

UNHEARD VOICES: EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT PERSPECTIVES OF
ENLISTED MILITARY WIVES

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Unheard Voices: Education and Employment Perspectives of Enlisted Military Wives
A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of
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DEDICATION

This is dedicated to my family, my gladiators.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Outside the Continental United States	OCONUS
Within the Continental United States	CONUS
Permanent Change of Station.....	PCS
Basic Housing Allowance.....	BAH
National Defense Authorization Act.....	NDAA
My Career Advancement Account.....	MyCAA
Military Spouse Employment Partnership	MSEP
Armed Forces Qualification Test.....	AFQT
Enlisted	E
Department of Defense	DoD
Temporary Additional Duties	TAD
Government Accountability Office.....	GAO
Family Member Employment Assistance Program	FMEAP
Military Officers Association of America	MOAA
Defense Accounting and Finance Service	DFAS
Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program	SNAP
Women, Infants, and Children	WIC
Postpartum Depression	PPD
Standard Operating Procedure	SOP
Spouse Education and Employment Opportunities	SECO
American Community Survey	ACS
Child Development Center	CDC
African-American	AA
Air Force	AF
Caucasian	C
Priority Placement Program.....	PPP
Military Spouse Preference.....	MSP

ABSTRACT

UNHEARD VOICES: EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT PERSPECTIVES OF ENLISTED MILITARY WIVES

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Abstract

Much has been studied and written about military wives during the post 9/11 period on topics ranging from coping under stress strategies to the connection between the military wife's quality of life and her influence on the combat readiness of her military service member husband. Wives' satisfaction with their education level and employment status has been shown to positively impact their quality of life, however, military wives' perspectives and priorities are often solely gleaned from quantitative data derived from often-employed surveys. This qualitative study of in-depth interviews serves as a complement to recent quantitative survey data by giving voice to enlisted military wives and allowing them, in their own words, to elaborate on their perceptions, experiences, and priorities in the areas of education and employment. Interviews were conducted with twelve enlisted military wives of various ranks representing all four branches of service, Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps. Findings support historical research that

wives believe the military lifestyle constrains their education and employment pursuits. Participants were of varying levels of education, employment, and socioeconomic status (ranks) yet all expressed having frustrated and depressive periods due to their military lifestyle circumstances. Additionally, wives expressed different levels of familiarity with and use (or non-use) of existing Department of Defense (DoD) programming designed to assist military spouses in their educational and employment pursuits.

CHAPTER ONE: STUDY BACKGROUND

Much has been studied and written about military wives during the post 9/11 period on topics ranging from coping under stress strategies (Blakely et al. 2012; Patterson and McCubbin 1984; Westhuis, Fafara, and Oullette 2006) to the group's high risk for postpartum depression related to every day, non-deployment stressors (Schachman and Lindsay 2013). Less focus has been dedicated to the day-to-day wide-ranging challenges for the wives of enlisted men, which are inherent to the military lifestyle. Issues including impediments to gaining meaningful education and employment opportunities and frequent relocation with its attendant broken kin networks reveal why the "job" of military wife is often called "the hardest job in the military."

Objective

The purpose of this project was twofold. First, it was designed to explore two crucial categories affecting military wives that have wide ranging effects: education and employment. Secondly, it sought to investigate military wives' perceptions of themselves, their perceived status, their goals, and their challenges. Both education and employment directly impact the military family and its gendered dynamics in many ways including the extent of wives' financial contribution to the household income, and wives' well-being and satisfaction with their husbands, the military, and most importantly, themselves (Blakely et al. 2012; Castaneda and Harrell 2008; Patterson and McCubbin 1984; Westhuis et al. 2006). An investigation of military spouse education and

employment is an important undertaking for two main reasons. Firstly, though the number of active duty military wives across all branches may be small at approximately 750,000, when compared to the general US population, there are related demographics that highlight the need for deeper investigation. In comparison to their civilian cohorts, military spouses have higher levels of education with 84% reporting some college, 25% having bachelors' degrees and 10% having advanced degrees. However, in the case of military spouses, more education does not equate to better, higher paying career opportunities. Rather disconcerting is the group's high unemployment rate, quoted at 26% by the Department of Defense, and when military spouses do become employed, they are paid approximately 25% less than their civilian cohorts of similar experience and education level (Stamilio 2013). Secondly, a deeper investigation into spouse education and employment is timely in that there are heavily funded and often scrutinized DoD spousal assistance initiatives currently in place, specifically Spouse Education and Career Opportunities' (SECO), My Career Advancement Account (MyCAA) and Military Spouse Employment Partnership (MSEP) program. According to DoD's 2016 fiscal year budget request, 100 million dollars in funding is solely for SECO programming (2015:17).

Military Organization versus Military Families

As competing "greedy institutions" the military and family both demand service members' loyalty, time, and energy (Coser 1974; Segal 1986). However, in this contest it is typical that the military prevails, leaving the military wife alone to cope with the challenges inherent to the military lifestyle: long hours, frequent moves, low pay, spouse separations, and life as a single parent (Harrell 2000; Harris 2009; Segal 1986; Taber

2009). Expectations from both the military and her service member husband often are that she should conform to the needs and desires of the military, which effectively positions the wife as twice removed from her own agency and the ability to guide her own future (Taber 2009).

Post 9/11, as the US simultaneously fought two wars, an increased emphasis on improving the quality of life of military wives became a priority. The Department of Defense (DoD) recognized that strains on the military wife include Permanent Change of Station (PCS) moves that uproot military families every two to four years and leave the wife, as dictated by established gender roles (Cooke and Speirs 2005), tasked with setting up the household, including children's schools, doctors, and logistics, whether the wife works in paid employment or not. Relocation breaks the wife's informal support and kin networks, possibly resulting in feelings of isolation, forcing adaptation and re-adaptation multiple times over the course of her husband's career. She often needs to find employment, which means starting again at the bottom of the ladder in often remote, rural base locations often inundated with other military wives also seeking employment (Clever and Segal 2013; Harrell, et al. 2004; Kleykamp 2013).

Military wives often are tasked with "making it work" in overwhelmingly stressful environments where emotional concerns, such as their husband's safety and children's adjustment to their father's deployment and/or work schedule, merge with the day-to-day challenges of balancing a household, including finances, often resulting in military wives becoming "distressed." If examined as a question of wives' agency, military wives are often constrained in making fundamental decisions that impact their

lives. It is left to a one to two page DoD-issued document known as “orders” that delivers key details such as where to live, possible separation due to deployment or Temporary Additional Duties (TAD), and length of separation. Thus the government, through the service branch, determines major decisions that affect the lives of military wives.

Previous studies, conducted by both civilian and military researchers, have demonstrated the direct correlation between military wives’ education and employment status to their well-being or quality of life (Castaneda and Harrell 2008; Harrell et al. 2004; Trewick and Muller 2014; Wadsworth and Southwell 2011). Findings demonstrated that military spouses who are employed and have attained their desired level of education have better coping skills and are more resilient (Blakely et al. 2012; Bowen and Orthner 1983; Cooke and Speirs 2005). Resiliency, a term often overused in military circles, is key to “family readiness,” which describes a condition where military families are “squared away,” that is financially and emotionally stable. Secured family readiness directly affects unit and service branch readiness, allowing the service member to focus on his/her mission.

As the primary funding source for the majority of research on military wives, DoD would have been aware of the correlation between wives’ well-being and family readiness. Acknowledging the correlation, DoD quickly set about to establish formal support spousal programs to assist in the areas of education and employment.¹ However,

¹ Additional research undertaken by military family advocacy agencies and quasi-independent academic military family institutes at several major universities such as Penn State, Syracuse University, and Purdue University, also provided data that supported the

it should be noted that the urgency and scope of the military's quality of life initiative was not an altruistic, patriarchal act aimed at awarding the sacrifice of military wives. Instead, the US military as a "greedy" institution was well aware of the research illustrating the strains placed on military wives and the link between wives' satisfaction and their consequential influence on their husbands' decision to reenlist (Karney and Crown 2007; Karney, Loughran, and Pollard 2012; Segal and Segal 2004; Wood 1991). As war personnel demands increased, military wives' satisfaction went beyond simply retention to being identified as an integral factor in ensuring her service member husband's combat readiness and willingness to deploy (Castaneda and Harrell 2008; Harrison 2006; Taber 2009).

Existing DoD Spousal Assistance Programming

It is unclear if the MSEP and MyCAA initiatives meet the expectations and goals of military wives. The MSEP program was undertaken to provide employment assistance to military spouses by linking them to corporate employers committed to hiring military spouses. According to marketing collateral² published by MSEP over 50,000 military wives have found employment through the MSEP portal (DoD 2013). Yet the Government Accountability Office (GAO), tasked by Congress to investigate MSEP and service branch Family Member Employment Assistance Programs (FMEAP), issued a highly critical review admonishing DoD that neither MSEP nor FMEAP has an

need for spousal support programming. It should be noted that I use the term quasi-independent because these institutes are primarily funded by DoD through contract research projects with the findings and conclusions published in non-peer reviewed DoD reports.

² In this context collateral refers to brochures, flyers, and information sheets.

established metric to measure success or a decisive plan in which to integrate the service branches' separate FMEAP programs (GAO 2012).

The MyCAA program, established in 2009, was originally intended to financially assist all military spouses in their “portable career” educational pursuits. At the program’s inception, eligible programs including accredited technical schools, community college, and both undergraduate and graduate degrees. However well-envisioned, the MyCAA program once executed quickly became a victim of its own success. According to DoD’s own statistics, 133,000 spouses had taken advantage of the tuition assistance program resulting in the quick exhaustion of MyCAA funding (Jowers 2010). The program shut down without notice in February 2010 forcing many spouses to pay out of pocket or take out student loans in order to continue their studies or, in some cases, to abandon their education all together. After a drastic restructuring the MyCAA program reopened in October 2010 as a much smaller-scaled model. Eligibility that had once encompassed all ranks of military spouses had been reduced to allow for only lower ranking wives’ participation, those with husbands who were enlisted E1-E5, warrant officer W1-W2, or officer O1-O2. Additionally, the academic programs that had previously been accepted under MyCAA, such as military wives’ pursuit of their bachelors’ and advanced degrees from accredited colleges and universities, were now limited to only associates’ degrees or certificates for “portable careers.”³

³ According to the MyCAA frequently asked question document (version 28, 12 June 12, p. 15), “the Department of Labor and Department of Defense define a portable career as one that is high growth; high demand; largest employment; and most likely to have job openings in military duty locations.”

Teaching and nursing are often used as examples of portable military spouse careers, so much so that great efforts were made by DoD to get every US state to join a licensing compact, which allows professional military spouses to avoid the time and cost intensive process of re-licensing with every state change due to PCS (Clever and Segal 2013; MOAA 2014). It should also be noted that both of these occupations along with social work are often in high demand on US military bases world-wide. The irony is that MyCAA does not support spouses pursuing many of these professional, portable careers deeming the undergraduate and advanced degrees required as “a long-term educational goal” versus the MyCAA approved short-term skill such as a medical transcriptionist or dental hygienist certification (Horrell 2010).

Figures released in 2013 illustrate the decline of military spouse participants in the MyCAA program, from its high of 133,000 in fiscal year (f/y) 2009 to recent counts of 20, 384 f/y 2012 and 17, 890 f/y 2013 (Jowers 2013). What is the reason for the participation drop off? Opinions vary. They include changes in the program that narrowed rank eligibility and educational options, lack of sufficient information by those who meet eligibility requirements, or as Kate Horrell speculated in her June 18, 2010 military.com blog, military spouses’ reluctance to use the program may stem from their suspicion that DoD is “forcing spouses into certain careers”? A spokesperson from the Pentagon presented the decline as a “settling into a steady state” while recent post-survey study recommendations from military family advocacy groups, Blue Star Families and

Military Officers of America Association (MOAA)⁴, discussed the possibility that eligible spouses may be unaware of the program (Jowers 2013).

Despite the drop-off in participation DoD, through both the MSEP and MyCAA programs, continues to spend a considerable amount of money and resources to assist wives in their employment and educational pursuits. But this study sought to investigate, from the perspective of enlisted military wives, their level of program awareness and if there are impediments to their learning about or following through in using the programs. Do these programs meet wives' educational and employment needs? Perhaps wives would prefer to see adjustments to the existing programs or a completely different programming focus? With an estimated 75% of military families living off installation, do military wives believe that not living on base negatively affects their involvement in unit activities and information flow (Jowers 2014)? Or are wives preoccupied with strained finances and childcare problems to such an extent that going back to school or finding suitable and satisfactory employment seem like unattainable luxuries? Do wives feel that their agency is constrained and that they have to sacrifice pursuit of their own goals so as not to conflict with the goals and desires of their service member husbands and/or the demands of the military? If they do, then the bigger questions are do they make peace with this and if so, how?

⁴ Military family advocacy organizations, such as Blue Star Families, National Military Family Association (NMFA), and Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) are generally composed of former active duty service members, their family members, and/or others with some type of military affiliation.

Quantitative studies conducted by DoD, DoD-sponsored academic family military institutes, and military family advocacy groups occasionally feature spouse-only surveys designed to gauge wives' needs, attitudes, and satisfaction with the military lifestyle and family programming. Moreover, due to limited resources, time, and scope, efforts to interview wives at length as a complementary component to the quantitative data is rarely pursued. This study's qualitative research provides an additional layer of support to the quantitative findings by presenting testimony from enlisted military wives that sheds light on the barriers that prevent both access to and information about the DoD spousal initiatives. These in-depth interviews allowed enlisted military wives in their own words to answer, "are there factors that you feel impede your education and employment opportunities?" As the end users, wives provided valuable feedback for those in policy and decision making capacities.

In-depth interviews permitted expansion into the analysis of wives' needs, perceptions, backgrounds, experiences, and ideas. Notably, wives' perceptions are not solely limited to discussion of the MSEP and MyCAA programs or even employment and educational topics. Wives expressed their perceptions of themselves, their status, their goals, and their challenges, sometimes inflected through an awareness of race, ethnic and class positions. For some participants, society's and the military's perception of military wives acts as an impediment to their forward educational and employment progress. They are aware of discrimination from civilian employers who often show a hesitance to hire military spouses because they anticipate higher training costs and reduced productivity as

wives relocate with husbands, leaving employers forced to rehire and retrain new employees.

I sought to assemble a collection of different voices and experiences, thus I recruited a diverse pool of enlisted military wives of different ranks, races, and ethnicities. The data from their in-depth interviews, analyzed using an inductive qualitative content analysis method, revealed ways that the hierarchal nature of the military organization contributes to the classism and elitism found in the military communities. Additionally, data was used to assess the ways in which limited agency, and reminders of one's place in the military and the wider social structure can result in enlisted wives having negative perceptions of themselves, and/or despondency, which may impede their well-being and education and employment efforts. Wives' voices sharing their objectives, limitations, and experiences in the areas of education and employment can inform existing spousal assistance programs in ways to better serve the population for whom they are designed to help. The primary impediment among participants is a low level of program awareness that permeated of all ranks and branches of service. Efforts to expand program outreach and education should be extended into partnerships with local civilian communities, schools and churches specifically, in an effort to reach the estimated 75% of military families who reside off-installation. To combat levels of social, emotional, and physical isolation found in military spouses, further recommendations include military directives regarding mandatory inclusion, opt-out versus opt-in of spouses on unit list serve communication and strongly worded

command encouragement to include spouses in installation and unit activities such as welcome aboard events, social gatherings, and spouse education and employment briefs.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review required a three-pronged, detailed effort to fully flesh out previously conducted work that may be relevant to my research. First, it was important to examine previous investigations of the coping strategies/resilience data detailing the impact of frequent moves, broken kin networks, isolation, and lost employment on military wives. The second effort was to explore the protective behaviors such as self-esteem building activities, education and employment gains specifically, that mitigate certain challenges of military wives. The third research component involved a review of government and military family agencies' reports and non-DoD funded online blogs and newspapers in order to locate information concerning the effectiveness of spouse employment and/or education initiatives. Unfortunately there is no current peer-reviewed literature that I could review, which specifically examines the impact of the DoD's education and employment initiatives in addressing the needs of military wives. Deeper investigation of the areas of known challenges for military wives would assist in the research goal of shedding light on wives' overall conditions and experiences. Literature reviewed for this study will be presented in four separate sections: military organizational effects, challenges for enlisted military wives, race and class intersection, and government and military family reports.

