K, 51 years old, male, soldier)

"Every day." (N, 33 years old, female, dependent)

"(...) I say most of the time or almost all, because you wait for the answer and if there's something urgent, you must always be on your phone." (M, 30 years old, female, dependent)

"On a daily basis." (S, 37 years old, male, soldier)

"I used it on a daily basis, from the beginning of deployment to the end of deployment." (X, 32 years old, male, soldier)

"Every day because nowadays, uh, is to before, before these uh cellphones, because before I remember pro 1995/1996 we used letters. So then a letter (laughs) you understand." (Q, 49 years old, male, soldier)

b) Sub-theme 1.2: Sometimes

"No, I have never used social media during deployment."(L, 49 years old, male, soldier).

"Currently, 63.7% of US military personnel use social networks on a regular basis" (Matthews-Juarez, et al., 2013). The participants' responses for this theme suggest that most used social media daily as a communication tool. The researcher suspected that participants may have had too much faith in the use of social media, not only in communicating, but also in reaching out to each other and bridging the communication gap. "When expectations regarding the frequency of calls were unmet, resentment and anger could result" (Pincus, et.al 1996). Similarly, deployed soldiers could feel neglected when they called and no one responded; especially if they had waited a long time before being permitted to make contact.

c) ***Sub-theme 1.3: Type of social media used***

(Bittner (2014) found that during deployment, military families endure long periods of deployment through communication through the social media. It emerged during the interviews that both the deployed soldiers and their dependents used social media to communicate during deployment. Although they did not all specify the type of social media tool they used frequently, those who did respond indicated that WhatsApp was the tool used most often to communicate with their significant others. Participants added that WhatsApp was affordable and convenient.

> *"[Yes] WhatsApp and also that time it was via Skype also [yes] WhatsApp and Skype."* ***(C, 27 years old, female, soldier)***

> *"I use WhatsApp."* ***(S, 37 years old, male, soldier)***

> *"Yes, uh, in the last deployment that I did externally, the availability was there at the MONUSCO* [The United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo] *base of the satellite internet where you could send messages back home via Facebook. uh, some of the members got right with the networks eventually connecting, uh, MTN and Vodacom, uh, between the South African and the Congolese networks. Members could use their WhatsApp when it could really come into form. Communication was better but not all members had the availability."*

> *"To be honest, WhatsApp I think is the most convenient because everybody runs on WhatsApp, whereas Facebook you don't have as much security on Facebook because of problem with hackers and so forth. And because also when we look at countries like DRC, Facebook is outlawed in DRC by the local government so we don't have access to Facebook. That's why everybody has switched over to WhatsApp, so WhatsApp remains the most convenient form of communication."* ***(Z, 33 years old, male, soldier)***

d) ***Sub-theme 1.4: Method used to communicate***

> *"Yes, we video call sometimes."* ***(B, 30 years old, female, dependent)***

> *"[Yes] WhatsApp and also that time it was via Skype also [yes]. WhatsApp and Skype."* ***(C, 27 years old, female, soldier)***

*"I'm say nowadays I think we are using WhatsApp because as I'm saying it's cheaper. More especially when you are on the outside deployment, uh, the rates are very high. So people prefer WhatsApp because you just, let's take you are in DRC, you just buy the starter pack of DRC and then you buy the datas there and then you send the messages."* ***(Q, 49 years old, male, soldier)***

e) ***Sub-theme 1.5: Affordability***

*"It is cost effective; it does not cost a lot of money so yes."* ***(T, 34 years old, male, soldier)***

*"A lot, is the most effective one and WhatsApp."* ***(X, 32 years old, male, soldier)***

*"Yes surely, uh, if there's a percentage of people who are not doing it right now it should be very less. I think it should be a percentage that cannot even be recorded (laughs). We are all using social media because is affordable."* ***(S, 37 years old, male, soldier)***

Haythornthwaite (2005) suggested that connections online tended to sustain even offline relationships. Social media presented good opportunities for connecting with family and friends, especially when there was a geographical divide between them.

Based on the preceding statements, it appears that most participants used social media to communicate with their significant others. Participants confirmed that it was more effective and cheaper to communicate through social media.

