

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



**Focus:**  
Multiple  
Branches

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

Castaneda, L. W., & Harell, M. C. (2008). Military spouse employment: A grounded theory approach to experiences and perceptions. *Armed Forces & Society*, 34(3), 389-412. doi:10.1177/0095327X07307194

**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

This product is the result of a partnership funded by the Department of Defense between the Office of Military Community and Family Policy and the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture through a grant/cooperative agreement with The University of Minnesota.



# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



## 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

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



For more information about the Assessing Research that Works rating scale visit:  
<https://reachmilitaryfamilies.umn.edu/content/assessing-research-that-works>