Military Organizational Effects

To lay the proper foundation it is first necessary to provide a brief overview of the military and its relationship with service members and their spouses. It is perhaps easier to understand military wives' connection to the military organization by viewing the military through the greedy institution lenses (Coser 1974; Segal 1986). Coser's original work (1974) detailing greedy institutions and Wechsler Segal's (1986) further elaboration on the military as a greedy institution set the stage for the inevitable conflict between the military organization and its families. The military demands of its service members their complete loyalty, dedication, and subordination regardless of the effects on their families. Though cushioning the strain with an assortment of military family programs and generous benefits, ultimately the service member's family must conform to the needs of the military and the military lifestyle with its inherent, consistent challenges such as service-related separation, risk of injury or death, frequent moves, and long hours.

When military wives' relationship with the military organization is viewed through the lens of a greedy institution, it makes sense that conflicts often arise between the two as they compete for the attention and presence of the service member. A greedy institution relies on the total physical and mental commitment of its members, isolating them from the greater society and incentivizing good behavior (as seen in the military promotions and pay increases). The military organization, as a greedy institution, handles daily human needs in a bureaucratic manner, dictating service members' daily schedules, meals, jobs, hours, and location. The service members' voluntary acceptance of this servitude and total commitment comes from their desire to be part of this elite group whose ideas and ethos infer access to power and exclusivity on their membership.

As the service members transfers their loyalty and devotion to the greedy institution, they distance themselves from their relationships with friends and family (Coser 1974).

Above explains the voluntary process of service members' indoctrination into the greedy institution, but to some degree, military wives also become part of it when they accept its terms and their place within the organization. There is a reason that for decades, the military preferred single men with no attachments, bringing forth the statement, "if the (branch of service) wanted you to have a wife they would have issued you one." Greedy institutions demand exclusivity from their members and wives/children were seen as distractions that threaten the dominance of the military.

However, with the rise of the all-volunteer military, men with families became the norm and not the exception. For their wives, membership meant developing a level of understanding that they would not be the primary relationship of the service member. His loyalty and duty were first to the military and the quicker she realizes this the less painful it would be. Wives must also agree to conform to the expectations and rules put forth by the military in how they are to conduct their lives and families. Wives must either accept the military's decisions such as where to live, what type of occupation, work hours, level of safety, and separations of the service member or plot their own course. Their husbands' membership in a greedy institution causes the wives, through default, to lose their agency in exerting control over their marital, familial, and personal needs. Yet, in order for the military organization to achieve effective functionality, it must act as a greedy institution, requiring strict adherence to its requisites, in order to preserve its status quo.

What role does military wives' marital and/or military satisfaction play in the outcomes for military families and what influences wives' satisfaction? Perhaps it is the benefits gained by military wives upon marriage including free housing, subsidized childcare, and free to low-cost medical. Data illustrates the military spends considerable resources to provide programming and entitlements that benefit service members with families from higher housing allowances (BAH) to additional pay for assignments that separate families (Clever and Segal 2013; Segal and Segal 2004). The benefit disparity between married and unmarried or cohabitating service members is substantial and many, namely Hogan and Seifert (2009), contend that the generosity of the benefits heavily influence service members and their intended spouses to marry and stay married. Additionally, the benefits also serve as tools to incentivize both spouses to remain loyal and subservient to the greedy military organization. But do military wives become so accustomed to the generous family-friendly benefits that it ensures their satisfaction with their marriages and the military lifestyle? Or is wives' satisfaction based more on personal fulfillment?

In addition to providing benefits, the military often appeals to military wives' sense of patriotism and commitment to cement wives support and subservience to the greedy institution. Wives are expected to share in the patriotism and willingness to sacrifice that allows their husbands to excel as warriors and do so while managing the unpaid reproductive duties of the household and unit's family readiness efforts (Harrell 2000; Hosek et al. 2002; Kelty, Ryan, and Segal 2013; Taber 2009). Eran-Jona (2011) speaks to the influence of wives' ideological support and patriotism in contributing to

their positive satisfaction of the military and their marriages. Taber (2009) also found an emphasis on military wives' patriotism in her study of gender representation in children's books published by the Canadian military. However, unlike Eran-Jona, Taber (2009) and Winslow (2010) go further in stating that the military organization uses wives' patriotic pride and personal fulfillment as tools to maintain wives' conformance to the needs of both the military and their service member husbands. Additionally, there is often an expectation from both the military and service member husbands that wives should volunteer for unit activities. The military favors using "wives as volunteers on a base as much as possible. Such volunteerism serves two purposes: It's cheap and it cements the wife's allegiance to the service by incorporating her into its mission" (Winslow 2010).

Gendered Marital Roles

The military thrives on traditional patriarchal structures, where the compliant wife is tasked with holding the family together thus enabling the husband to be free to pursue his career. Military wives who sacrifice their career aspirations and personal well-being may indeed conform to a more traditional marriage model but what exists in family dynamics when gender roles are modern versus traditional, or one spouse's perception of gender roles is incongruent with the other's? Research indicates that modern military wives often are bound to conform to their traditional husbands' guidance (Bowen and Orthner 1983; Harrell 2000; Harrison 2006; Taber 2009). According to Cox and Demmitt (2015), husbands' establishment of rigid gendered divisions of labor in the household ensures their control of the family and protects their position of importance and respect. By strictly following this traditional gender model, military wives may not

only become dependent on their husbands, they may also feel repressed and constrained by their limited agency (Burland and Lundquist 2013; Cox and Demmitt 2015).

Absent a decision to end the marriage, a wife may feel compelled to comply with decisions that may not be her choice (Hochschild 1989) and this can have short and long term negative consequences for her economic and personal well-being. Adverse effects on military wives who choose to exert agency that contravenes the husband's PCS order often include marital separation or divorce and the associated financial, social, and emotional challenges that accompany the possible interruption or disintegration of the family unit. For those wives that do choose to comply, are there varying levels of acceptance to their reduced agency and if so, how are these demonstrated?

One measurement of military wives' level of acceptance of their limited agency and the military lifestyle is represented in data gauging their satisfaction with both their marriage and the military organization. This data has traditionally been used to connect spouses' satisfaction to the likelihood of their service members' reenlistments (Karney and Crown 2007; Karney et al. 2012; Wood 1991). In its simplest terms, this data could be called, "A Happy Wife is a Happy Life," meaning higher levels of satisfaction lead to higher reenlistment rates for the military. For certain service members and their families, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, the meritocracy, stability, and benefits offered by the military provides socio-economic opportunities that are often hard to find in civilian society (Burland and Lundquist 2013; Clever and Segal 2013; Kelty et al. 2013; Lutz 2013; Teachman 2009).

Additionally, minority military families, specifically those of African-American servicemen, continue to reap the benefits of service into their civilian lives after their retirement from service. For example, emotional stability can be seen as many of these families experience long-term marriages that far surpass the length of their civilian cohorts' unions (Teachman 2009). Moreover, these families are financially better-positioned than many of their non-military service civilian cohorts due to receipt of retirement pay, free or reduced healthcare for life, along with the strong likelihood they have secured a high-paid, high-skilled post-retirement position (Bennett and McDonald 2013; Kleykamp 2013). Military wives that become military retirees' wives also benefit in a shared pride of service, considering themselves as having served alongside their husbands (Burland and Lundquist 2013). In many ways the military can provide the military wife with a happy life.

However, there are instances where the military organization and lifestyle act as constraints to wives' agency leading to "an unhappy wife is an unhappy life." The personal and professional life trajectories of military spouses are often interrupted, stymied, or redirected due to the fact that "their life courses are partially dictated by the needs and demands of the military" (Kleykamp 2013:157). Burland and Lundquist (2013) point out many of the shortcomings that disadvantage military wives including a system of tradeoffs that may ultimately disaffect military families. In exchange for the stability, career, money, and benefits, service members sacrifice their safety, work-family balance, and in many cases, their overall well-being. Military wives, linked to their

service member husbands, are thus consequently impacted by the decisions and outcomes of their husbands and the military organization.

Burland and Lundquist (2013) expand their argument to include the demands and scrutiny placed on military families to conform to a military-approved dictated model of family life that, if not strictly followed, could result in quick intervention by military family crisis response personnel or complete removal from service. This family-oriented model includes the military's expectation that women (wives) continue to be in charge of childcare and their careers are secondary (Kelty et al. 2013). This may lead to wives' insistence that her husband separate from service before retirement and follow instead one of the non-military career trajectories, either attending college or joining the civilian workforce (Bennett and McDonald 2013).

There are other concerns expressed by Burland and Lundquist (2013) that cover military families after the service member has retired from active duty. Those retirement benefits that serve as financial security for the former service member's family actually have many strings attached that continue to tie the family to the military, stymying a successful integration into civilian society. Also of concern are the former active duty military wives who are especially at risk finding themselves at a new post-active duty life stage, middle-aged and lacking marketable skills to join the workforce. As Kleykamp (2013) notes, the generous family benefits offered by the military such as free housing and medical often serves as a disincentive to military wives in seeking productive employment. Along these lines Hosek (2002) adds that military wives may have a certain "taste" for work that differs from their civilian cohorts in that they may view

working outside the home as simply a means to make ends meet versus the pursuit of an occupation or professional career.

It should be noted that there is a tension in the data between the degrees of wives' influence on their husbands, illustrated by the decision to reenlist being a family decision, and previously mentioned traditional gender role perspectives existing in many military families where the service member husband solely makes all of the major decisions. Gill and Haurin (1998) investigated the traditional model of military marriage between an active duty male service member and a civilian wife and what dynamics are at work between the spouses when it comes to the service member remaining in the military or separating. What is interesting to this research is that the study focuses on the migratory nature of the military lifestyle as the main source of (dis)satisfaction between military couples. Findings contradicted previous civilian couples' research suggesting that career decisions are made jointly with both spouses working together to determine the family's ultimate total benefit. Instead, the traditional gendered structure of many military couples dictate that it is the "husband's level of satisfaction with the family's present work-life station matters more than the wives' level of satisfaction and a (military) husband gives less weight to his wife's potential earnings if the wife has a low attachment to the labor force" (Gill and Haurin 1998:264). The term "low attachment" can refer to a number of possibilities for wives including underemployment, reproductive labor status, or what economists cite as military wives' "lower reservation wage" also known as wives' willingness to accept lower than average wages in order to secure productive work (Bennett and McDonald 2013:157).

Challenges for Enlisted Military Wives

There are many challenges encountered by enlisted military wives, however, for the purpose of this research I will focus specifically on PCS moves, education, employment, and resilience. Each of these has far-reaching effects for wives in a multitude of areas including their over-all well-being. Before moving to these categories I will first review the literature on marriage and parenthood.

Military Marriage Research

Data is plentiful that demonstrates the high occurrence of marriage and parenthood for service members. According to DoD's 2013 Military Demographics report, over 55% of active duty service members are married and over 42% have dependent children (under age 21). Clever and Segal (2013) illustrate this point with the junior enlisted (E1-E5) active duty group where 36% of men and 37% of women are married compared to 24% of men and 33% of women in the civilian cohort of similar ages and earnings. Parenthood also comes early to the most junior ranks as illustrated by DoD's figure that of those service members who had their first child in 2013, over 50% were ages 20-25 years old (DoD 2013).

There are gender and race differences in the marriage data of active duty service members from both the enlisted and officer ranks. For example, service women are less likely than male service men to be married but for those active duty women who are married, they are over two times more likely to be in a dual military⁵ marriage than their male peers (Clever and Segal 2013; Hosek and Wadsworth 2013). Clever and Segal (2013) found that active duty military men (all races) are more likely to have dependent

⁵ Dual military marriage refers to a marriage between two active duty service members.

children than military service women adding that this is due to military women leaving the service due to motherhood. In an interesting twist that speaks to both race and gender, the authors found that 47.3% of African-American female service members have children compared to 30.4% of Caucasian female service women, with this significant difference perhaps related to Black women having longer service retention than White women (Clever and Segal 2013:23).

Hogan and Seifert (2010) take a closer look at the military marriage phenomenon finding that those who had served at least two years active military duty were significantly more likely (by three times) to be married than those who had never served. When the figures were recalculated to reflect high school graduates only (enlisted), the odds of active duty personnel being or having been married were similar to the previous findings from Zax and Flueck (2003) and Cadigan (2000). Those with bachelors' degrees, typically officers, were 15 percentage points higher than their civilian counterparts of similar education level to be married or had been married.

PCS Moves

Trailing Spouse Permanent Change of Station (PCS)/Relocation is one of the main issues investigated in research of the challenges of being a military wife. To offer a comparison to the US civilian population, military families move 14% more often and further away than civilian families (DoD 2013) and “nearly all experience a move outside the continental United States” (Clever and Segal 2013:26). Perhaps a better illustration of how impactful frequent moves can be on military families is found in the DoD Education Authority's figure that “on average, military children attend six to nine different school systems from kindergarten to twelfth grade” (Lange 2015). Thus,

recommended policy improvements in formal support networks, both at service branch and installation level, outreach, and spouse specific employment initiatives are cited as mitigations of the effects of PCS moves on military wives (Blakely et al. 2012; Harrell et al. 2004; Werber Castaneda and Harrell 2008; Segal and Segal 2004; Wood 1991).

For the service member, military service is viewed in certain life course models as a “bridging” event, described as a step after high school where they gain the work skills to either continue a successful career in the military or transition to college or civilian employment (Bennett and McDonald 2013). Joining the military is seen as a forward trajectory event that builds human and social capital, which positively affects future socio-economic outcomes for those that choose to enlist. Yet the outcome is often very different for service members’ civilian wives.

From a life course perspective, military wives are referred to as having “linked lives” with their service member husbands whose careers, with its associated moves, often negatively affect the wives’ employment trajectories, resulting in wives’ “limited career mobility, lower wages, and dampened aspirations” (Kleykamp 2013:144). The effects of this can be both short and long term with challenges such as unexplained employment gaps on resumes to meager, if any, individual work-related retirement savings. Gleiman and Swearingen (2012) utilize Schlossberg’s transition theory (1984) in presenting PCS moves as “chronic hassle transitions characterized by their continuous and pervasive presence” that may cause negative effects to seep into many areas of the lives military wives (2012: 80).

An additional lens through which to view the impact of frequent moves is how gender role perspectives affect family decisions in military families. In many military families, traditional gender roles dictate that wives follow their husbands (Cooke and Speirs 2005; Patterson and McCubbin 1984; Payne, Warner, and Little 1992) who may or may not be the breadwinner in the family (Kroska 2008). Cooke and Speirs' (2005) use of the term "tied migrant" to describe these trailing spouses is interesting; implying that an additional layer of constraint may be found in the home as constructed through established gender roles. Cooney, Segal, and DeAngelis (2011) expand on the "tied migrant" or "tied mover" concepts by stating that civilian military wives follow their husbands, often to the detriment of their own careers and well-being, in order to maintain joint family unit. Going further, the authors add that military wives then become "tied stayers" meaning they cannot move on to pursue better employment or education opportunities because to do so would disrupt their established household. Cooney et al. speak to the many military wives in productive work who are employed because they have chosen to be job-oriented versus career-oriented, often leaving behind their experience and training to secure an underemployed, but paying, position.

Military Wives' Resilience and Coping Strategies

A wide body of literature exists on military wives and their coping strategies including protective behaviors and personal attributes (Blakely et al. 2012; Cooke and Speirs 2005; Patterson and McCubbin 1984; Schachman and Lindsay 2013; Westhuis et al. 2006). The majority of these studies focus on the extreme stress and strain of wives facing long-term deployment of their husbands. Though this area is rich with data, this

study has excluded wives whose husbands are deployed, meaning transferred away from their duty stations for typically 3-15 months, in order to focus on the everyday challenges experienced by the majority of active duty military wives.