### 4.3.3. Theme 2: Challenges or difficulties experienced during deployment

This theme focused on the challenges experienced by participants as a result of separation due to deployment. It also considered challenges related to social media including connectivity network connections, availability and accessibility. The sub-themes under this theme were: separation challenges and social media challenges.

As discussed in the literature review, family members and deployed soldiers suffered separation and adjustment-related challenges (Bittner, 2014). Based on the extracts from the data, it appears that both soldiers and their dependents experienced certain challenges which affected the well-being of the family as a system. The challenges included parents being separated from their

children, spouses being separated from each other, a mass of responsibilities for the remaining spouse/parent and other family members.

### *a) Sub-theme 2.1: Separation challenges*

While most participants reported experiencing challenges during deployment, these challenges differed from one participant to the next. The variety of challenges included financial management, shared parenting responsibilities, separation, loneliness and safety concerns. According to Trautmann, et al. (2015), the deployment of a family member often left a gap in family members' lives. Adding to this difficulty was the challenge of having to take up the reins from the deployed soldier, which may be overwhelming for one person, e.g. having to be both the mother and father to children during deployment. Trautmann, et al. (2015) pointed out that a fear of the unknown presented a challenge to many families, exacerbating their struggle through the deployment, because they were unsure whether their loved ones would safely return home.

> *"Hmm, like it's not easy to stay alone with the children while their father is away and then like when you have family problems and he's far."* ***(B, 30 years old, female, dependent)***

> *"Like me, for when we first got there, like my first deployment was with, we went to Sudan. The only is there for everyone, will miss the family. You're afraid that something can happen to them there but as the months goes by then you start to get used to."* ***(C, 27 years old, female, soldier)***

> *"The loneliness and the challenges that I do everything alone because he's not here."* ***(N, 33 years old, female, dependent)***

> *"Uh, the challenge I can say it that goes with, uh, maybe the spouses who doesn't take responsibility. So as most of the things as a husband, if you are not there it get stuck. If she cannot take it on her own, you understand. [Yes] that will be a challenge if, let's say I'm away and then the children are sick, and then if she understand that she's alone and she must run around and do these things on her own at home. If sometimes she depends on, like, there are those who will say wives whom the husband is doing everything, he must be the one to run around. If there's post open you must be the one to go because you*

*are the father of the house but there are those. yes, if you are not there because they are the women, they take every responsibility."* ***(Q, 49 years old, male, soldier)***

*"I will be honest on this one, obviously when you are partners, I mean being away from each other it's a daunting task. Talking to each other on the phone is not enough. I mean there are times when you need to cuddle, look at each other in the eye and obviously enjoy yourselves sexually. Those are the biggest challenges."* ***(T, 34 years old, male, soldier).***

Deployment created some instability within the family as the remaining family members had to reposition themselves to fill the vacuum left by their deployed member (Pincus, et.al., 1996). According to Chartrand et al. (2008, as cited in Trautmann, et al., 2015, p.671) "more frequent and lengthier deployment appears to be associated with greater levels of parent stress and depressive symptoms". Allen et al. (2011, as cited in Trautmann, et al., 2015) argued that deployment had a negative impact on family relationships and had an impact with respect to poorer family and couple functioning. Deployment carried short- and long-term effects on families even after the return of the family member (Chandra et.al. 2008).

Deployed soldiers are away from their families, on active-duty, for extended periods every year, often causing them to experience high levels of stress and resorting to dangerous coping mechanisms such as alcohol or substance abuse (Hoshmand & Hoshmand, 2007).

### *f) Sub-theme 2.2: Social media challenges*

Besides the separation challenges faced by the participants, social media had also been mentioned as not making things easier for the participants. Some challenges mentioned regarding social media included network coverage, connectivity, availability and accessibility.

