



Choices and Constraints in a Two-Person Career: Ideology, Division of Labor, And Well-Being among Submarine Officers' Wives

Mederer, H.J. & Weinstein, L. (1992). Choices and constraints in a two-person career: Ideology, division of labor, and well-being among submarine officers' wives. *Journal of Family Issues*, 13, 334-350. doi:10.1177/019251392013003005

SUMMARY: 81 wives of Navy submarine officers completed a survey examining gender attitudes, overall role satisfaction, and satisfaction with Navy life. Women with more traditional gender attitudes were more involved in and more satisfied with Navy life.

KEY FINDINGS

- Wives with more traditional attitudes about gender roles were the most involved in their husbands' Naval careers.
- Wives who held traditional gender attitudes and were more involved in the Navy were most satisfied with Navy life.
- Wives described stresses associated with a military career, noting they cannot count on their husbands to be present for family activities or holidays and tend to rely on other spouses for support.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS

Programs could:

- Partner with officer wives' clubs to explore ways to collaborate in supporting spouses.
- Consider offering classes for military spouses, offering ways they can support their partners' careers.
- Offer peer support groups for military spouses, both in-person and online forums.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES

Policies could:

- Continue to allocate funding for support programs for partners of Service members.
- Recommend expanded access to child care programs for military spouses to help them in managing their stress.
- Allow deployed Service members flexibility in their schedules to enable them to connect with their at-home families at important times (e.g., holidays).

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



METHODS

- Questionnaires were distributed at a Navy Submarine Officers' Wives Club meeting.
- 64% of questionnaires distributed were returned.
- Surveys assessed gender role attitude, employment, division of labor, involvement in Navy activities, personal well-being, satisfaction with Navy life, and life satisfaction.
- Semi-structured interviews with a subset of the wives probed the perceived costs and rewards of being a Navy wife.

PARTICIPANTS

- 81 wives of Navy submarine officers.
- Average age = 32.0 years; most wives had at least a college education.
- Average length of marriage = 8.0 years, 63% have children.
- Most of their husbands were Lieutenants or Lieutenant Commanders.

LIMITATIONS

- The sample consisted of only Navy submarine officers' wives and the results may not apply to other partners of Navy personnel.
- The study used a convenience sample which may limit the generalizability of the findings.
- The measures were all self-reported and may be biased.
- The data was cross-sectional and causal conclusions are inappropriate.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

- Future research could explore the relationship between gender role expectations and satisfaction for other branches of the military.
- Additional studies could assess satisfaction longitudinally and link it with marital outcomes.
- Future research could assess female officers' partners to see if these relationships apply in those relationships.

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