A significant amount of literature has identified a link between resiliency and strategies to combat everyday challenges for military wives such as utilizing formal and informal support networks, contributing financially to the household, and furthering one's education, that indicate the strength and efforts in establishing wives' coping strategies (Blakely et al. 2012; Cooke and Speirs 2005; Kroska 2008; Patterson and McCubbin 1984; Schachman and Lindsay 2013; Westhuis et al. 2006). While not focusing on wives' earnings or employment specifically, Patterson and McCubbin link self-esteem and self-reliance to increased success in coping with the psychological strain of separation and family responsibilities. Spouses with these personal attributes were more likely to seek assistance from formal support networks, develop informal support networks (friends, unit cohorts), and get medical assistance for coping if necessary.

Schachman and Lindsay (2013) speak from a nursing perspective on the personal attributes and protective factors that may assist military wives in avoiding postpartum depression (PPD) or other challenges for new mothers.⁶ Their findings indicated that over half of the participants in this US-based study needed immediate interventional measures for PPD and those wives who were in the "non-distress" category were likely to be older, more educated, better connected to support networks, and in general, more

⁶ Dual military couples refers to marriages where both husband and wife are active duty service members.

accustomed to the military lifestyle. They also had more self-esteem and were more self-reliant than the “distressed” wives. Schachman and Lindsay (2013) suggest that further research and policy improvements, such as testing new mothers for PPD as standard operating procedure (SOP), would positively impact the high risk population of military mothers.

Military Wife Employment and Earnings Constraints

Further issues constraining military wives are the challenges presented not only relocation but by the military lifestyle itself. With frequent, non-deployment separations, spouses’ long hours, and their own limited education and spotty employment history, along with their primary responsibility for childcare and household duties, enlisted military wives often face an uphill battle in finding flexible, suitable employment (MOAA 2014). These constraints impact enlisted military wives on many levels including the tangible, lack of enough money in the household, to the intangible such as loss of identity and self-esteem due to the inadequacy of their financial contribution or inability to reach their potentiality.

The earnings’ component of the data indicates that worth, self-esteem, and independence are established in wives by their being able to contribute financially to their households (Hosek and Wadsworth 2013; Kroska 2008). Additionally, Wood (1991) found a correlation between spousal military satisfaction and the reenlistment of the service member, soldiers (Army) in her research. Her findings indicated that the most important attribute to spousal military satisfaction is being employed which leads to

positive spousal well-being, a good sense of self, and self-esteem.⁷ Werber Castaneda and Harrell's (2008) mixed methods research provides an excellent overview of just how important, both emotionally and financially, paid employment is to military spouses. Many spouses reported their motivation to work as a means to help make ends meet in their households while others sought personal fulfillment through work.

However, wives' earnings are often devalued by both husband and wife due to their gender role perspectives. It should be noted that this may occur when wives make more or less money than husbands. Kroska's civilian study does have implications into the military family arena with service members often considering their wives' earnings as "pin money" or "gravy" thus devaluing the contribution (2008). The extent to which this is done by men to preserve their real or perceived position as breadwinner cannot fully be determined. Yet, wives can also be complicit in supporting their husband's gender-enforced position as the breadwinner by devaluing their own earnings (Kroska 2008). Again, Kroska studies civilian heterosexual couples yet this behavior may also be seen in military families where both military wives and their service member husbands may view her earnings from productive labor as simply a way to make household ends meet and not as an expression of her occupational ambition or quality of life enhancing career pursuits. This attitude can reflect how enforced traditional gender roles may further impede military wives' well-being, self-esteem, and sense of self.

⁷ Wood's findings are also supported by Eran-Jona (2011) who found in her research of marriage among male Israeli soldiers and their civilian wives that wives' positive employment status led to an increase of military satisfaction for the Israeli military wives.

The literature on military wives' earnings is consistent in its findings that military spouses are less likely to be employed and when working, they work fewer hours and are paid less for those hours than their civilian cohorts of similar experience and education (Cooney, Segal, and DeAngelis 2011; DoD 2013; Gill and Haurin 1998; Hosek and Wadsworth 2013; Hosek et al. 2002). Findings also support that military wives are less likely than civilian wives to have worked in the past year and less likely to work fulltime (Hosek et al. 2002) and for the junior enlisted wives (E1-E5) specifically, the likelihood of being in productive work decreases significantly if the woman is a parent (Bureika et al. 1999). For this group, being married and a parent is likely as reflected in DoD military family demographic data where over half of all active duty service members are married and have children (DoD 2012, 2013). Research has also found that military couples marry and have children significantly earlier than their civilian cohorts (Clever and Segal 2013; Harrell et al. 2004). In addition to the demands of motherhood, hypotheses for why military wives work less include PCS moves that cause employment disruption, negative employer perceptions of wives' as transient, and labor oversupply of military wives seeking full-time employment in densely populated military communities (Bureika et al. 1999; Cooke and Speirs 2005; Cooney et al. 2011; Hosek et al. 2002; Hosek and Wadsworth 2013).

The hypotheses mentioned above also serve as the same rationale as to why military wives earn less than their civilian counterparts. However, these assertions are joined by wives asserting their agency to a certain degree or perhaps simply accepting their limitations. For example, Cooney et al. (2011) and Hosek et al. (2002) each discuss

wives' acceptance of positions far below their education and experience in both duties and wages out of a sense of desperation to find any kind of paying job. Figures of the pay difference between military spouses and their civilian cohorts vary by study, thus it might be safest to cite DoD's own figure of a 25% pay gap between the groups (DoD 2013).⁸

Race and Class Intersection

When investigating enlisted military wives' employment and earnings, a clearer picture emerges of how these areas are impacted by race and class, or perhaps more accurately, the intersection of race and class.

Race and the Military Wife

There is good data mainly from Bureika et al. (1999) and Cooney et al. (2011) that delves further in the discussion of military spouse earnings by separating and analyzing data by gender and race, with Bureika et al. researching enlisted military spouses from E1-E5, part of the population covered in this research study. Both groups of authors offer a wealth of information regarding the employment and earnings of military spouses, however, because of the dated nature of the data, it should be viewed more as an historical overview. Bureika et al. (1999) utilized data from 1997 DoD Survey of Enlisted Spouses and Cooney et al. (2011) performed secondary data analysis on a 1992 data set from the DoD Survey of Officers and Enlisted Personnel and their

⁸ The 25% figure refers to "military spouses" which reflects DoD's inclusion of both female (95%) and male (5%) civilian married spouses of service members. Post FY2013 DoD reports with "military spouse" numbers will begin to include same-sex married partners and all spouse counts will be aggregated by gender without differentiating between heterosexual or same-sex couples.

Spouses. Much has changed in the military community and society-at-large over the past twenty years that shifts the focus from analyzing the exact numbers in the findings to paying closer attention to the racial and gender related earning trends within.

Speaking specifically of the junior enlisted wives, Bureika et al.'s (1999) study is interesting on several different levels in addition to providing hard numbers on spouse employment by race. Attitudinal information sheds light, by race, on what motivates junior enlisted spouses to work. The top two most often cited reason for wives (all races) to work was "need money for basic family expenses" and "save for the future", however, there is a significant difference when it comes to what wives chose as their third most important reason to work. Black wives overwhelmingly chose "desire a career" and Hispanic wives "get experience", while Asian and White wives primarily chose "extra money to use now" as their third choice option. In fact, African-American wives overwhelmingly chose "desiring a career, gaining independence, and enjoying work" as major motivations of working (Bureika 1999:50). This drive to work is reflected in Black wives being the largest segment from the over 300,000 respondents who reported working for pay in the last twelve months.

This data agrees with Cooney et al. (2011) in the likelihood of African-American military wives to be employed, however, Bureika et al. offers an additional glimpse into the likelihood of working based on educational attainment. Wives with four-year degrees were significantly more likely to be working than wives with less than a high school diploma. There is also one figure that appears to reflect the underemployment and less hours worked for less pay discussed earlier. Of the working spouses (all races) in

Bureika et al.'s survey only 7% made over \$10,000 for the year (1996) with median earnings for Black women at \$10,000⁹, White women \$9,000, and Hispanic women \$8000. When the (1996) earnings of junior enlisted wives¹⁰ were compared with their civilian cohorts¹¹, E1-E3 wives' incomes were in line with their civilian peers while E4-E5 wives earned less than half of similar aged civilian working women.

Cooney et al. (2011) investigates the effects, by race and class (officer and enlisted), of PCS moves on military spouses' employment and earnings. The findings, similar to Bureika et al. (1999) offer more than simple hard numbers, instead providing harder-to-measure attitudes such as spouses' satisfaction with their job opportunities. Black spouses were more likely (42%) than White spouses to be satisfied and junior spouses (all races) were more likely to be dissatisfied with their job options. Additionally, junior enlisted and senior non-commissioned officers (senior enlisted) spouses were more likely to be dissatisfied than senior officer wives. But there is more to this data that brings forward the effects of moving and how much time spent between moves affects employment status. For example, Cooney et al. (2011) determined that more PCS moves increases the likelihood that enlisted spouses would find employment while the opposite is true for officer spouses. The speculation is that officer wives are more likely to hold four-year degrees which limit the job options and lengthen the

⁹ For comparison, \$10,000 (1996) is \$15, 297 (2015) when adjusted for inflation. Calculated using in inflation tool dollartimes.com

¹⁰ Bureika et al. survey demographic, average age of junior enlisted wives E1-E3 age 22, E4 age 24, and E5 age 29.

¹¹ According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census, in 1996 the annual average wage for 18-24 year old women was \$9,438 and \$20, 637 for 24-34 year old women.

amount of time it takes to find a suitable job. White spouses stationed OCONUS experienced a 2.7% increase per year in the likelihood that they will become dissatisfied while African-American and Asian spouses in OCONUS locations showed no significant increase in dissatisfaction. The data demonstrates that many minority spouses thrive during OCONUS assignments, finding suitable, steady employment and increased earnings with Asian wives earning 15.4% more per move and Black wives earning 28.4% more with each move (Cooney et al. 2011)¹². Longer stays at locations also significantly benefitted minority spouses reflected in their increased satisfaction numbers.

Cooney et al. (2011) also found that Black spouses were the most likely to be working and Black military wives, on the whole, earned 24.9% more than White wives. For male spouse study participants (5% of total) there was no indication that fatherhood significantly affected their employment, however, motherhood demonstrated a huge effect on military wives' employment. For example, for White military wives each child reduced the likelihood of employment by 14.3%, and that number increases to 53.7% if the child is under age six. For Black military wives, there was no significant effect of having children on their employment, except in cases where the child was very young which led to only a 25.1% reduced likelihood in employment. These findings may offer an interesting look into how one's culture continues to influence military wives. For example, Black women have traditionally worked with or without children, and this, it appears, is no different for the African-American military wife.

¹² In Cooney et al.'s study, the earnings of White military wives fell 2.4% with each move.

The scholarly work of Jay Teachman contributes heavily to the body of research on military marriage and divorce and how these intersect with race and gender. Teachman's findings support previously mentioned findings that military service members marry at greater rates than their civilian cohorts, attributing this to personal attributes such as being more "traditional" than civilians as well as the socio-economic benefits awarded by the military to married military families (Clever and Segal 2013; Hosek 2002, 2013; Segal and Segal 2004; Teachman 2007, 2009; Teachman and Tedrow 2008). However, Teachman goes further than other studies by including race in his investigation of military marriage and divorce. He found that African-American service members marry at extraordinary rates compared to their civilian cohorts and these military marriages far outlasted the civilian length of marriage of African-American men (Teachman 2009). The author's research concurs with findings discussed in earlier sections that minorities, specifically Blacks, view the military as offering more of a race-neutral, meritocratic, opportunity-filled, inclusive environment with less discrimination than civilian society (Bennett and McDonald 2013; Kelty et al. 2013; Lutz 2013; Segal and Segal 2004) fostering balanced, well-adjusted, socio-economically successful military families of color. Teachman asserts that it is this positive environment with its steady pay, well-paved promotion path, and benefits that serves as a stabilizing factor for military marriages, resulting in long-lasting marriages especially for African-Americans (Teachman 2007, 2008).

Class and the Military

"If education is an indicator of social class, there is a class difference between enlisted personnel and officers" (Segal and Segal 2004:8). It is education that creates the

gulf between the two groups with the majority of officers entering the military with bachelors' degrees while the majority of enlisted troops enter with high school diplomas. There is no one-size-fits-all categorization but as Segal and Segal (2004) stated, the easiest way to imagine the difference between enlisted and officers is to compare blue collar versus white collar civilian classifications. This class distinction is ingrained into military culture but service members' socio-economic class and its effects have been long at work even before they join the military.

There are several misperceptions regarding what type of person joins the military with many civilians assuming enlisted personnel consists of members from the lowest socio-economic class (Keltly et al. 2013). Data from the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness (2007) reflects an ongoing trend that those from the lowest and the highest household median incomes, \$34,000 and \$65,000 respectively, are unrepresented today's active duty military. The days of "enlist or go to prison" or the military is the last resort that gratefully accepts everyone even high school dropouts are long gone. Today's military can be picky insisting its enlisted personnel have at least a high school diploma, test well on the Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT), have clean criminal, drug, and mental health histories, as well as the wherewithal and physical stamina to be molded into a good soldier, marine, airmen, or sailor. According to data, those that join the enlisted ranks are overwhelmingly white men from middle to working class households with the South dominating as the region of birth for most recruits (Lutz 2008). Minority participation numbers indicate Blacks are overrepresented in the military when compared with the age (17-35)/race cohort in civilian society while Asians

and Hispanics are underrepresented (Lutz 2013). However, as Clever and Segal (2013) point out, Hispanics may appear underrepresented when compared to their civilian cohort, but this number may be heavily influenced by military eligibility requirements namely English fluency and proper immigration status.

The strict qualifications to enter the military can bar entry for many low income, poorly educated minorities for whom service would allow access to opportunities unavailable to them in civilian society (Bennett and McDonald 2013; Clever and Segal 2013; Lutz 2013). Basics such as food, housing, and medical care, especially when combined with a decent wage and education benefits serve as powerful motivators for those who have limited options after high school. For those minorities from disadvantaged backgrounds who do make it into the military, their life trajectories can be forever changed with the military being the “turning point” redirecting their original path to poverty to one of upward mobility (Bennett and McDonald 2013). For those that fulfill their contracts and separate from the service before retirement, many are able to choose new life courses by utilizing their new skills and educational benefits.

How the social class of recruits is related to military wives is complex if one were to make the assumption that there is a strong likelihood that one marries in their own socio-economic class. However, there is no data on the socio-economic backgrounds of military wives and to assume they are of similar backgrounds is unsupported by data. Military wives are not a homogenous group (Cooney et al. 2011; Hosek 2002) and come from a variety of backgrounds in regards to education, class, and upbringing. Yet, once they marry into the military a rigid form of class distinction

informs and influences the challenges, perceptions, and outcomes of enlisted military wives. Due to the hierarchal nature of the military organization, a service member's status as enlisted or officer helps to determine class position. This class structure often filters into the civilian military wife community where the phrase, "you don't wear your husband's rank" is often said but seldom heard. Wives, especially those married to higher ranking service members, are told on one hand, they do not have a rank, but on the other hand, because of their husband's rank they are expected to perform certain duties in the unit. Greater expectations are attached to senior officer wives (Harrell 2000) who may feel they have a full-time unpaid job participating in military related endeavors preventing them from seeking full-time productive employment. In most cases, fewer demands are made of senior enlisted wives who are more likely to be employed full-time in productive labor due to financial need (Clever and Segal 2013; Hosek and Wadsworth 2013; Segal and Segal 2004). For example, unit family readiness groups are often top-heavy led by the commanding officer's wife and an assortment of higher-level officer and senior enlisted wives leaving junior enlisted spouses underrepresented in the group. Here it should be noted that joining the group is not restricted; all wives are encouraged to join, but wives, especially junior wives, are often held back by their perceptions of themselves and what they believe are senior wives' perceptions of them.