*"Okay some time ago he was at Madimbo and there was no network so I would wait for him to call."* ***(A, 29 years old, female dependent)***

*"(...) mostly its communication cause you don't get to communicate with them and where they are going. Sometimes it might be network restricted or there is something and you cannot get hold of them as you want."* ***(M, 30 years old, female, dependent)***

*"From personal experience on internal deployments, internal deployments are a lot easier unlike external deployments, because on internal deployments we, especially in the past we always, uh, had the line to towards home whereby we could phone home we could SMS [ ] and so forth. We had communication lines with our families at home. Whereas on external deployment it was very difficult, uh, a case in point would be uh 2012 DRC [ ] uh we were deployed in a very high stress situation whereby we were only 34 members at a base, a full operational base of which myself was the only member who didn't rotate, whereas all the other members would rotate every 20 days. So the only form of communication that we had that was a satellite phone back to South Africa, which we a had a complete time of 8 minutes every two weeks to speak with your family back home and further than that we had no form of communication. So that in itself was quite difficult".* ***(Z, 33 years old, male, soldier)***

One of the advantages of a social media as identified by Bittner (2014) was that increased accessibility to social media allowed for the exchange of information, irrespective of distance or different time zones. "It was particularly during the sustainment stage that the frequency, method, and content of communication between deployed soldiers and their families became critical" (Pincus, et.al 1996). Relaying of incorrect or unintentional messages, owing to infrequent access, could result in conflict between family members whose relations were already strained.

Limited access to communication devices as a result of, e.g. blackouts, could give rise to misunderstandings and frustrations (Hinojosa et al., 2012).

### 4.3.4. Theme 3: Importance of social media in maintaining or sustaining relationships

It emerged during the interviews with some participants that social media had helped to maintain or sustain their relationships. Other participants mentioned that the use of social media assisted in improving communication. The sub-themes under this theme were: *improved communication* and *maintained contact.*

#### *a) Sub-theme 3.1: Improved communication*

*"Hmm, to be truthful I mean it's been better than nothing. Uh, the fact will remain that*

*the physical body will never be at home when it's needed. Uh you have to look at it this way, that when you sit with a situation, it is literally like I said it's better than nothing, because at least you have communication line. However, because of the developments that have been brought forward in our social media and technology, it does now enable you for example there is problems, uh, previously you couldn't do, for example couldn't reached to the unit social worker while you are on deployment that side. Uh, there was an entire channel of command to follow just to have the most basic and simple things to be attended to, whereas now you can reach the unit social worker directly within an hour and inform them of the problem, even the unit chaplain that is still in your unit, and then they can attend to your family if there's a crisis."* ***(Z, 33 years old, male, soldier)***

*"(...)Yes [what] the use of social media has helped, it does keep it because that is how you communicate and you can pass on, let me say how you feel maybe, or you still updating yourself. [Yes] especially when you can see them, or you also informing him that this and this is happening and how the progress or maybe the child's school activities is."* ***(M, 30 years old, female, dependent)***

***g) Sub-theme 3.2: Maintained contact***

*"Very helpful."* **(A, 29 years old female, dependent)**

*"Yes."* ***(B 30 years old female, dependent)***

*"[Yes], sometimes it does but not in all cases because they don't have access to their phones or maybe due to network you can't get them so you write a message or phone them you leave a voice message sometimes if you are doing telephonic like maybe calling then they get the message later then call you."* ***(M, 30 years old, dependant)***

*"Absolutely helpful, if you look at what the basis of a relationship were which is completely shifted with new generation of social media walking in and new technology walking in. Uh, in today's current times when you've got, uh, when you speak of a relationship, it's un-normal or unusual for a couple not to be on social media together because that's our main form of communication now. We communicate so much more in comparison of what we had, if we take a simple example we, our generation, look at our*

*parents, for example as they are people over 50, even they themselves now it's not uncommon now for them if open their phones you see that they have been sending each other messages the whole day. Relationships, it has now became a crucial milestone in the relationship whereby you have to be able to speak [...* person talking in the back ground] *to speak to each on an hourly basis, even minutely basis on social basis. It is the milestone or cornerstone of any relationship. It's a foundation and it's necessary through all levels."* ***(Z, 33 years old, male, soldier)***

*"It's been very useful, as a means of communication, maintaining contact and, uh, it's affordable. I think WhatsApp is more user friendly and it's affordable and that is probably the reason why most people prefer it."* ***(S, 37 years old, male, soldier).***

*"Err not all of them because some of them need two people together in order to reach a consensus. Some of them yes like err I have sent money into your account and yes thank you [love] I saw it. That form of communication is easy but there are some other decisions that needs to be taken when two partners are together. I wouldn't say entirely all the issues or challenges will be solved on social media."* ***(T, 34 years old, male, soldier)***

Bittner (2014) pointed out that, despite increased reliance on social media for communication, its long-term impact was not yet known. However, she said it had played a pivotal role in maintaining relationships during extended periods of deployment.

