

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Honey I Love You, but... Investigating the Causes of the Earnings Penalty of Being a Tied-Migrant Military Spouse

Hisnanick, J. J., & Little, R. D. (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: Census data were 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
- Continue to support programs that offer spousal employment opportunities on base
- Encourage collaboration among DoD and community employers to help military spouses secure employment

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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.
- The study sample was drawn from approximately 19 million housing units who received the Census 2000 long form.
- The military spouse sample was obtained by selecting married men and women with an industry code of Armed Forces, but excluded those in the Reserves or National Guard.
- The civilian spouse sample was obtained by selecting married men and women who were working full- time and where both partners were civilians.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were between the ages of 18-46 years.
- Men married to a Service member were more likely to be younger and a minority compared to civilian husbands.
- Women married to a Service member were more likely to be younger and a minority compared to civilian wives.

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:

- Explore wage differentials based on the duration of tenure on installations
- Examine the impact of specific spousal careers and/or employers on spousal wages
- Investigate wage differentials across ethnicity and other population characteristics

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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