Financial need, noted as the main motivator for enlisted wives seeking full-time productive employment, deserves a closer look when discussing class distinctions between officers and enlisted personnel. In short, there is a huge pay differential between

the groups where officers are paid more than warrant officers¹³ who are paid more than enlisted troops. This hierarchal structure is complemented by a multiplier of years in service that dictates pay. For example, according to the Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS) 2014 pay scale, an E1¹⁴ with less than two years of service is paid \$1,531.50 a month or \$18,378.00 per year before taxes. If the E1 has a family they may fall below the poverty line qualifying for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) and Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP) and other government assistance. According to Hosek (2013) the number of military families on food stamps is small, less than 5000 families in 2012 who usually consist of a low ranking service member with several children and unemployed spouse. On the other end of the spectrum, an E9, the highest level of enlisted rank usually awarded near twenty years of service, earns \$5411.10 per month or \$64,993.20 before taxes and allowances (e.g. BAH). Comparing an officer with twenty years of service, typically a Colonel O-6 to the E9, the officer earns \$9,180.30 per month or \$110,163.60 annually before taxes and allowances (e.g. BAH). This pay gap illustration may support the argument that enlisted wives, especially those from the lower ranks, may feel further constrained by obstacles such as financial shortfalls and unaffordable childcare that consequently limit wives' education and/or employment pursuits.

¹³ Warrant officers (W1-W5) are a separate category ranked higher than enlisted personnel but below commissioned officers. Warrant officers begin as enlisted personnel that are deemed to be experts in their field and granted entry into warrant officer corps.

¹⁴ Titles of ranks for enlisted (E1-E9) and officer (O1-O10) vary by branch.

Negative perceptions of military wives are found within the military community as Margaret Harrell uncovered in her research where she discovered a stereotype of junior enlisted spouses as “young and immature big-haired, trailer park babes with too many children who do not know how to manage their money. This stereotype is widely held by the military community at large, including other junior enlisted personnel and spouses, who often speak disparagingly of their cohorts” (Harrell 2000:12). It is interesting to examine this stereotype under a racial lens because it appears to only point to White wives with the descriptions of “big-hair” and being from a trailer park, two slurs that are not usually attached to minorities. Is this due to the fact that Whites make up the majority of military spouses at over 60% and minority wives are somehow spared from the derision? A review of online military community related blog threads such as Reddit and anecdotal evidence points to all races/ethnicities of wives are targets of race-based and gender-based slurs. “Hood rat,” “tramp,” and “ho” are words that are used on the message boards to describe military wives, yet these terms are used in the general population and are not exclusive to only military circles. I would also argue that these terms, though originally intended as racial/ethnic pejoratives of Black women, have crossed into use across all races/ethnicities. Some might contend that these slurs solely communicate promiscuous female behavior or tendencies, however, when viewed through a class lens these expressions take on a deeper meaning. If slurs target classes (Anderson and Lepore 2011), perhaps terms such as “ho” and “tramp” are descriptors indicating one’s belonging to a lower socio-economic class? This would lend itself to the

elitist negative perceptions of enlisted wives found in Harrell's research (2000) as well as more modern slurs of military wives found in this study.

Military specific examples of negative military wife stereotypes are expressed in the often used synonymous terms, *dependapotamus* and *dependasaurus*, which are, to paraphrase the definitions from Urban Dictionary, lazy, slovenly, military wives who are stay-at-home moms prone to sitting on the couch, gossiping with their friends, spending their long-suffering husbands' pay, and continuing to produce children to further cement their marital position as it becomes "cheaper to keep her." Besides being offensive, these terms point to a devaluing of military wives that may negatively influence wives' well-being and create damaging perceptions that may impact wives' education and employment aspirations. Additionally, these terms are primarily used to describe enlisted wives, which further illustrates the perceived gulf in class, education, fitness, and desirability between officer and enlisted wives (Harrell 2000). These slurs degrade enlisted military wives and reassert the firmly divided social-economic class structure of the military community.

Additional Non-Peer Reviewed Literature and Government Reports

An additional review of government, government sponsored organizations, and military family agencies' reports provide a behind-the-scenes glimpse into the historical background that led to establishment of the MyCAA and MSEP programs. Stamilio, Assistant Secretary of the Army, Soldier and Family Quality of life programs (2013), delivers an overview of the current demographics (all branches) of military wives' population that I cited earlier in the background chapter. The demographics are in line with other literature on the topic but the main takeaway are the 2011 numbers, which

according to DoD's own figures, document an outlay of 28 million dollars in FY2011 to fund MyCAA for 34,040 Army military spouses and from 29 Jun 2011–3 Oct 2011 there were 54,532 jobs posted on the MSEP portal with 5669 spouses hired by MSEP partners¹⁵.

The National Military Family Organization (2007) offers a variety of data from their spouse education survey of almost 8000 spouses along with recommendations from participants and the organization, namely request for more government-sponsored childcare for military families and spouse employment training and educational assistance programs. Survey findings included 37% of participants responded that being a military spouse affected their education pursuits and status, with 25% reporting negative results such as temporary and long-term education delays or giving up on their career goals entirely. RAND Corporation's DoD-funded reports from 2004 (Harrell et al.) and 2005 (Harrell and Castaneda), both offer similar snapshots in the area of spouse employment finding that over 2/3 of participants (1102 total sample) responded that being a military spouse negatively affected their employment status and work opportunities. More recent studies from MOAA (2014) and Blue Star Families (2013) reflect current spouse perceptions, desires, and outlooks that demonstrate spouses' continuing strong commitment to improving their education and employment situations. Unemployment, underemployment, poor pay, lack of childcare, financial constraints, and

¹⁵ Figures are unverifiable and sources are not cited for these figures in Stamilio's presentation.

husband's demanding schedule continue to dominate as the primary obstacles for military wives as drawn from both old and new survey data.

Improving military spouse educational and employment opportunities has been championed by both the President Obama and the First Lady, with their message being put forward in a January 2011 brief detailing the results of a federal government-wide review in how synergies can be found amongst agencies to increase well-being and better support military families. Participation across the federal government was wide-ranging including Departments of Defense, Homeland Security, Education, Agriculture, and Treasury amongst others. The offices of the First Lady and Dr. Jill Biden in collaboration with the US Interagency Policy Committee devised four key areas of military family foci: psychological health, child development and education, career opportunities for military spouses, and childcare resources. In context of this project, action items to create career opportunities for military spouses include some that are fairly vague and lacking tangible measurement metrics. For example, the Office of Personnel and Management vowed to continue "to promote, educate, and assess Federal employment mechanisms for improving hiring trends for military spouses" (2011:16); the Departments of Labor and Commerce vowed to "educate corporate America on the benefits of hiring...more military spouses" (2011:17). However, there are other initiatives that have been enacted such as the agreement between the Departments of Labor, Veterans Affairs, and DoD to rework the Transition Assistance Program¹⁶ for

¹⁶ Transition Assistance Program is approximately a 2.5 day classroom-based training course required for all separating active duty military members to ease the transition into

active duty service members separating from service to include sections and employment assistance information specifically for military spouses who are also transitioning out of their military affiliation through the end of their spouses' service.

Additional progress has been made by other government agencies, notably in successful partnerships, as featured in the joint US Departments of Treasury and Defense report (2012), which detailed the successful joining of forces at the national and state level to ease the re-licensing path for military spouses¹⁷. This effort affords those spouses with teaching, nursing, and other occupational licenses, who relocate to a different state per their spouses' new military orders, varying degrees of relief from license reciprocity to year(s)-long transfer extensions. Many states, especially those with large military populations, have worked together to mitigate the costly and time-consuming licensing process allowing spouses to quickly and affordably resume their careers after moving.

The final report reviewed is perhaps the most impactful and what originally piqued my curiosity about these programs. The Government Accountability Office (GAO) was required by Congress to perform an investigation (final report published December 13, 2012) into military spouse employment programs as part of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) of 2012. It should be noted that I found

civilian life by providing résumé writing, job-search techniques, benefits' information, etc.

¹⁷ A deeper investigation of the level of need for interstate transference of military spouse occupational licensure was included as a commitment by Departments of Treasury and Defense in the "Strengthening Our Military Families" White House directed government-wide initiative (2011).

shortcomings in the GAO study itself namely the lack of military spouse input and the overreliance on testimony from the service branches' spouse employment program support staff interviews.

Yet even with this limited data, GAO researchers found these programs lacked both uniformity and collaboration among the branches and any established metrics to properly measure program performance and effectiveness. According to GAO, the reported participation numbers were unreliable due to no established data keeping standard operating procedures. GAO recommended new collaborative, uniformed efforts of data keeping and the establishment of a uniform set of metrics to measure performance. As of July 2015, GAO's open recommendations report (found in appendix B) lists the two recommendations remain open (incomplete).¹⁸

By accessing this collection of varied literature I gained deeper insight into the demands and demographics of the military organization and its complex relationship to military families, specifically civilian enlisted military wives. Though not a homogeneous group, wives do share many of the same military lifestyle challenges that often affect many areas of their lives including their education and employment outcomes. Wives' positive outcomes can be reflected in their high levels of financial and emotional well-being as well as in their having better coping skills and family readiness. Conversely, negative outcomes may decrease wives' satisfaction with the military, their marriages, and

¹⁸ GAO Open Recommendations Link Report GAO-13-60

¹⁸ Outreach efforts to GAO's listed report contact seeking more information on the open recommendations and communication timelines received a response June 30, 2015 stating that there may be more up to date information. However, they would have to check and get back to me. As of July 25, 2015 no follow up answer has been received.

themselves. Developing a better understanding of military wives' complicated dynamics, varied roles, and conflicting priorities allowed for a broadened awareness in approaching this study's research.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this project was to not only explore enlisted military wives' perceptions of their education and employment, but also to investigate military wives' perceptions of themselves, their perceived status, goals, and challenges. Additionally, in examining wives' perceptions of themselves, they may or may not be affected by how they are identified by others in both the civilian and military communities. For instance, a civilian employer may be biased against hiring military spouses because they believe this group requires work-hour and attendance flexibility to suit their service members' schedule or deployment as well as spouses' frequent moves will result in the employers' incurrence of additional training and hiring costs. In order to capture the perceptions of enlisted military wives, a qualitative research design was utilized consisting of convenience sampling and semi-structure interviews followed by transcription, coding, and analysis.

Project Approval

Both the purpose of this qualitative descriptive study and the research design were summarized into a proposal that, once approved by committee members, was submitted to the George Mason University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for final approval. The IRB process is quite extensive requiring a detailed methodological proposal including interview questions, sampling technique, and recruitment email text and phone script. Additional documents such as a separate audio recording attachment, customized

consent form, and Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) certification were also required to complete the IRB application. The IRB process is completely online (IRBnet.org) thus all documents are electronically submitted and the primary investigator must also give her approval before the IRB review can begin. My experience with the IRB was positive in their timely review, requesting only minor changes primarily to the consent form, and final approval.

Participant Recruitment

Purposive, convenience, and quota sampling methods were used to recruit qualified participants for the project's in-depth interviews. Participant qualification was based on a strict set of requirements including:

- a) Must be heterosexual female non-veteran civilian wife of an enlisted, active duty serviceman;
- b) Their service member spouse must not be deployed at the time of the interview;
- c) Must be located in the mid-Atlantic region;
- d) Must satisfy branch, rank, and when possible, race prerequisites.

The branches of service prerequisite included only those operated by DoD: Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps. The original intention behind recruiting from all four branches was to develop a better level of understanding of how wives from the different branches received their information on spousal assistance programming, recognizing that each branch manages its own resources including family programs' staffing, marketing, and outreach. Considering the small sample size of this study, any information gained in this area would serve only as a complement to the primary findings and perhaps serve as a blueprint for future research conducted with a larger sample. With this in mind, I did continue to pursue recruiting wives from different branches simply to

inform this study of how wives who were familiar with the MyCAA and MSEP gained their information. Some avenues for learning about the programs include new spouse orientation programs such as the Navy's COMPASS or the Marine Corps' Lifestyle, Insights, Networking, Knowledge, and Skills (LINKS) initiatives. Was there a consistent delivery method that could be established amongst this small group that might provide insight for a larger study?

The rank prerequisite is one wife per enlisted rank category, E1-E3, E4-E6, and E7-E9 thus three wives per branch. Coverage of all enlisted ranks was important for several reasons including the wide gap in earnings and allowances between ranks that may affect the education and employment resources and opportunities for enlisted military wives. Additionally, not all ranks of spouses are eligible to use the DoD spousal assistance programs as illustrated by the MyCAA, which is only available to those spouses of E5 service members and below.

Regarding race, in a larger study, the ideal sample would have included an accurate representation of both Caucasian and minority groups in the sample of enlisted military wives. According to data, Caucasians military wives account for over 60% of the total with no one minority group being dominant across all branches (Lim, Golinelli, and Cho 2008). However, in this small sample the main objective in securing minority participation was to be able to include a variety of voices in the qualitative data. I did adhere to a loose prerequisite to recruit wives from different minority groups whenever possible to better investigate their diverse experiences.

Outreach

I employed several methods to locate participants including phone calls, emails, and text messages to my existing personal contacts, social media, in-person networking, and official military requests. IRB approved sample scripts for electronic communication and audio calls are included in appendix C. Persistence was key in reaching out to as many people as possible, as often as possible, to either participate or help me recruit participants. Through personal calls, text, and emails to my own network I secured the participation of five wives. I had little trouble recruiting more senior wives from the military installation and local community events, especially family activities held at local in-town schools. Lower ranking wives proved extremely difficult to recruit with more details on this challenge being discussed in the limitations section of the thesis.

I received tremendous assistance from fellow military wives who did not qualify for the study because they were either officer wives or enlisted wives who were either veterans themselves or whose rank or branch was not needed. This was especially helpful in recruiting outside of the Marine Corps, my husband's service branch, or the Navy, which has a large presence on our local installation. For example, there are private Facebook sites solely for select groups of Army and Air Force wives where non-participant Army and Air Force wives would post my information in an effort to assist my recruitment. When one of the wives received a response from a poster either volunteering or with questions, they would ask permission to send the respondent's contact information to me for follow-up. I would then contact the respondent via email or phone to discuss the project and/or set up a time for an interview.

Local military wives' Meetup groups proved to be an effective recruiting tool as the site administrators would allow me to publish posts to their membership thus gaining additional interviews. The assistance I received from other military wives who posted and distributed my request was essential in that it served as not only additional outreach into private networks, it also provided me with what amounted to a pre-vetted status where wives vouched for me and my project. Vetting would prove to be an important component of this project that will be discussed in the limitations section. There were also unsuccessful outreach attempts included networking at my university and among its Reserve Officer's Training Corps (ROTC) personnel, installations' facilities (commissary/PX or Exchange), metro DC installations' enlisted wives' clubs, and official military requests. To elaborate on the last two outreach efforts, first, several requests were sent to local enlisted wives' clubs assuming they would be the most likely to appreciate the scholarship and the opportunity to express themselves. My inquiries were, for the most part, completely ignored. I did receive one phone call from a club representative (Army E7) in Maryland whose rank was not needed for the study yet she promised to pass the message within her group. Official military requests were completely unsuccessful and will be discussed at greater length in the limitation section.

All told, there were three instances of what could be described as declined invitations to participate, although not officially communicated. However, three wives failed to respond to follow-up calls and emails after stating interest in participating. Twenty-one wives, who volunteered for this study but were not used because their rank or branch was not needed or they did not qualify because of their status of previous

military service, dual-military marriage, officer wives, or same-sex partners, requested to be added to any later studies if possible. The final sample consisted of twelve enlisted military wives, three from each branch of service Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps, with one wife in each rank category (E1-E3, E4-E6, and E7-E9), and of the total, seven identifying as Caucasian, three as Hispanic, one as African-American, and one as Asian.

Table 1 Final Sample Detail

Branch	Rank	Race/Ethnicity
Army	E8	Caucasian
Army	E6	Caucasian
Army	E2	Caucasian
Navy	E7	Caucasian
Navy	E6	Asian
Navy	E3	African-American
Air Force	E8	Caucasian
Air Force	E6	Caucasian
Air Force	E3	Hispanic
Marine Corps	E9	Caucasian
Marine Corps	E6	Hispanic
Marine Corps	E3	Hispanic

The Interview Process

Interviews were conducted in-person within the DC metro region at a location and time that was convenient for the participant. The average length of the interviews for E1-E3 was 18.64 minutes, E4-E6, 36.14 minutes, and 55.7 minutes for E7-E9. In certain

cases, interviews were shortened to accommodate children's needs, however, some wives thoughtfully arranged for their husbands' or a friend to watch their children during the interview period. In-depth interviews consisted of one session per participant with follow-up via email to each thanking them for their participation and forwarding information such as scholarship and employment opportunities along with online and on-installation resources discussed during the interview. Two follow-up phone calls were made, one to confirm trade licensing efforts for one participant and the other call was to confirm details of one participant's previous geographic separation from her husband.