Using family systems theory, social media was beneficial in the interactions between individuals within a family by promoting free and continual communication system between parents and children who often use social media to stay connected with their significant other (Padilla-Walker, et al., 2012). According to Chalmers (2011), American military families mentioned that social media played a significant role in helping them to stay connected with deployed members. Social media had a number of benefits including relieving anxiety and stress (Matthews-Juarez, et al., 2013).

Social media was not only seen as a communication tool, but it also helped participants to mend their relationships, update each other daily basis on any developments and to resolve issues. Both

the deployed soldiers and their family members confirmed that social media was beneficial in maintaining or sustaining their relationships.

### 4.3.5. Theme 4: Frequency of use of social media during deployment

## 4.4. Conclusion

This chapter described, presented and analysed the research findings of the semi-structured interviews conducted among soldiers and their dependents on the use of social media during deployment in Ba-Phalaborwa municipality, Limpopo province. The main themes and sub-themes that resulted from the data analysis were presented and discussed, making reference to some of the literature that had been reviewed. In the final chapter, the researcher will present her conclusions and recommendations based on the research findings.

# CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMEDATIONS

## 5.1. Summary

This present study aimed to develop an understanding of social media use patterns by soldiers and their families as a result of deployment. The objectives of the study were:

- To explore the challenges encountered by deployed soldiers and their family members
- To describe the challenges of using social media by the deployed soldiers and their family members
- To explore social media as a coping tool for family members and deployed soldiers in tackling the challenges associated with deployment.

To address these objectives, the data was collected using semi-structured interviews. The collected data yielded four themes, each with sub-themes, as summarised below:

- Use of social media for communication during deployment
- Challenges or difficulties experienced during deployment
- Importance of social media in maintaining or sustaining relationships
- Frequency of using social media during deployment.

Each theme yielded a number of sub-themes which are summarised below:

- ***Use of social media for communication during deployment:***

  The use of social media as a theme included the type of social media used by the participants, the method used to communicate and the affordability of such means of communication.

- ***Challenges or difficulties experienced during deployment:***

  The challenges and difficulties reported by the participants in relation to the deployment of their family member were the challenges associated with separation, specifically loneliness and the negative impact of deployment on parental responsibilities normally executed by the deployed soldier. The findings in relation to this theme also highlighted the challenges or difficulties faced by the participants in relation to network coverage or signal connectivity which often hampered the quality of their interaction with a deployed soldier. In some

instances, participants alluded to affordability presenting a challenges in accessing the social network.

- ***The importance of social media use in maintaining or sustaining relationships:***

  Social media was applauded by the participants for its ability to improve communication and facilitate contact during the period of deployment.

- ***Frequency of use of social media during deployments:***

  Participants reported that they either used social media daily or when and where there was a need.

### 5.2. Conclusions

The findings of this study illustrated the experiences, challenges and benefits of employing social media among deployed soldiers and their families. While there were similarities and differences in participants' experiences and challenges, most agreed that the benefits derived from using social media during deployment outweighed the disadvantages. Most reported using social media daily, pointing to its value in a deployment scenario. The findings demonstrated that social media played a significant role in breaching the communication void generated by deployment.

### 5.3. Limitations

While the findings of this research were valuable, a number of limitations were identified as follows:

- The study was conducted among a small sample of soldiers and their family members who were from the Phalaborwa military base. Considering the small sample size, the findings of this study cannot be generalised to the larger population.
- The fact that most participants were soldiers and not dependents was also considered a limitation as the dependents' experiences did not represent those of the larger group.
- Most participants were black Africans, with other racial groups (Whites, Indians and Coloureds) represented in small numbers. This could be a limitation as the findings contained data mainly from one racial group.

