

## GUEST EDITOR'S EDITORIAL

I will begin my introductory thoughts with a touch of humour. Just over a hundred years ago in the Austro-Hungarian army, it was not desirable for young officers to marry too soon and start a family. Their thoughts had to stay clear and their hearts in the right place – with the country not with the girl. A Slovenian soldier today can thus be happy to be able to marry and have a family. This cursory and humorous historical comment also touches on the content described in more detail and more seriously in the following pages of this special issue.

Military families have been an important topic in different fields of science around the world for at least 50 years, while Slovenia is breaking new ground by putting down what is currently known and taking a comprehensive approach to studying military families. Since July 2019, the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Ljubljana, with the cooperation of The Peace Institute, has been carrying out the project *Military Specific Risk and Protective Factors for Military Family Health Outcomes* with the support of the Slovenian Research Agency. The researchers are very grateful to the Slovenian Armed Forces for providing organizational support in these research efforts, and to the editorial board of *Contemporary Military Challenges* for being ready to devote the entire issue to this important topic which, we have to admit, represents a support activity, which may, however, still seem marginal given other military challenges. We are also aware, however, that support is very important in any fight, and may significantly contribute to victory.

I will begin by identifying the study subject of this issue of the publication. Family is placed in a civilian environment, but where do we place and how do we understand a military family? There are no military bases in Slovenia in which families are subject to military socialization; there is no intertwining of the military hierarchy with the social status of a family. In a welfare state which Slovenia is considered to

be, military families are not offered any special benefits that would set them apart from other families in the civilian environment. In the United States, for example, military families are often physically separated from the civilian environment and subject to military requirements; in Estonia, the term military family is associated with former Soviet officer families; in Sweden, the term is neither known nor used. And in Slovenia?

The Service in the Slovenian Armed Forces Act, adopted in 2007, which significantly contributed to the legalization of comprehensive support for members of the Slovenian Armed Forces, defined military families indirectly by listing those who, in addition to SAF members, are entitled to comprehensive care.

Our research shows that a military family is understood as a family in which at least one family member is employed by the Slovenian Armed Forces. Here, we refer to different forms of military families such as a parent or a child employed by the SAF; a nuclear or a multigenerational family; a family in which both parents are employed by the SAF; or a family in which the military boots are worn by either the father or the mother. A military family is more than the legally defined core family of an SAF member. It is a question of identity and military culture which is passed (or not) on to the immediate or extended family. Likewise, the challenges and problems faced by SAF members are passed on to the family and may lead to mental, emotional and physical health problems, as well as poor interpersonal partner relationships and relationships between parents and children. Different risk factors are also present in the wider society, not just the military, yet the military profession is particularly demanding.

Part of the civil society might argue that people face risks in many different professions in which parents are often away on business trips; moreover, work overload today is very common. A peculiarity of the military profession, however, is that parents are not away on temporary duty for only a few days, but are absent for several months, sometimes repeatedly. The tasks that military parents must perform during their absences are not daily routine obligations, but are often associated with an increased level of threat and the possibility of injury or even death. It is not uncommon for parents to be absent at the time of their child's birth, and perhaps see the children for the first time when they are no longer newborns. Their work overload is not measured by two hours of overtime but by two weeks in the field, mud, cold, wind, heat, and other adverse conditions. Work risk is not defined as the possibility of a work accident, but is a conscious decision of an individual who is prepared to lose their life while performing tasks to achieve the goals of our nation.

At this point, it would be difficult to say that all of the above only affects SAF members. It significantly affects their entire families. Sacrifice, coordination, stress, fear of losing a family member, and a range of other emotions are present in the entire military family, from children and partners to grandparents.

At the time of writing this editorial, SAF members are facing a new challenge, as they represent one of the most important elements in the fight against the SARS-CoV-2 virus epidemic. Within the project Military Specific Risk and Protective Factors for Military Family Health Outcomes, a cross-sectional study was conducted in April 2020, in which it was determined how military families have adapted their daily lives to these extremely unusual circumstances. Based on the opinions of the respondents, it can be concluded that military families are quite resilient and adaptable.

However, they are not indestructible, and would sometimes welcome support, whether coming from friends, colleagues, or in the form of formal support from the SAF or the state. Particularly vulnerable are families with pre-school and young school-age children for whom measures at the time of the epidemic were least suitable and appropriate. In a time of quarantine and social self-isolation, during the closure of kindergartens and schools, and without the support of grandparents, military activities, such as several days of absence and military exercises, can be a difficult challenge for a family and can even lead to health problems.

Satisfied and healthy military families are certainly a good basis for the successful and dedicated work of SAF members. Most likely, this is an important factor in deciding to continue one's career in the Slovenian Armed Forces.

Please do not take offense, dear members of the Slovenian Armed Forces, if I conclude by addressing you directly. It is not just you who are serving the homeland, but many a time also entire families who support you emotionally, logistically, organizationally, and in other ways; who adapt their everyday lives to your work requirements; subordinate their careers to your military mission; do not blame you when you are away on international operations and missions just when your child is celebrating their birthday or needs comfort because their pet has died. Again and again, in an upright manner, although sometimes with bitterness, they accept your departures and arrivals, being aware that soldiers are calmer, more successful, more confident in performing their tasks, and consequently safer by knowing they are supported by their families, an invisible backbone of the military profession.