Participants chose locations and times of interviews; I met them in their homes, at coffee shops, in installation Exchange's seating areas, public parks, and even a public library. After participants read and completed the consent form, I asked if they had any questions, then did a brief volume test of the recorder followed by my announcing that taping was starting. Participants were asked an assortment of study questions (see Appendix A), designed to investigate if they perceived that there are challenges inherent to the military lifestyle that constrain their education and employment pursuits. Questions varied by participant, their experiences, and the general direction of the interview. There were uniform questions asked of every participant that pertained of demographics such as employment status, level of education, number of children, daycare usage, and on or off-installation housing. Open-ended questions followed relating to wives' education and employment including their satisfaction, goals, and obstacles in these areas as well as their knowledge/usage of the MyCAA and MSEP programs.

For those familiar with the programs, I followed with how they had heard about them. Interviews were semi-structured with most questions open-ended. Lines of questioning was determined by both the age/rank of the wife along with her elaboration into certain areas. For example, the E1-E3 participants had little military lifestyle experience to discuss in terms of lifestyle challenges that had affected their education and employment pursuits. For this group, I would ask more background questions, such as, “did you and/or your parents always imagine that you would go to college?” or “are you homesick?” More senior wives’ questioning followed more of a step-by-step detailed description of their PCS moves, attempts, and outcomes of their education and employment efforts. Interviews were informal and participants seemed comfortable answering questions and asking them anticipating I would have answers. This will be covered in more detail in the discussion section to follow.

Transcription

Interviews were taped and downloaded into a SONY digital program, Sound Organizer, which allowed for the voice file to be manipulated, e.g. slowed down, magnified, replayed, or skipped, with one touch to computer keys making the transcription process relatively easy. The program also managed transcription files, marrying them to the voice digital file, backing up both. Final transcripts were printed one-sided to be hand and colored coded for analysis instead of coded and sorted through an automated electronic program.

Coding and Analysis

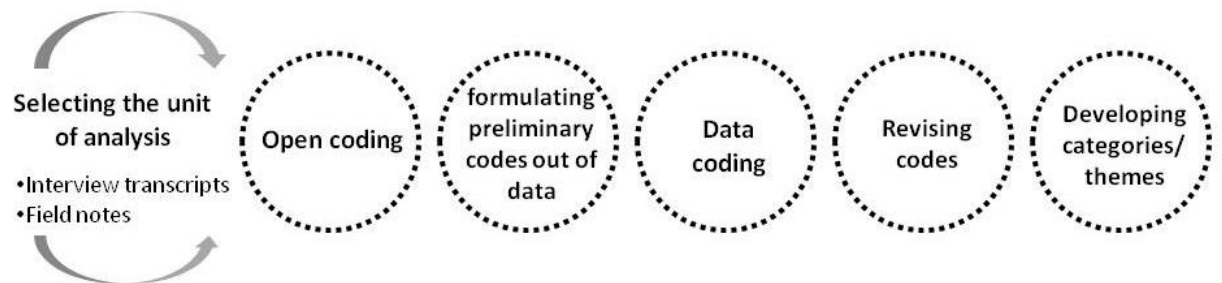


Figure 1 Inductive Qualitative Content Analysis Process

I utilized inductive qualitative content analysis (IQCA) as my method of reducing, categorizing, and interpreting the data. In this case, this method is preferred over grounded theory (GT) for two main reasons: first, the end goal of this descriptive, qualitative project is not theory making through the data (GT), instead it is to find similarities and meaning among the themes that emerge from the categories (Cho and Lee 2014; Mayring 2000; Sandelowski and Barroso 2003); secondly, beginning the process with certain theoretical ideas that may later emerge from the data is permitted with IQCA but in GT it is not. The two methods are very similar with both involving coding and categorizing, however, there are differences that affect not only the outcome but the entire process. In the end, the more straightforward, less abstract content analysis method, which has also been described as less transformational of the data than GT (Sandelowski and Barroso 2003), is the ideal method of capturing the voices of enlisted military wives.

Yet, GT and IQCA share one important characteristic, creating memos (Sandelowski and Barroso 2003), which helped me a great deal as I noticed word patterns or concepts in the data I wanted to capture. For example, midway through coding transcripts, I reached the sixth participant who had used the word “depression” to describe herself in some way, meaning at least 50% of the wives’ interviewed described themselves as “depressed.” Sensing something meaningful but not yet ready to fully think it through, I began a simple analytical memo noting the instances that the word was being used, along with specific sections of verbiage noting participant e.g. Army E2 and transcript page number. Also included in the memo were alternated words such as “funk” or “worn down” that can also be used to describe depression as well as why I found this pattern significant along with my own speculation on what it could mean.

The IQCA process is noted in the above graphic (Cho and Lee 2014:11) and begins with establishing the unit of analysis. For this study, the unit of analysis consisted of full transcripts, transcribed verbatim, of the in-depth participant interviews. Next, I utilized a two part open coding process. First, I read through all transcripts to develop a set of preliminary codes under which to sort and reduce data: social, physical, emotional, financial, and organizational. Then I went back to the transcripts coding line-by-line using the preliminary codes. This process loosely followed a Strauss and Corbin (1990) model, as far as organizing data for analysis coding line-by-line; however, unlike GT, I was not open coding to establish which “concepts are identified and their properties and dimensions are discovered in the data” (Strauss and Corbin 1990: 101). Open coding in

IQCA results in a general set of preliminary codes that will be revised later into codes that will ultimately identify components of the emergent themes.

The next step in the qualitative content analysis process is to revise and refine the preliminary codes into more specific codes. For example, I utilized charts (see tables 2 and 3 examples below) to assist in the process of analyzing and revising each preliminary code. For example “financial” was coded into more fine-tuned codes and sub codes with more detail. I added sections of data, in my own shorthand descriptions, which had been coded under the financial category in order to review the different concepts, e.g. student loan debt and the myth that marrying in the military will mean more money (table 2).

Table 2 Coding

Open Code	Data Examples
Financial	Lack of \$ for education Working -need more \$ for household/make ends meet Student Loan debt from previous educational attempt Myth that extra military benefits are good reason to marry=no money Judged differently because working (career) =more \$ Self-worth Independence

Next, I sorted the financial data into subcategory codes, noted in parentheses, to drill down on more specific areas of the financial code adding a higher category e.g. education (see following table 3 example).

Table 3 Sub Codes

Financial/Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lack of for tuition (obstacle)• Lack of for childcare (obstacle)• Student loan debt (desire to not incur-obstacle)• Student loan debt (already incurred –no desire to incur more-obstacle)
Financial/Employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Need to make ends meet (motivation)• Not enough money for childcare to work (obstacle)• Judged negatively for having money/career (outcome)
Financial/Well-Being	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Self-worth (outcome)• Independence (outcome)• Stability (outcome)• Security (outcome)

I also assigned codes under higher categories, education and employment, adding these labels to the codes to simplify the content analysis process. However, certain segments of data did not squarely fit under education or employment, often crossing over into both because participants' comments were more of general situational statements. This will be discussed more in a later section. Once codes and sub codes were established they were reviewed, analyzed, and grouped into categories (Cho and Lee 2014) from which several themes emerged. The processes above describe the exercises

involved in analyzing, revising, and refining the codes along with the data that ultimately formed the themes. Out of seven themes that emerged, three were selected that best represented the data and best defined the perceptions of enlisted military wives. These will be discussed in the following sections.

Table 4 Themes

Seven Themes	Final Three Themes
Constraints for Enlisted Military Wives	
Wives' Satisfaction	
Isolation	Isolation
False Sense of Security	
Depression	Depression
Money	Money
Stereotypes	

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

When investigating the research question if enlisted military wives perceive that there are challenges inherent to the military lifestyle that impede their education and employment pursuits, I was prepared to hear the most-often cited obstacles: money (lack of), childcare (lack of), PCS/moving (too often), and difficulty finding suitable employment (unemployed or underemployed). What I was ill-prepared for was the bigger picture in how the challenges not only work together to constrain, but how this situation can be viewed as a series of inputs and outputs, such as how dissatisfaction over employment status and lack of money (inputs), can lead to isolation and depression (outputs). However, before I discuss the bigger picture, I will explain my findings and their connections to the three major themes that emerged from the interview data.

The emergent themes, isolation, money, and depression evolved from discussions with participants that could be categorized into five main groups: physical, social, emotional, financial, and organizational. It should be noted that this system is imperfect with captured themes appearing under different groups. For example, the theme isolation refers not only to physical isolation but also speaks to social and emotional isolation as well. The theme money, which serves as a major obstacle for wives affecting their education and employment pursuits as well as certain aspects of their lifestyle, is

primarily financial but its effects are far-reaching into the physical, emotional, social, and organizational. The final theme depression is embedded across all categories and exerts a heavy influence in complicating enlisted military wives and their education and employment pursuits.

Isolation

Originally, I was curious if wives lived on or off base and if they believed this affected their participation in or knowledge of the spousal assistance programs. One noteworthy characteristic emerged from the interviews: eleven out of twelve participants lived off installation in civilian communities. There are certain drawbacks for military wives who do not have the day-to-day physical connection to their installation and its resources. It can lead to a physical isolation where wives are not only disconnected and perhaps geographically separated from the closest military installation, but wives may also be disconnected from education and employment opportunities and/or base spousal assistance programs. Would wives attribute their unfamiliarity with available programs and resources with their living in civilian communities and how does living in-town inform their military lifestyle? What began as a simple question of on or off base housing became more of an opportunity for wives to communicate their perceptions of their isolation and disconnectedness.

Physical

Within the off-installation numbers there are fine points that better illustrate the physical disconnection to the military community. For example, none of the wives interviewed worked on base, and with the exception of the one USMC E3 wife who lives in base housing, none ventured to the base more than 1-2 times per month with trips

planned to the commissary, Exchange, medical facilities, or pharmacy. Three participants, Navy E6, E7, and AF E6, lived well over one hour from their closest installation making trips to the base challenging and time-consuming. All shared the same reason for living so far away, to stretch their Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) dollars by finding cheaper housing that allowed for more household income. Two wives, Army E6 and Navy E7, are currently living in the mid-Atlantic region on “geo-bachelor” status, meaning their service member husbands are located at their duty stations, Fort Bragg and Okinawa, Japan respectively, while their wives relocate or remain elsewhere.¹⁹ The Army E2 wife also considered herself physically isolated because she did not go to base or venture out of her in-town apartment because she had no transportation.

Social/Emotional

In this study, participants, in their own words, attached their own meanings to how living in-town contributed to their lack of information and connection. They described their isolation or disconnectedness, which went beyond the physical to the social and emotional. For example, six wives said that being a Stay-at-Home-Mom (SAHM) keeps them home and away from interacting with others, especially other military wives, while others described being in an information vacuum where their husbands are their only source of military information. When asked if they received informative emails from their husbands’ units, only four wives received them and none of

¹⁹ Clever and Segal (2013) note that only a small number of military families choose to geo-bachelor, approximately 6-7% though these numbers may not be accurate due to the dated (1990s) research.

the other wives had reached out to the unit to ensure they were on the distribution list. The Navy E7 wife responded, “No-it was kind of weird-I think it was my husband’s fault. When he asked me if I wanted emails from the chaplain and I said no I think he thought that I didn’t want anything.”

Social and emotional isolation was also described by participants who found themselves not only off-installation but also outside of the ingroup of military wives at their husbands’ duty stations. Four wives’ stories stand out as examples of not feeling welcomed or being accepted into the military wife community. The senior Army wives, E6 and E8, expressed feeling isolated by other military wives, both officer and enlisted, because of their education, employment, and class (enlisted). Both wives were educated, the E8 having a Masters’²⁰ and the E6 her bachelors’, and were working career professionals who had geographically separated, the E8 wife at a previous duty station and the E6 currently, from their service member spouse to maintain their careers. Both shared that this last fact did not cast them in a favorable light to other wives in their husbands’ units making them the subject of gossip. The Army E8 wife related that when her husband received PCS orders to move to Fort Campbell from Langley in Southern Virginia, she remained in Virginia for two years until she found a similar job one hour from the Kentucky base. When she did join him at Ft. Campbell she received an unwelcoming reception from the wives in the unit describing that she appeared to be an officer’s wife, dressing nicely with a fashionable hairstyle and “polish.” Yet, once

²⁰ The Army E8 and the Navy E6 wives held the highest level of education, masters’ degree, of all wives in the study.

officers' wives found out she was enlisted they ignored her, and once the enlisted wives found out she had a career, they thought "she must think she's too good for us." Her efforts to organize unit family readiness events were rebuffed by unit wives because they did not work and preferred daytime-only activities during children's school hours, times that were inconvenient for the working wife. She added that upon joining the enlisted spouses club at previous duty station, Fort Campbell, Kentucky, "The other wives in the group complained that I should have to pay more in dues because I worked."

The Army E6 shared a similar experience in that her professional and educated appearance did not "win her friends" in the wives' social circle in her husband's unit. As a relatively new military wife (married less than two years) accustomed to more urban settings, e.g. San Francisco, residing on a remote, Southern military base in a military town, Ft. Bragg, hours from "people like her" was a culture shock. In this "parallel universe," as she described it, her choice to remain childfree in her mid-twenties labelled her as "different" and an outsider in the military community.

I don't mean to sound insensitive. But from what I've seen so far... I mean I get people are like you're 26 and you're not planning on having kids yet? And we have neighbors next door, across the street who are an older retired couple, 35 plus years in the military the man and the woman was a stay-at-home Mom with you know now...I don't know. We have several friendly conversations, very traditional, southern, and she's like "You know-how old are you now? You don't want to end up like those people next door to you who didn't have kids until they were 31!" I was like Oh God where am I? AHHHHH My gynecologist at Ft. Bragg said I better start thinking about it because the time, the clock is ticking. And I was like NO IT IS NOT!

In the case of the USMC E6 wife, she felt isolated not only being a stay-at-home mother, but also felt the social isolation from other wives in the unit for being “different.” She did not feel it was her race/ethnicity (Mexican Latina with little accent) that caused her exclusion but instead it was her age, fitness, and outlook that made her an outlier. She shared that she had reached out to bond with the unit wives to encourage them to exercise and was rejected.

I remember when I was pregnant and I was ten years older than all of them and way more fit than they are and they would comment on about how I was so fit and pregnant, and looked awesome and I want to be like you. And I would say you can-let’s do it! I will teach you how. But no one ever called me and nothing ever happened.

When asked to elaborate on why she thought she was excluded she replied, “They’re all fat and it’s OK because they all look the same and do the same thing. Nothing.”

Lastly, the E7 wife, currently geographically separated from her husband’s duty station in Okinawa, attributed her treatment from other Navy wives and her isolation living so far from base immersed into a Japanese speaking-only area, as reasons why she took their son, left their apartment, and relocated back to Virginia. When asked to elaborate on her treatment from other unit wives she responded:

Oh man-but I think it was sort of bad there because there’s a lot of foreign spouses like Japanese and Filipino. They just kind of had this superior attitude and I’m like – I hate to sound rude-I am American-I didn’t marry one-this all comes to me natural-and I didn’t have to marry to get it-you’re not better than me because you married someone in the military. You know what I’m saying. So that’s just kind of how I felt.