### 5.4. Recommendations

Based on the findings, the researcher has made the following recommendations:

- To minimise the hardships encountered by soldiers and their family members, the SANDF should implement more resilience and support programmes for both parties before, during and after deployment.
- A multi-professional team should be used to ensure the necessary specialised support to the family members of soldiers who are deployed for more than six months, to assist them in addressing the psychosocial challenges faced by these family members.
- Forums which could be used as support groups should also be established to provide support to the spouses or partners of soldiers who are deployed.

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# APPENDICES

## Appendix A: Participant Information Sheet



UNIVERSITY OF THE
WITWATERSRAND
JOHANNESBURG

**Exploring the effectiveness of the use of social media during deployment within military families: The case of Ba-Phalaborwa district municipality, Limpopo province in South Africa**

Good day

My name is Katlego Mogale, and I am a postgraduate student registered for a mMaster's degree in occupational social work at the University of Witwatersrand. As part of the requirements for the degree, I am conducting research to explore the use of social media during deployment within military families.

I wish to invite you to participate in my study, as your involvement and experience will contribute to providing information about the challenges faced by military families. Your participation will be entirely voluntary and refusal to participate will not be held against you in any way. If you agree to take part, I shall arrange to interview you at a time and place that is suitable for you. The interview will last for approximately one hour. There are no benefits attached to participating or not participating. You may withdraw from the study at any time and you may also refuse to answer any questions that you feel uncomfortable to answer. With your permission, the interview will be tape-recorded. No one except for me and my supervisor will have access to the tapes or data. The tapes and interview schedules will be kept in a locked cabinet for two years following any publications, or for six years if no publications emanate from the study. Please be assured that your name and personal details will be kept confidential and no identifying information will be included in the final research report. The researcher will be interviewing 14 dependents of soldiers whose spouses/partners have been deployed in the past 36 months for a period longer than six months. Your participant need to be told who else will be

participating and how many.

Please contact me on 079 391 7495 (cell) or my Supervisor, Dr Busisiwe Nkala-Dlamini on +27 11 717 4483 should you have any questions regarding the study, and we shall answer them to the best of our ability. Should you wish to receive a summary of the results of the study; an abstract or summary of the results will be made available on request.

Thank you for taking the time to consider participating in this study.

Yours sincerely

Katlego Mogale

**Appendix B: Semi-Structured Interview Schedule: Participants**



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**Exploring the effectiveness of the use of social media during deployment within military families: The case of Ba-Phalaborwa district municipality, Limpopo province in South Africa**

Interview questions:

1. Kindly explain to me your understanding of deployment?
2. What are some of the challenges or difficulties that you have experienced while your spouse/partner was on deployment?
3. Have you ever used social media to communicate during deployment?
4. How useful has it been in addressing issues in the absence of your partner?
5. How frequently do you use it?
6. How easily accessible is your spouse on social media during deployment?
7. Do you share pictures of birthdays or any milestones during his absence?
8. If so, how was that helpful in keeping and maintaining you relationship?
9. What are the advantages or benefits of deployment to the family?
10. What are the disadvantages or risks of deployment to the family?
11. In your opinion, what role does SANDF play pre-deployment for the deploying members?
12. In your opinion, what role does SANDF play pre-deployment for family members?
13. In your opinion, what role does SANDF play post deployment for family members?
14. What are some of the support systems/programmes provided by SANDF during deployment for families and the deployed soldier?

Is there anything else that would be important for the research which I have not asked you?

Thank you for participating in my study!

**Appendix C: Demographic Information Sheet**



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JOHANNESBURG

**Exploring the effectiveness of the use of social media during deployment within military families: The case of Ba-Phalaborwa district municipality, Limpopo province in South Africa**

All responses are confidential. Please answer all questions as truthfully as possible.

