

Abstract

Exploring the Parental Experiences of Raising Autistic Adolescents in a UK Military Family: The Emerging Role for Occupational Therapists.

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There is a dearth of research and understanding of the lived experiences of UK non-serving partners in military families raising autistic children. This research study seeks to address the current gap in understanding of this specific population group, highlighting the potential role of occupational therapy interventions with military families.

The qualitative study used two sequential semi-structured interviews, completed approximately eight months apart, with seventeen non-serving partners of UK military personnel, all of whom had care responsibilities for their autistic adolescent aged 13-25 years. The interviews included open-ended questions regarding diagnosis, relocations, education, and coping with deployments. The interviews were administered through an online audio platform 'Zoom' and recorded for analysis. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data, resulting in a coding framework and determination of themes.

The study findings illuminated the numerous practical steps these parents undertook to maintain the stability and well-being of their autistic adolescents, showcasing their remarkable skills and resilience when navigating healthcare systems and the persistent challenge of reconnecting with healthcare professionals and support communities following every relocation.

The role of the Occupational Therapist in supporting these families is discussed, providing strategies to ensure stability for the autistic child and family well-being, amidst relocations and deployments. Given the frequent moves and transitions inherent in military life, occupational therapists bear a significant responsibility for developing and implementing inclusive practices within healthcare systems, ensuring that military families consistently receive high-quality communication and care, despite navigating numerous healthcare boundaries and providers.

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