

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Employment Gaps Between Military Spouses and Matched Civilians

Meadows, S. O., Griffin, B. A., Karney, B. R., & Pollak, J. (2016). Employment gaps between military spouses and matched civilians. *Armed Forces & Society*, 42(3), 542-561. doi:10.1177/0095327Xa5607810

SUMMARY: This study provides a post 2008 Great Recession description of the employment situation for female military spouses. It examines aspects of female military spouses employment (e.g., hours worked, earnings, gaps among the highest educated women) and whether or not they are disadvantaged relative to matched civilian peers.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Female military spouses do earn less than comparable civilian peers in terms of dollars and percentage earnings.
- Female military spouses who are part of the labor force work as many hours as their civilian counterparts, but still earn significantly less for that work.
- The most educated female military spouses are not disproportionately affected compared to spouses with less education.
- A greater number of recent moves for Service members and their families were significantly associated with working fewer hours and earning less, in raw dollars, than civilian peers.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer military couples' career counseling that focuses on unique military family situations, such as deployments and relocation
- Provide information on career development and opportunities for military spouses
- Develop training for professionals who work with military families to facilitate career development workshops for military spouses

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Encourage awareness among professionals who work with Service members and their spouses on the importance of programming around career development for military spouses
- Expand the scope of military spouse employment programs to include all spouses regardless of educational background
- Continue to support programs that address the unique challenges (e.g., relocation, deployment, employment) faced by military spouses

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METHODS

- Data were drawn from the Deployment Life Study, a longitudinal survey of approximately 2,700 deployable, married, military families, including Service members and their spouses which was administered between March 2011 and February 2013.
- The total sample in this study was 1,779 women out of which 553 were employed. This sample included only couples where the Service member was in the Active Component of the military and the spouse was female.
- Analyses of the data determined how the two samples of women differed in terms of pay and hours worked.

PARTICIPANTS

- Military wives in the full sample were, on average, 31 years old, had some college experience, were White, and had at least one child under six in the household.
- Military husbands were, on average, 32 years old, had some college, and White.
- Twenty-seven percent of spouses in the sample came from Army families, 29% from Navy families, 27% from Air Force families, and 17% from Marine Corps families.

LIMITATIONS

- The Deployment Life Study is an ongoing longitudinal project with cross-sectional data which were drawn from a baseline assessment; therefore outcomes cannot be interpreted as causal.
- This study did not assess military wives' preference for work outside the home; therefore, interpretation of results should take this into account.
- The Deployment Life Study survey was administered over a two year period of time, the difference in economic and political context could affect the results of the study.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Conduct a study around under-employed military female spouses, to address some of the barriers to full employment and what effects this may have on their children
- Investigate, using qualitative methodology, factors that military female spouses consider when making a choice on whether or not to seek outside employment
- Evaluate the Service members' role in their spouses employment and career development

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