*The information is required for research purposes only, and s is not intended to offend or discriminate.*

**1. Age (years):** ☐

**2. Gender**

Male: ☐

Female: ☐

**3. What is your home language? * Please tick one**

Afrikaans: ☐

English: ☐

IsiNdebele: ☐

IsiXhosa: ☐

IsiZulu: ☐

Sepedi: ☐

Sesotho: ☐

Setswana: ☐

SiSwati: ☐

Tshivenda: ☐

Xitsonga: ☐

Other(s): _____

**4. Race?**

African: ☐

Coloured: ☐

White: ☐

Indian: ☐

Other (please specify): _____

**5. Religious affiliation**

Christianity: ☐

Hinduism: ☐

Islam: ☐

Judaism: ☐

No religion: ☐

Ancestral Worship: ☐

Other (specify): _____

**Appendix: D Consent Form for Participation in the Study**



UNIVERSITY OF THE
WITWATERSRAND,
JOHANNESBURG

**Exploring the effectiveness of the use of social media during deployment within military families: The case of Ba-Phalaborwa district municipality, Limpopo province in South Africa**

I hereby consent to participate in the research project. The purpose and procedures of the study have been explained to me. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may refuse to answer any particular items or withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences. I understand that my responses will be kept confidential.

Name of Participant:_____

Date:_____

Signature: _____

Name of Researcher:_____

Date:_____

Researcher's Signature: _____

**Appendix E: Consent Form for Audio-Taping of the Interviews**



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JOHANNESBURG

**Exploring the effectiveness of the use of social media during deployment within military families: The case of Ba-Phalaborwa district municipality, Limpopo province in South Africa**

I hereby consent to tape-recording of the interview. I understand that my confidentiality will be maintained at all times and that the tapes will be destroyed two years after any publications arising from the study or six years after completion of the study if there are no publications.

Name of Participant: _____

Date: _____

Signature: _____

Name of Researcher:_____

Date:_____

Researcher's Signature: _____

## Appendix F: Approval of the Study by the Department of Defence



RESTRICTED

Defence intelligence
Department:
Defence
**REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

DI/DDS/R/202/3/7

Telephone. (012) 315-0216
Fax: (012) 326-3246
Enquiries: Brig Gen T.G. Baloyi

Defence Intelligence
Private Bag X367
Pretoria
0001
11 May 2018

**AUTHORISATION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENCE (DOD): LT K.M.J. MOGALE**

1. Telephonic communication between Lt K.M.J. Mogale of the SB Phalaborwa and WO1 K. Skweyiya of the Defence Intelligence on the 10 May 2018, as well as a request letter SB Phalaborwa SB/R/104/10/18 to conduct research in the DOD dd 11 April 2018 with a Research Proposal attached has reference.

2. Lt K.M.J. Mogale is hereby granted approval from a security perspective to conduct research in the DOD on the topic entitled **"Perception of the Effectiveness of Social Media and other Electronic Forms of Communication among Married Deployees: A Case of Ba-Phalaborwa District Municipality, Limpopo Province in South Africa"** as a precondition for an attainment of a Masters Degree under the auspices of the University of Witwatersrand as requested.

3. After the completion of the research, the final research product must be forwarded to Defence Intelligence (DI), Sub-Division Counter Intelligence (SDCI) for a final authorisation before it may be published or distributed to any entity outside the DOD.

4. For your attention.

**(G.S. SIZANI)**
**CHIEF DIRECTOR COUNTER INTELLIGENCE: MAJ GEN**
KS/KS (Lt K.M.J. Mogale)

**DISTR**

For Action

OC SB Phalaborwa (Attention:Lt K.M.J. Mogale)

Internal

File: DI/DDS/R/202/3/7

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**Appendix G: Confirmation letter from the editor**

ERICA WEBSTER
Editorial services
15 FW Ferreira Street
Malanshof
Randburg
2194
Tel: 079 122 0716
webstenca2013@gmail.com

31 March 2020

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

I, Erica Jean Webster, ID No. 650309 0141 083 hereby confirm that I have provided a language editing service to Kgaogelo Moganie for her research report, Exploring the effectiveness of the use of social media during deployment within military families: The case of Ba-Phalaborwa district municipality, Limpopo province in South Africa.

I have a BA Degree from the University of the Witwatersrand, with majors in English and Industrial Psychology.

I have about 15 years' freelance writing experience, having written features for various publications, including Business Day (Surveys/Insights) and Sunday Times (Business Times Surveys), and have done copy writing for a variety of corporate organisations, NGOs and business schools.

More recently (over the past three years), I have assisted a number of students in language editing and proofreading proposals, research reports, dissertations and theses.

Please feel free to contact me should you require further information.

Yours sincerely

Erica Webster
079 122 0716
webstenca2013@gmail.com