Military Spouse Employment: A Grounded Theory Approach to Experiences and Perceptions


SUMMARY: Military spouses participated in interviews to understand their motivations for paid work and their perceptions of how being a military spouse affected employment opportunities. Most reported that being a military spouse had a negative effect on their careers.

KEY FINDINGS:
- Almost two-thirds of spouses believed that being a military spouse negatively impacted their work opportunities.
- Reasons cited for this negative effect on employment included frequent geographic moves, difficulties with child care, and employer bias.
- Motivations for seeking employment included paying bills, personal fulfillment, and avoiding boredom.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:
- Programs could:
  - Increase awareness of military spouse employment programs via flyers in buildings on military installations and via social media
  - Offer training modules to help military spouses address employer bias
  - Offer support groups for working military spouses

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:
- Policies could:
  - Continue to support military programs that offer childcare services for working parents
  - Recommend periodic review of spouse employment programs to determine whether they meet current needs and are reflective of the local labor market
  - Recommend incentives for hiring military spouses, particularly surrounding military installations

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METHODS
- Spouses at eight military installations were selected randomly to participate in a short telephone or in-person interview (average interview length was 14 minutes).
- Interviews were conducted between October 2002 and March 2003.
- Participants were from eight U.S. military installations across the United States.

PARTICIPANTS
- One thousand one hundred-two military spouses participated in interviews, including some who were employed, seeking employment, or had chosen not to work.
- Participants represented all four branches of the military.
- Participants were representative of the overall military spouse population in terms of age, education, and family conditions.

LIMITATIONS
- The article did not explicitly state the gender of interview participants, though it is presumably a study of only female spouses.
- The article did not include findings about why some military spouses choose not to work, though such spouses are included in the sample.
- Most participants resided at military installations located in communities with relatively high unemployment at the time of the study which may have affected their employment opportunities.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH
Future research could:
- Compare labor force outcomes of military and civilian spouses
- Examine the types of work military spouses do and how they choose their occupations
- Compare motivations for work and employment experiences of male and female spouses

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