Wives were asked a series of questions about their living situation, including distance from base and number of visits per month, if they were aware of or ever stopped

(three wives out of twelve had) at the installation Family Member Employment Assistance Program (FMEAP) office, and if they believed living off installation limited their access to and knowledge of spousal assistance programming. This line of questioning served as the gateway for wives to respond adding more substantive elaboration on their feeling isolated geographically, then socially and emotionally. Yet, how does this address military wives' perceptions of constraints that hold them back from pursuing their education and employment pursuits? For the eleven out of twelve wives currently living off installation, all agreed that their living situation and limited trips to base decreased wives' opportunity to be exposed to outreach and resources devoted to helping them with education and employment. Going a step further, how does this differ from civilian wives who find themselves isolated geographically, socially, and/or emotionally? What makes this more of an issue for military spouses is that they may find themselves in this situation over and over again as their family moves every 2-3 years with PCS orders. Their well-being is affected by the social and emotional effects of isolation and in turn, wives' well-being, according to previous research, impacts all areas of their lives including their education and employment efforts. This will be discussed at greater length in the discussion chapter to follow.

Money

Education and Employment Motivation

Before investigating what factors inherent to military life constrain enlisted military wives in their education and employment pursuits, it might be best to first uncover why they seek to increase their level of education or find employment. Study demographics included three wives who were currently employed and one who was

actively looking for work. Eight wives were SAHM but all had held at least one part-time job, either volunteer or paid, during their military marriage usually before they had children. Two wives had masters' degrees, two had bachelors', three had trade education (cosmetology, nursing), six had some college, and one had no college or trade, just her high school diploma. The Army E6 with the bachelors' degree would prefer a masters' and those with some college would like to finish their undergraduate degree. For those wives interested in completing their undergraduate degrees, the most often cited reason was to get a job and make money. The three wives with trades, two cosmetologists (AF E6 and USMC E3) and the Navy E7 Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN), sought to further their career through education. The cosmetologists did not seek degrees but were instead interested in taking a few business classes that will help them in managing their financials when they eventually open their own hair salons. The LPN is not pursuing a Registered Nurse (RN) bachelors' degree, but is planning on securing her RN certification, which offers a significant pay bump, through a local Virginia trade school.

The USMC E9 wife had been in school the longest, completing her first two years of college directly after high school (1993-1995), then restarting the process in 2007, spending the next nine years to the present toward finishing her degree. For her, the need to complete her degree, find productive employment, and make her own money took on a new urgency after she entered the divorce process with her Master Gunnery Sergeant Marine husband after almost twenty years of marriage. Hers is a cautionary tale for both military and civilian wives who are completely financially dependent on their husbands.

So I met my husband when I was 16, I married him at 21, and it took years and fertility treatments to have kids. We both agreed that when we had kids I would be a stay-at-home mother and he would be the breadwinner.

So now I'm 40 with 2 kids in middle school, no degree, no work history, and he's left me for his girlfriend in Indiana. I am barely getting by because he pays his child support but stiffes me on my spousal support.

He's also retiring early – six months before we'd be married for 20 years. He's happy he gets to screw me out of my 20/20/20²¹. I won't even be able to get on base to go to the commissary for my kids.

Money as a Constraint

Money served not only as the main motivator for participants to pursue educational and employment gains, it also served as wives' major constraint in pursuing their goals. A pattern emerged where over half of the wives expressed that lack of money, either for tuition, childcare or transportation, was the main constraint in preventing them from returning to school. The Army E6, USMC E3, Navy E7 and AF E8 all cited existing sizeable student loan debt as the main obstacle blocking them from continuing their education. To better illustrate this point, the USMC E3 shared that she had over \$25,000 in student loan debt from cosmetology school, "It's because I went to Aveda, I should have gone somewhere cheaper." The Army E2, Navy E3, and USMC E6 expressed an aversion to taking on student loan debt in order to re-enter school.

²¹ 20/20/20 grants wives' who have reached this milestone their own status as a retiree granting them healthcare for life, free prescriptions at installation pharmacies, installation access, and commissary and PX privileges. Even after divorce, wives still retain these benefits if they do not remarry.

Lacking money for education is not exclusive to military spouses; however, money did emerge as one of the main challenges inherent to the military that impedes wives' agency and options. Often the discussion centered on the high cost of living in their region where some military families who live off installation find that their Basic Housing Allowance (BAH) provided by the military does not fully cover their rent and utilities.²² For the junior enlisted, money shortages were especially trying as illustrated by the Navy E3 wife who had her child on a year-long wait for the Child Development Center (CDC), noting that the cost of a good day care for an infant in the Northern Virginia is @\$1800 a month. For her education and experience level, she felt she could not earn \$1800 per month to even cover the in-town childcare. Commenting further, "The (military) benefits look really good, but they're not. We have NO money." The Army E8 wife expressed apprehension of staying in the area after her husband's retirement in an attempt to stave off another move, but with the loss of BAH they would be financially challenged to afford the same type and location of housing. The theme of money, and its role as a challenge in preventing spouses from continuing their education or seek employment, is woven into the narrative of this research and has its own impact on wives' well-being. This will be discussed more at length in the discussion section to follow.

²² When families live in military housing their entire BAH is applied toward their rent and utilities with little to no contribution from the servicemember.

Depression

There have been multiple studies linking the effects of deployment and its related stressors to depression in military wives along with studies noting the group's increased likelihood of experiencing post-partum depression. Less investigation is conducted for military wives exposed to the everyday challenges of the military lifestyle. A pattern emerged from this study's data where eleven out of twelve wives stated, without being prompted by a specific question regarding depression, that they had been "depressed" by their situation or events. Again, due to the size of this sample this is not to be generalized for the entire enlisted military wife population, yet the findings do provide insight into the effects of military lifestyle challenges. This is also not a comparison to enlisted military wives' civilian cohorts who face many of the same issues such as job loss and broken kin networks. However, due to the transitory nature of the military lifestyle, I would argue that military wives are more likely to confront these challenges more often than their civilian peers noting "nearly all military families experience a move outside the continental United States...and military families move 2.4 times more often than civilian families" (Clever and Segal 2013:26).

Money/Financial Insecurity

The easiest way to unpack these findings would be to list the terminology used and the context demonstrating the pattern in the data. However, in investigating human subjects and their perceptions, it can be a challenge when context and causality do not neatly line up under one specific event or outcome. PCS and its effects often bear the brunt of being thought of as the primary source of dissatisfaction and/or depression among military wives. However, in this study, other reasons emerged that were unrelated

specifically to PCS. For example, a participant's money woes often follows them duty station to duty station where they may become exacerbated. In this case, it is not about the move but instead the indebtedness. As Hosek and Wadsworth (2013) note, debt levels of military families across all branches are growing and over 26% of these families are in serious financial trouble.²³ Half of participants expressed that they had become "worn down" or "depressed" by lack of money, incurred debt, or unaffordable expenses such as day care or rent. The Navy E7 wife cites her current rental situation and its financial drain has kept her in a long "funk" which began during her time in Japan, "I was there and my world literally did revolve around him. Because I did nothing. I just sat around all day and hindsight I should have –even if I'd gotten some stupid job- I should have gotten it but I didn't but it is what it is. I had nothing else and I didn't want to do that anymore." She left her apartment in Japan to return stateside assuming her husband could break their lease and move from their apartment into the barracks or live on the ship, thus saving their BAH. Instead, the couple is held to their lease until the lease ends or new orders arrive, whichever comes first. The couple is also still paying back to the Navy half of the \$10,000 in what is described as "thank you money."

So to rent our house it was ten thousand dollars-the Japanese have these-first our rent every month is \$2000-which the Navy gave us that which is no big deal.

That's your BAH right?

Right. But then you have to give them a deposit and the rent-but then you have to give them then thank you money for letting them rent your house. It's crazy.

²³ Financial trouble, as defined by Hosek and Wadsworth, includes inability to pay bills such as rent, mortgage, utilities, minimum credit card payment and/or collection actions and garnishments.

So \$10,000 was for the length of the...
No that was just to move in. We still pay two grand a month.

Her lack of funds would be cause enough to claim depression, however, it is compounded by having to move in with her mother and attend night nursing classes, a longer program of eighteen months instead of thirteen for the day program, because she cannot afford childcare.

Job Loss/Professional Insecurity

Money woes were not the only challenge that wives found “depressing,” others cited isolation, homesickness, and losing friends due to PCS. One area of focus came from the professional wives who talked of losing jobs they loved and how “depressing” it was to not find work. Even though the Army E8 wife was currently satisfied with her position locally, this was not always the case. When her husband received PCS orders to move to Fort Campbell (Kentucky) from Langley (Virginia), she could not find a comparable job and refused to settle for less pay and duties in order to accompany her husband on the move. She stated that this period of separation was “depressing” and lasted two years until she found a suitable job near Ft. Campbell. When asked to elaborate on why she chose separation over accepting a lesser job, she said she valued continuing her career and independence over moving with no job, stuck on the base, with no friends, and “being depressed.” Adding to her anxiety was the new discovery that having spent her twenties building her career, childfree, she was now, in her early thirties, having fertility difficulties.

The Army E6 wife who relocated herself to Washington DC in order to continue her career also expressed feelings of dejection. She found it “depressing” that she spoke four languages fluently²⁴, including Farsi, and had Foreign Service contractor experience in combat zones, yet could not find a job on her military installation location. She also found it frustrating to be underemployed in her current position, considering herself capable of much more. The Marine E6 wife admitted to becoming “depressed” when she was fired from her job because of her pregnancy, adding that she considering herself a “failure.” When asked if she pursued a complaint against the company, she responded that “she was seven months pregnant and couldn’t be bothered.” This same wife mentioned that when she relocated to Virginia, she became increasing depressed because it “had been a year and I hadn’t found a job. It was hard to get myself up in the morning and actually get dressed.”

Life Upheaval

This last comment from the previous paragraph concerned me because it seemed more serious than just being “worn down” or “in a funk,” finding it hard to get up and dressed to start the day takes depression to a different level. Luckily, a new baby gave the USMC E6 wife a new sense of purpose and a reason to get out of bed in the mornings. However, not all wives were as lucky in finding a way out. There are obviously different levels of depression but as a non-clinician I hesitate to expand on them, attempting to frame them in a degree of difficulty scale. One wife’s PCS

²⁴ Wife is a U.S. born, White American female whose primarily language is English. Her language skills were acquired through high school and college education.

frustration at finding new schools, doctors, dentists, hair dressers, and friends might send another wife into darker territory. This was the case with the Air Force E8 wife who fell into, her words, “a debilitating depression” compounded by a recent move, joblessness, and tough financial times. As an experienced military wife, she had been through several moves and anticipated that this last one would be no different. Yet, something happened, she described it as “cracking,” finding herself diagnosed with clinically depression, on heavy medication, barely leaving her home. She added that agreeing to be interviewed for this study represented a major step for her as she continued through her recovery.²⁵

Complicating Life

Three of the youngest wives in the study, E1-E3 expressed having periodic depression due to a variety of issues, including homesickness and a sense of nostalgia for their not-so-long ago simpler lives. For the three, dropping out of college and experiencing such a tremendous, often constrained, lifestyle change could be seen as a drop in their previous status. On the other hand, their husbands’ status continued to rise as he moves along, unencumbered, in his military career. One child-free young wife, Army E2, who had only been married a few months, felt “depressed” that she was away from her family, isolated at home, off-base, without transportation, job, or money. She was upset that it was *her* car that her husband was using when just a few months ago she was in college fulltime “going somewhere.” Three out of four junior enlisted wives were young mothers, of limited means, with husbands who were away the majority of the time.

²⁵ Update: E8 Air Force wife received new orders to PCS to Georgia August 2015 and will seek out care upon arrival. I freshened her résumé and she has begun applying for contractor work at her new location.

One E3 wife, whose husband is a military air traffic controller, shared that he works over eighty hours per week, leaving her at home completely overwhelmed. With small children including a newborn, the wife's behavior, personal appearance, and unkempt home, concerned me enough to inquire if she was under continuing care for possible postpartum depression. While uncomfortable for me, this concern was not a leap considering Schachman and Lindsay's 2013 research highlighting the glaring number of military wives with non-deployed husbands who tested positive for PPD and required urgent intervention.

Delayed Dreams

Both the USMC E6 and the AF E6 wives expressed dissatisfaction but acceptance of having their careers put on hold, or "losing time" in order for their husbands to reach their career aspirations. However, their responses differed in that the USMC wife, though challenged by this, found peace in accepting that the "good outweighed the bad" in what she has gained from her husband and the military, including American citizenship. The AF E6 wife, a SAHM with two small children, spoke flatly of her aspirations to open her own hair salon after he husband ends his military career, "wherever that is." Her demeanor struck me as a melancholy or sense of defeat in acting upon her agency to try to change her situation that included physical, social, and emotional isolation.

Depression emerged as a theme after a pattern developed in the data where the word "depression" or similar words, such as "worn down" or "funk" were often repeated though used in different context. Depression can perhaps be viewed an outcome or output from being on the receiving end of the intersection where wives' position at the

bottom rung of the military community's social order often leaves them frustrated and dissatisfied with their circumstances, education level, employment status, finances, etc. and with little opportunity to act on their own agency to change their situations.

Depression can also go beyond serving as a byproduct of dissatisfaction to actually impacting wives' well-being and negatively framing wives' mindset and confidence as they pursue their education and employment aspirations.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this project was to capture, in their own words, enlisted military wives' perceptions of education and employment and if they believed there are challenges inherent to the military lifestyle that constrain them in the education and employment pursuits. The discussions surrounding these research questions contained multiple layers of information, including what impact education and employment have on their lives and the how these areas affected their well-being. The data demonstrating wives' stories regarding their education and employment can be presented as building block effects, here are two examples.

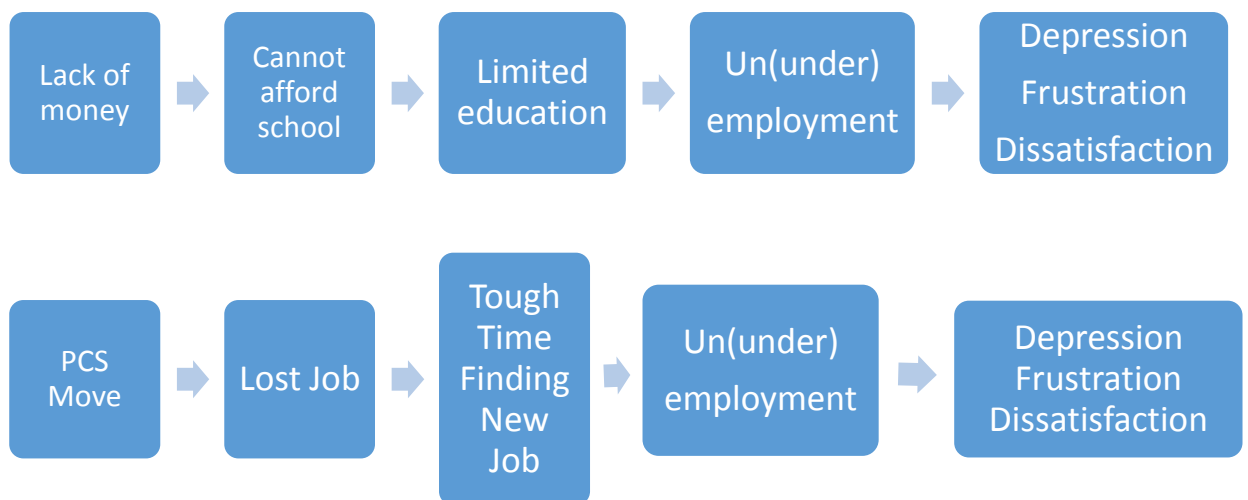


Figure 2: Effects of wives' education and employment impediments

What is clear from this descriptive research study is that the findings support previous research that military wives' satisfaction with their education level and employment status are directly tied to their well-being (Blakely et al. 2012; Castaneda and Harrell 2008; Patterson and McCubbin 1984; Westhuis et al. 2006). Moreover, the majority of this study's participants held productive work and continued education in high regard, results demonstrated by previous studies' quantitative findings (MOAA 2014; Blue Star Families 2013). Unsurprisingly, constraints found in these same quantitative studies are also found among this study's participants:

- Lack of Money
- Husband's Schedule
- Un(under)employment
- Lack of Childcare
- PCS Moves
- Husbands' poor pay

I sought, through this project, to provide qualitative descriptive research that would serve as both supportive and complementary to previous quantitative findings while offering deeper insight into individual wives' perceptions of their education and employment. My research offers the additional benefit of gaining a better understanding of the individual situatedness of each participant and how this affects her education and employment outcomes. Participants' similarities in experiences, backgrounds, and goals, though not generalizable from such a small sample, do allow for a deeper look into this group of current active duty enlisted military wives. Their voices and how that data

informs and answers a series of additional research questions illustrate the benefits of qualitative research.

