

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Military
Related

Investigating the Causes of the Earnings Penalty of Being a Tied-Migrant Military Spouse

Hisnanick, J. J. (2014). "Honey, I Love You, but..." Investigating the causes of the earnings penalty of being a tied-migrant military spouse. *Armed Forces & Society*, 41(3), 413-439. doi:10.1177/0095327X13512620

SUMMARY: 2000 Census data was used to compare salaries of military spouses to salaries of civilians. Overall, military spouses have lower annual incomes than their civilian counterparts. This differential is due to three factors: (1) the decision not to work, (2) different qualifications, and (3) more limited work opportunities, which impact husbands and wives differently.

KEY FINDINGS

- Military spouses work fewer hours and earn less annually than their civilian counterparts.
- Compared to spouses of civilian employees, military wives have a 53% earning penalty, and military husbands a 43% penalty.
- Among military wives, 25% of the observed earning differential is due to the decision not to work, 51% to their different qualifications and 24% to more limited job opportunities.
- Among military husbands, 21% of the wage differential is due to the decision not to work, 37% to different qualifications, and 42% to more limited job opportunities.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS

Programs could:

- Offer additional, specialized job training for military spouses
- Provide courses and workshops on salary negotiation for spouses of Service members
- Create listings of military-friendly jobs previously occupied by military spouses

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES

Policies could:

- Consider longer rotation times on military bases, to allow spouses longer job tenure
- Consider creating spousal employment opportunities on bases
- Subsidize spousal hiring in larger firms, where transfer may be an option

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



METHODS

- Four groups were constructed from the Census data: wives of Service members, husbands of Service members, wives of civilian employees, and husbands of civilian employees.
- Earning differentials were calculated for wives (of civilians vs. Service members), and for husbands (of civilians vs Service members).
- Statistical analysis was used to disaggregate earnings based on three factors known to impact military spouse employment: the decision not to work, more limited job opportunities, and more limited qualifications.

PARTICIPANTS

- The study sample was drawn from approximately 19 million housing units (1 in 6 United States households) who received the Census 2000 long form.
- The military spouse sample was obtained by selecting married men and women between the ages of 18-46 with a detailed industry code of Armed Forces, excluding those in the Reserves or National Guard.
- Civilian spouse samples were obtained by selecting married men and women between the ages of 18-46, who were working full time and where both partners were civilians.
- Military spouses in the sample were younger, had less work experience, and were more likely to be minorities than civilian spouses.

LIMITATIONS

- The research does not account for the type of employment or industry.
- Groups are not equivalent in terms of ethnic diversity.
- The research uses Census data, which may have low response rates that favor specific demographics.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

- Future research could look at wage differentials based on the duration of tenure on installations.
- Additional research may examine the impact of specific spousal careers and/or employers on spousal wages.
- Future research can study wage differentials across ethnicity and other population characteristics.

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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