Notice of the Final Oral Examination
for the Degree of Master of Arts

of

TAMMY TUPPER

BSc (University of Victoria, 2010)

“Non-Civilian/Civilian: A Canadian Youth Perspective of Growing Up in the Military Lifestyle”

School of Child and Youth Care

Monday, October 17, 2016
10:30AM
David Turpin Building
Room A136

Supervisory Committee:
Dr. Sandrina de Finney, School of Child and Youth Care, University of Victoria (Supervisor)
Dr. Marie Hoskins, School of Child and Youth Care, UVic (Member)

External Examiner:
Dr. Heidi Cramm, School of Rehabilitation Therapy, Queen’s University

Chair of Oral Examination:
Dr. Andre Smith, Department of Sociology, UVic

Dr. David Capson, Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies
Abstract

The title of this study, Non-Civilian/Civilian, illustrates the paradoxical positioning of children of military personnel: Though dependants are not in the military, they are not entirely separate from it either. Many studies have addressed the lives of military families as a whole but few studies have focused on a Canadian context, and fewer have addressed the perspectives of adolescents from military families.

Data collected through individual interviews recorded and assembled using a digital storytelling method afforded in-depth exploration of three participants’ recollections of growing up in military families. Focusing on the research question “What are the experiences of youth with parents in the Canadian Armed Forces, and how do they approach this unique lifestyle?” the research participants provided rich accounts of their lives as dependants in a Canadian Armed Forces family. Video interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify thematic patterns, commonalities, tensions, and gaps within and across the participants’ stories.

Key findings that were consistent with existing research included repeated and ongoing parent separation adding stress to all aspects of family life; children’s fears about absent or deployed parent(s); high levels of mobility causing disruptions in education and relationships; and multiple losses and reconstruction of community after each relocation. Of particular note were themes of youth mental health and well-being and strained relationships with fathers as the participants became adolescents. These themes spoke to the centrality of the role played by the remaining parent and their ability to support normalcy, routine, and confidence within the family unit. Participants noted the imperative for the serving parent(s) or stepparent, specifically if the serving member is the father/stepfather, to attend to each individual relationship within the family unit in order to nurture familial closeness and a strong child-parent bond. Participants also highlighted the importance of identifying signs of negative coping behaviours, and a need to follow through with professional consultation when necessary.

This study contributes to current research by offering a Canadian youth perspective on everyday life for members of the Armed Forces and their families, and provides insight as to how the military lifestyle affects children/youth within a family unit. Study findings provide targeted areas for further research and will be relevant for both military and civilian educators, mental health care workers, and other professionals who work with youth of military families.