Physical Location

The percentage of participants who lived off-installation, eleven out of twelve, is higher than DoD estimates that 75% of military families live in-town. However, what stands out in this discussion of the research question, specifically how living off-base affects wives, are the number of participants who claim to be isolated or disconnected due to their physical location. First to clarify, there is a difference in being physically geographically separated from an installation and being “isolated or disconnected” as wives described themselves. There are negative connotations attached to these words that should be understood as, for these wives in particular, being separated from the installation resulted in feelings of isolation and disconnection. Additionally, being physically separated from an installation does not mean wives are automatically disconnected from communication, especially information regarding education and employment opportunities.

Information Vacuum

Eight wives out of twelve did not receive electronic communication from their husbands’ units nor from any military related organization, e.g. Military OneSource.²⁶

The effects of being in an information vacuum are far-reaching especially for those wives

²⁶ Military OneSource is a DoD website that serves as a clearinghouse for military family related information including spousal assistance programs such as MyCAA and MSEP, childcare options, and ways to stay connected to the military community. Families can sign up to be included in the list serve that periodically forwards information on available programs and upcoming activities.

who could have taken advantage of the available spousal assistance programming but did not know about it. Only one wife, the USMC E9, had ever used the MyCAA program back when it first launched and was open to all ranks. She also suffered the fate of many MyCAA users who were dumped from the program after it was shut down and re-opened with a smaller scope of eligibility for E5 and below. As for the rest of the participants, five wives out of twelve knew of the MyCAA program and only one of those who knew of it qualified to use it based on rank, the Navy E3. Though she did qualify and planned to use the MyCAA program, she had what some would say, just enough information to be dangerous. She shared that she planned to pay for a childcare program at Northern Virginia Community College herself or with financial aid (possibly loans) in an effort to “save” her MyCAA benefit for her bachelors’ degree. After telling me of her plans, this discussion followed:

P: That’s what the certificate is so it’s only two semesters, so I’m not using them (MyCAA credits) this time. I just want to get financial aid or pay out of pocket I guess.

R: Why is that?

P: I just want to kind of reserve those benefits for an actual bachelors’.

R: You can’t use it for that.

P: I can’t?

R: No, it’s only good for the first two years of community college or a certificate.

P: Does it go towards this I don’t know?

R: Yes!

P: It does? OK!

R: So think that plan over.

P: I’m going to think that plan over.

Needless to say, MyCAA suffers from a lack of familiarity among wives from all ranks and all branches. As the above example indicates, even those that are aware of the

program are lacking in important details that may cause them to make poor financial decisions, such as taking out unnecessary loans. Two of the E1-E3 wives who were not aware of the program but now are, plan to utilize the MyCAA to jumpstart their studies. Four wives E6 and above expressed regret that they did not know about the program because they could have taken classes before ranking out of eligibility. The Navy E7 shared, “Like that school thing-I wish I would have known that when he was an E5 because he just became an E5 right before we got married-and even though he became an E6 fairly quickly I still would have had time to take something.”

The information vacuum continues with the MSEP program with only one quarter of participants responded that they were familiar with it. Similar to the MyCAA, only one wife, the Army E6 had used the program. She reported that she did not have a good experience.

Someone (from Spouse Education and Career Opportunities-SECO) tried to counsel me on my résumé and the feedback they were giving me was ridiculous. It was grammatically incorrect. Just wrong. Stuff that I would never do. So I realized that the person I was talking to obviously had no idea what they were talking about and they didn't really care.

Wives in the study were told that the MSEP program has its own web portal listing jobs specifically for military wives from companies that are contractually bound to the US government to actively recruit military wives. In addition to DoD's MSEP web portal, SECO also has its own website with job coaching, interview tips, and several other useful tools to assist military wives. The issue is, getting the word out to military wives while bearing in mind the trend of military families living in-town versus on-installation.

Communication and Outreach

There was no one consistent method mentioned in how those spouses who knew about the MyCAA and MSEP gained that information. There were methods that may provide guidance on better communication vehicles to distribute spouse information. For example, the Army E8 was very well-versed in the programs which she attributes to her time living on-installation at previous duty station Fort Campbell, which as a major Army installation, had what she described as tremendous spousal assistance program outreach including briefs at unit events and networking functions. The USMC E6 learned of the spousal assistance programs through unit briefs geared to spouses and emails sent from the installation that included available spouse resources. As the only participant who had visited a Family Member Employment Assistance Program (FMEAP) at an installation, she reported that she also received programming information during her visit.

Conversely, the Navy E3 reported that she did not learn of the program through a DoD outreach effort, instead, she learned of the MyCAA program from a Facebook post from a fellow military wife. Spousal assistance programs topics are usually discussed at length during welcome aboard events, given by installations to newly arriving personnel and their families, and new spouse workshops where spouses learn the meaning of the multitude of military acronyms and available resources geared directly to assist them. However, not one of the wives reported that she had attended either one of these events. Regardless of the outreach efforts undertaken by DoD, wives in this study, for the most part, had missed the messaging.

Unattainable Luxuries

An additional research question, are wives too preoccupied with strained finances or childcare problems to such an extent that going back to school or finding suitable and satisfactory employment seem like unattainable luxuries, could be answered to a certain degree by the data in this study. Without retreading into the financial constraints presented in the money theme section of the results, I found the answer to this question more complicated than a simple yes or no. For some participants, mainly the USMC E3 and Air Force E6, their dreams of working and taking classes were significantly unattainable at the moment. Overwhelmed with young children and husbands that work long hours these wives seem to be taking it one day at a time. For other wives, even with young children, obstacles such as child care and money constraints, did not dissuade them from actively seeking school or employment opportunities. Wives who expressed financial concerns, especially in taking out student loans for school funding, received information on several military wife specific scholarships in their follow up interview emails with one wife communicating later that she had applied. Timing of course is a factor, for example, the Navy E7 pursuing her Registered Nurse certificate, will need to wait until her GI Bill funding is approved before registering for classes. Thus pursuits may be delayed, not abandoned completely.

Stereotypes

Education and Employment Impediments

One last research question asked if wives were impeded in the education and employment pursuits by others' perceptions of them or stereotypes. This area did not produce the anticipated response in that only two wives expressed any impact from

others' perceptions on their employment: bias toward military wives by employers. One, the USMC E6, shared two instances where she felt her position as a military spouse impeded her employment. The first case illustrates the limitations of career growth for wives and provides a glimpse into why 90% of military spouse participants in the MOAA 2014 survey reported being underemployed with 40% reporting they do not tell employers about their status as a military spouse.

I remember the HR director when I said thanks for the new position- I did tell her I want you to know we're leaving in six months. And she said, she kind of smiled and felt, I think, she felt well I already offered you the position I can't take it back. And she did give it to me anyway, but she laughed and told her co-worker said "she I told you, they don't stay." But they still gave it to me. They didn't discriminate. But maybe had they known ahead of time that I was leaving in six months they might have not given me that new position.

This same wife also experienced what she described as discrimination as a military spouse but from an outside perspective, it may have been simply pregnancy-related, or a combination of the two. Her civilian employer fired her when she was seven months pregnant and after having recently receiving an excellent job performance review. Interestingly, when asked if she filed a discrimination complaint with authorities, she replied she was "seven months pregnant and couldn't be bothered." With that, no one can determine the rationale behind her firing but suffice to say non-military wives are often fired for being pregnant.

Race/Ethnicity Bias

The second wife, Navy E6, responded that she feared bias in employment but did not attach this to being a military spouse. Instead, she perceived that employers would discriminate against her because she is a Japanese national with, as she describes it, a “strong accent when speaking English.” Though well-educated with her masters’ degree in finance, she hesitated to attempt to gain employment due to her perception of herself as “other.” The bias described by this participant is supported by previous studies that have found those with accents are often discriminated against in the workplace particularly in the hiring process (Deprez-Sims and Morris 2010; Lai 2013). This wife also offers an interesting picture into how perceived stereotypes can negatively affect self-esteem and ultimately prevent well-being strategies, e.g. getting a job, from happening. This limiting behavior also resulted in social, emotional, and physical isolation because she felt that because of her race/ethnicity, White military wives (the ingroup/majority) were making fun of her because of her accent and being different. When asked if she ever experienced discrimination or been openly subjected to negative comments by White wives, she replied that she had not, but she “knew” this is what they were doing. This assertion is supported by previous studies that describe signs of subtle racism and microaggressions towards Asians found in US society (Sue et al. 2007).

Participant Similarities and Dissimilarities

Mothers and Child-Free Wives

In the social isolation subtheme section of the results chapter, there was a reference to a wife’s perception, (Army E6), that her childlessness was a reason for being excluded by other military wives in her husband’s unit. In an interesting twist, the three

Army wives were the only child-free participants which allows for a certain level of comparison between wives who are mothers and wives who remain child-free.

According to the government, over 1/3 of military couples are “childfree,” yet this group is rarely heard from nor studied (Smith-Strickland 2014). The Military organization is heavily family-oriented, offering generous benefits to those who marry and reproduce. When viewed as a form of social control, harkening back to the greedy institution discussion from an earlier chapter, these generous benefits bind families to the military in loyal subservience. The military organization spends considerable resources in promoting and supporting the traditional family model where wives are the keepers of the domestic sphere, taking care of home and children while their husbands fully commit to their military missions. Evidence from this study points to the ability of professional military wives without children, the Army E6 and E8 participants, to preserve their agency and independence by determining where they will live and work. However, these decisions have serious consequences and strongly impact childfree wives’ well-being. While their work life may be full and they are fully invested in securing their own, independent future, their status as outliers leads to a lonely life in the military wife community.

Inclusion in this study of childfree military wives, who had demonstrated their ability to preserve their agency and independence after marriage, led to an interesting opportunity to compare the two groups of participants, wives with and without children. When considering constraints to enlisted military wives that are inherent to the military lifestyle, a definite difference appears between mothers and the child-free. As exhibited

by those unencumbered by parenthood, they are free to easily geographically separate without regard to children's schools, activities, and needs. These wives also did not mention being constrained by their husbands' work schedule or maintaining their households on their own. Money also was not a constant strain for the child-free wives, with the noted exception of the newly married Army E2 wife whose Basic Housing Allowance (BAH) did not cover all the rent and utilities. Conversely, the ten other participants, including the Army E2, are completely financially dependent on their husbands with little agency to create different outcomes. Perhaps it is not simply military marriage, but instead military marriage and motherhood that impedes wives' agency in deciding where to live and work, and her ability to secure an independent, self-supporting livelihood. With this said, it is important to note that this independent life is not easy when it results in isolation and the lack of a sense of belonging in this child-focused community.

Gender Roles

I anticipated that the majority of participants would be in more traditional marriages where wives maintain the domestic sphere while the husbands are the breadwinners. This held true for the most part except for those childfree wives mentioned in the previous section. For the remaining participants, their households were not egalitarian in the division of labor with wives being tasked with the bulk of domestic duties including childcare, cleaning, cooking, shopping, chauffeuring, etc. Husbands were free to pursue their career and had few demands made of their time by their wives. There is a certain peace the wives make with their lot and position, below their children, husbands, and the military organization, for the foreseeable future. This is indicated by

comments such as, “After about three months in a new place I get to start thinking about a job for me,” or the underemployed and underpaid USMC E9 wife who occasionally substitute teaches in the local school system. She accepts this limited employment because, as the main caregiver, she needs the flexibility to be available for her kids to take them to activities or be home with them if they are sick. This supports previous research that indicates that military wives often conform to their traditional husbands’ guidance (Bowen and Orthner 1983; Harrell 2000; Harrison 2006; Taber 2009).

Interestingly, USMC E6 was the only participant who mentioned that she and her husband shared duties equally before parenthood intervened. With that said, they did have over ten child-free years with just the two of them before having their child. No competition, conflict, or confusion existed amongst wives regarding the role of husbands as the source of money for the family, a mindset that often explained wives’ willingness to relocate when new orders were received.

False Sense of Security

In the comparison between the career childfree professional participants with the stay-at-home military mothers, one glaring difference appeared that emphasizes the gap in independence and self-sufficiency between the two groups. Six of the ten stay-at-home moms mentioned what could be defined as an “unofficial” attachment to the military. They used expressions such as “when I joined the (branch of service)” or “my career as a military spouse” as they described their situatedness. Was this simply an effort to give themselves status in the hierarchy where wives are at the bottom rung of the social ladder below their husbands and the military organization? Or perhaps a reflection that the military specifically and society in general, privileges males leaving women in search of

a source of stability and identity? Or is it women's desire to be in the ingroup, which in this case is the military itself? Wives seemed perplexed by my question of what is the root of their statement. I asked, "Do you feel that you are a member of the military?" I received responses including "I'm not like a soldier, but we are military," or "I didn't sign up but I am part of the military community," that did not quite address the question. I considered going further by asking wives if they thought the military would take care of them if they were to divorce, but chose against this course as not to unsettle anyone. What is clear is that even in its most expansive meaning, being a spouse may mean a career to some. But officially, it is their husbands who joined the military, not the spouse. While this may be dismissed as a slip of the tongue if it were to happen once or twice, when it happened in over ½ of the interviews, it rises to the level of significance. This attachment to the military may stem from wives' socialization that their commitment to their husbands also means a commitment to the military and acceptance of the sacrifices that accompany the military lifestyle. But for the military stay-at-home moms, this form of self-identification can provide a false sense of security that may dissuade wives from pursuing education and careers that can make them financially, socially, and emotionally independent.

Depression

As presented in the previous chapter, periods of depression are claimed by eleven of the twelve participants of this study. Similarities are found in ten out of the eleven that emphasize the connection between education and employment to spouses' well-being. In discussions surrounding depression, it most often occurred around an event, such as PCS

move, or job loss, extended unemployment, or a financial set back. Only the Army E8 spouse attributed her depression to a non-education or employment related event-geographic separation. Many of these issues are beyond the wives' control such as PCS moves or the consequential job loss. Would well-being enhancing activities such as advancing education or securing employment, alleviate spouses' depression long-term? Or do they face a repeated cycle with disruptions to their lives caused by the chaos of PCS? This is an area of future research that will be noted in the following chapter.

Goals

For those wives that seek to go back to school or find appropriate employment, participants, with the exception of the two cosmetologists, share the belief that this will help them in their current state. Of these, none stated that their efforts to improve themselves were for a future state, perhaps after their husband's military service is complete. Wives' belief that actions now will benefit them in the short term holds tremendous importance in that previous research indicates the average length of a military career is seven years (Clever and Segal 2013) and only 20% of military service members will retire with at least twenty years of service (Hosek and Wadsworth 2013). With this in mind, wives should prepare for their life outside of the military by investing in their education and gaining valuable work experience that will ease their transition outside of the military community. This transition can be challenging for families who separate from the military before retirement and no longer have access to the government's generous military benefits such as BAH, free to no cost medical, and reduced costs childcare facilities. Mentioned previously was a life course perspective statement that describes a service member's time in the military as a bridging, a step

often after high school where he/she gains valuable skills and experience to either stay in the military, go back to school, or enter the civilian workplace in a better position than they would have had access to without the military service. From the same life course perspective, their husbands' military service acts as a disruptive event for military wives often redirecting downward their trajectories (Kleykamp 2013). If more attention were focused on the short-term likelihood of their husbands' service, perhaps wives would utilize programming that would enhance their post-military trajectories? Could wives not experience the military as a bridging event in which they advance their education and career experience that can propel them forward during and after their husbands' military careers? This is an area for future research that I will discuss in the next chapter.

Including all Voices

This project has been illuminating in the different voices and experiences expressed by participants, however, one participant has been silent through the course of this paper. She has been included but only as the one that makes findings found in eleven out of twelve participants. She is that one holdout-the Air Force E3 wife who is an outlier sharing little in common from an education and employment perspective with the other participants. She may be the "perfect" military wife, content and completely supportive of her husband's career, even if it comes with multiple moves and potentially broken kin networks. Marrying her high school sweetheart, they had decided early on that they would not "leave their kids with strangers or dump them in day care," he would be the breadwinner and she would be the nurturing stay-at-home Mom. When asked if she ever wanted to go college, she answer, "No, never, no interest, it wasn't for me."

Perhaps a career? What did she want to be when she grew up? “A mother. Just a mother. I never wanted a career.” Did she ever work? She had, for less than a year at the exchange at their first duty station in order to have something to do. She quit when she learned she was pregnant. Taken back, I had to process this because I had never heard this response from participants or anyone in my circle. She offered a completely different outlook from interviews filled with the educational and employment challenges and frustrations of the other participants. She was happy and satisfied with her life as it was and did not aspire to have a degree or a career. There was a peace about her that was different from other participants who seemed to be banging their heads against walls because their aspirations eluded them. When asked if she had any recommendations for other wives, she advised, “I don’t know. I think everyone is in such a hurry to get *that* job. Maybe they should just get *a* job and work towards *that* job.” Perhaps.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

The purpose of this project was to investigate enlisted military wives' perceptions of education and employment and if spouses believe that there are factors inherent to the military lifestyle that impede their forward progress in these areas. Of the twelve participants, three from each service branch, with representatives from each rank category, E1-E3, E4-E6, and E7-E9, eleven had experienced impediments to their education and/or employment pursuits. However, could these impediments be firmly tracked back to the military lifestyle? Wives issues funding their education are not exclusive to military spouses, nor are childcare issues and money shortages. Where this gets complicated and takes on factors of the military lifestyle are for example, when money shortages are due to a PCS move where the wife has lost her job and has difficulty finding a new one in their new duty location. Lower ranking wives also complained of their husbands' poor pay as a deterrent to their education, yet previous research demonstrates, the base pay and generous military benefits, including housing and medical, far outweigh what non-military young men can expect to find in the civilian world.

Both examples demonstrate the major finding of this study, that there is a significant gap in participants' knowledge of not only general information, but more specifically, knowledge of existing DoD spousal assistance programs designed to help

them with their education and employment. This information vacuum leads to what I would refer to as “small picture” thinking, a myopic world view that consists of wives’ often challenging daily lives without glimpses into the bigger pictured outside world. This small picture thinking actually prevents wives from knowing many details that would not only change their way of thinking but could also potentially change their life course trajectories. This will be discussed more at length in the upcoming sections of this chapter: suggested areas of future research, study implications, and study limitations.

Suggested Areas of Future Research

Military Spouse Research

There is a dearth of peer-reviewed qualitative studies in the existing quantitatively-focused military spouse research literature. Capturing and listening to the voices of military spouses can benefit researchers where even smallest of studies can offer insight into what challenges face today’s military spouses and what strategies they employ to mitigate them. Also missing are longitudinal studies that could demonstrate how military wives’ lives, careers, needs, and expectations change over time (Skillman 2013). These studies could also distinguish if the spousal assistance programs MyCAA and MSEP adequately address wives’ education and employment needs. For example, E6 and above participants, ineligible for MyCAA, questioned why there is no educational programming for them considering many could also use community college classes or a certificate in a portable career. However, there is no longitudinal data that demonstrates the efficacy of these programs for MyCAA, thus there is no existing measurement to demonstrate the extent of how excluded wives are affected by the eligibility requirements.

SECO's MSEP program would also benefit not only from longitudinal studies but any level of research of the efficacy of this program. Hiring milestones and partner agreement signings are important, yet research into measurements such as average pay, type of work, experience needed, preferred educational level, length of employment, work-from-home, and other details would add a level of transparency and demonstrate the effectiveness of the MSEP effort. Research could answer such questions as how effective is the portable component, were jobs secured through the MSEP portal transferrable to new duty stations or were spouses able to switch to different jobs with the same company after PCS? There are many questions that require a deeper level of research. With this said, military wives must know of the programs and then utilize the resources for the programs to ultimately be effective.

Communication and Outreach

Lack of familiarity of spousal assistance programs and available resources were the most dominant findings in this study relating to the MyCAA and MSEP programs. Five senior wives were familiar with the MyCAA but only one out of the four rank eligible participants knew of the program and her knowledge of it was limited at best. For the MSEP, four participants knew of the program but only one had used it, unsuccessfully. Is there a solution to the information vacuum seen in the majority of participants? How military spouses get their information has been an ongoing question that continues to challenge DoD. Quantitative voluntary studies of spouses cannot solely be the source of inquiry. As demonstrated in the participant demographics of the MOAA survey, minorities and spouses without undergraduate degrees did not respond to their

survey attempts. For their survey, 85% of the over 3000 respondents had bachelors' degrees while the entire military spouse population has only 25% will undergraduate degrees. MOAA, as a military family advocacy organization, has done an admirable job in at least attempting to widen the scope of information to include race and education as demographics. However, DoD should do more research into the most effective vehicles to distribute the spousal assistance program messaging.

Yet this is not solely DoD's challenge, it also falls to the service branches' headquarters to ensure their spouses receive the messaging and are aware of the programming available to them. Spousal assistance programming is originally created at the DoD level with the basic framework being disseminated down to the headquarters of the service branches. It is the within the headquarters of the branches' that these programs are further customized to implement within each installations' existing structure. Standards are set for staffing, outreach, and ultimately, funding, which in effect produces variances amongst the branches. There is a notion within the military community, especially among policy makers, that many DoD programs are "purple" meaning standard across all branches. However, the level of branch funding allotted to the operation, including staffing and outreach, of available family programming varies not only branch to branch, but from installation to installation. More research should be devoted to best practices and joint efforts to disseminate the spousal assistance programming message.

Stereotypes

One area that deserves deeper research is to investigate the effects of negative stereotypes and slurs directed at military wives. Examples of negative stereotypes include the synonymous terms often used in military communities, dependapotamus and dependasaurus. Nine out of twelve wives were very familiar with the term (s) and most had heard it used by their service member husband or another male service member. A good starting place to begin a future investigation are the Facebook pages, described by the Air Force E6 participant, that are dedicated to the military wife as a dependapotamus.

Implications

The findings of this study support previous research that there are factors inherent to the military lifestyle that impede military spouses in their education and employment pursuits. Additionally, the link between spouses' well-being and their satisfaction with the level of education and employment status was strongly reflected in participants' relating periods of negative well-being to issues surrounding their education and employment pursuits. Though this is a small sample size, which restricts any generalizability, for these participants, there is a significant gap in DoD spousal assistance programming knowledge. Also missing is any one vehicle of information delivery among those participants who were knowledgeable in these areas. Successful communication was seen in installation outreach efforts such as inclusion in installation-wide welcome aboard events and individual unit activities. However, wives need to first know about these events and then second, show up.

In-Town Living

Though above DoD's figure of 75% of military families living off-installation, this study's higher figure of eleven out of twelve participants living off-installation detail can serve as both a limitation and an opportunity. As it informs implications, wives rarely came to base, some only for monthly or bi-monthly trips to the commissary thus attention needs to be paid to how to reach these military wives embedded in the local communities. The majority of military wives are mothers so perhaps partnerships can be formed with local school districts to target military wives at back-to-school nights, system-wide automated phone calls, backpack fliers, or additional opportunities for outreach.²⁷ One incentive for local school districts to partner is the sizeable annual federal funding it receives for educating military children. Area churches are also heavily populated by military families and may be an additional source of disseminating spousal assistance information. One large implication from not only this study but anecdotal information from other military spouses is messaging must become more community-centric.

Depression

The findings of the study also suggest that the negative effects to wives' well-being of unsuccessful education and employment pursuits, as well as other factors inherent to the military lifestyle, do take an emotional toll on military spouses. This link is not new nor is it uninvestigated, however, research skews toward depression as an

²⁷ If a military family lives off-installation they cannot enroll their children in on-installation DoD schools, thus the outreach suggestion to focus on schools in the local community.

output of deployment and/or reintegration post deployment. The positive impact to spouses' well-being when they succeed in their education and employment pursuits should add an urgency to re-evaluating the messaging and programming so it can better reach and serve the group it is trying to help. Additionally, outside of the areas of education and employment, service branches and units should recommit to inclusionary efforts to bring in spouses who may be socially, emotionally, or geographically isolated into the fold to give them a sense of support and belonging to the larger military community. A more assertive approach may be necessary but these tough decisions rest on the military for consideration and implementation. Recommended actions include mandatory inclusion of spouses on unit list serves, with opt-out versus opt-in, and/or mandatory attendance to welcome aboard events, to ensure spouses are included and well-informed.

Limitations

Sample

The largest limitation to this study is the small size of the sample. Research studies with this small of a sample cannot be generalized. A much larger study of a representative sample of military wives, preferably mixed methods where the survey component can supply the interview pool, would be ideal. There was also a geographical limitation restricting participants to only one region versus a larger sample from locations inside and outside of the US. The restriction of in-person only interviews played a role in the geographical limitation.

Program participation should be considered another limitation because only one participant had utilized the MyCAA program and another participant was the only one to have used the MSEP program. With so few users I could not attempt to analyze the effectiveness of these programs. A larger sample may include more participants of these programs and their experiences would enlarge the available data to better evaluate if these programs meet the needs of military spouses. A quantitative survey to capture program participation that could guide the sampling process thus ensuring program users as participants, would have expedited the recruitment process and resulted in a more varied sample. Additional voices such as dual military couples, active duty women, civilian male spouses, same-sex partners, and veteran spouses would also enhance a future study.

Recruitment of Wives of Enlisted Military Men from the Lower Ranks

The higher the rank of wife the easier it was to recruit. I had many E6 and up volunteers, so many there were not enough slots. However, I was challenged in recruiting lower ranking wives who did not seem to be on the social media or in the same networks as senior wives from their service branches. There were also junior enlisted wives who initially expressed interest on the Air Force and Army private Facebook pages only to lose interest after being told there was no compensation for participating. Senior enlisted wives expressed appreciation for the opportunity to have their voices heard and making positive change. Other recruitment attempts such as recruiting potential E1-E3 wives at the commissary on payday were ineffective. It was not until undertaking the data collection of this study that I learned that this group of wives rarely come to the

installation, not to mention the commissary. In the end, E1-E3 wives were recruited and interviewed but seemed to use the interviews as more of an opportunity to have some kind of conduit to the military community that would, at least temporarily, decrease their isolation and information vacuum.

Military Organization Recruiting

I did employ another recruiting effort that was extremely unsuccessful and worse, brought its own set of challenges. Reaching out via phone, email, and in-person directly to the military organization through installations' Family Member Employment Assistance Program (FMEAP) offices, medical centers, units, and commands, netted me zero assistance. For example, when calling Fort Belvoir FMEAP office, the first person on the call seemed most helpful stating that I should speak to the staff member in charge of Family Readiness Groups (FRGs) for the installation. Upon being transferred, the staff member gruffly replied, "I can't help you" and ended the call.

Additionally, in retrospect this project suffered from poor timing due to unanticipated terrorist activity and the resulting increased vigilance in DoD circles. The Islamic State (ISIS) released what was referred to as a "Hot List" of targeted personnel in the military organization. Apparently they utilized social media networks and additional online sources to formulate this information. DoD reached down to all commands across all branches to advise service members and their families to not only avoid sharing any personal information with outsiders, but to report inquiries to the appropriate criminal investigating officials. Without knowing this, I emailed the project details to a local military office with a request for recruiting assistance. Shortly thereafter I was contacted

by a special agent from Naval Criminal Investigation Service (NCIS) and advised I was being investigated as a possible threat. Adjudicated and cleared, the process, though stressful, did serve a purpose in providing me with invaluable military vetted status for future research. Other researchers attempting to recruit within the military community will have to consider this severe limitation and reevaluated recruitment avenues against this “new normal.”

Conclusion

Listening to the voices in this study, there are factors that impede military spouses’ education and employment pursuits, namely money and PCS respectively. Yet regardless of their obstacles, participants shared a strong desire to better themselves and contribute financially to their household. Isolation or failed attempts to improve their education level or employment status often led to self-described depression. Looking to previous research, this study demonstrates the link between military spouses’ well-being and their satisfaction in these areas. Heavily funded DoD spousal assistance programs and resources are available to help wives pursue their goals to advance their education or seek productive employment, activities that can alleviate wives’ isolation and depression. But military spouses need to know about the programs in order to use them.

Responsibility for low program awareness cannot solely be blamed on DoD, the service branches, or military spouses. Each must do their part to improve outreach and participation. With a 100 million dollar budget requested for 2016, Spouse Education and Career Opportunities (SECO) program is, as a good steward of taxpayers’ dollars, expected to continue to reevaluate and improve their messaging and marketing in an

effort to reach more military spouses, even those deeply embedded in local communities. Ideas from all comers regardless of research scope size should be heard along with the voices of those military spouses who took the time to share their perceptions, goals, and experiences in the hope that they could create positive change. The service branches also play an integral role in pushing the program information and inclusion message further down to the installations, unit, and families. Lastly, spouses must do their part to get and stay connected, either joining a list serve such Military OneSource, or attend an installation-sponsored spousal assistance program brief. Perhaps the easiest most effective tool is to interact with other spouses who are often the best source of information.

If a connection can be made between military spouses and the programs designed to assist them it will be a win for all involved. Spouses would have the tools to increase their own well-being and position their life course on an upward trajectory. Service member spouses would share in the positive outcomes experienced by their civilian mates. Ultimately, the military organization succeeds in retaining and valuing willing spouse partners who are themselves committed to the military and its lifestyle.

APPENDIX A

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Semi-Structure interviews

Three sections: I Education
 II Employment
 III Well-Being

12 interviews total 3 per Branch of Service

I. Education Questions

- a) Are you satisfied with your level of education?
- b) If yes, did you complete your education before you married your servicemember?
- c) If no, what education would you like to pursue?
- d) Is this a portable career? If so, is this why you considered it?
- e) Have you attended any classes after high school?
- f) If so, how did you pay for it? Student loans? Cash? Military assistance?
- g) Did you complete your program? If no, why did you stop going?
- h) Do you want to go back?
- i) What obstacles do you feel are preventing you from going back?
- j) Do you know about the MyCAA program?
- k) If not, are you involved in any unit/installation spouse programs?
- l) Do you live near an installation?
- m) If so, how often do you come to the installation? 1-2 X per month?
- n) If E-1 to E-5, would you use the program? Why/Why not?
- o) What would you say is the best way you get your information?
- p) Did you and/or your family expect you to attend a community college or four year university after high school?
- q) What does having reached your desired education level mean to you?

II. Employment Questions

- a) Are you satisfied with your employment status?
 - a. If not, what would you like to pursue?
 - b. Do you need more education for that position?
 - c. Are you currently looking for a job? Or do you have a job and consider yourself underemployed?

- d. What obstacles do you think get in your way when trying to find a job? Stay at a job? Get a job that matches your qualifications?
- e. Are you interested in a portable career you can carry to each duty station such as a dental hygienist or administrative assistant?
- f. Have you been to the Military Spouse Employment Partnership (MSEP) portal? Have you been to the Family Member Employment Assistance Program (FMEAP) aboard installation?
- g. What is your perception of the military's efforts to help military wives find employment?
- h) If employed, did you use the FMEAP or MSEP programs to assist you getting a job?
 - a. Do you have a specific certificate, license, or degree that one must have to do your job?
 - b. If so, do feel like your _____ helps make your job portable – say like a nurse who can easily find a job at each new duty station?
 - c. If you were back in the job market would you use FMEAP or MSEP?
 - d. Would you first reach out to others in your industry in your new duty location or use installation formal support programs first?

III. Well-being questions

- a) Do you think the military cares about your education and employment satisfaction?
- b) Do you think that being satisfied with your education and employment positively affects your well-being and/or your perception of yourself?
- c) Do you consider your family more traditional in that you are the primary parent who handles the majority of domestic, childcare duties?
- d) Does your husband encourage you to work? Is this for your personal satisfaction and/or financial contribute to family?
- e) If you do work, are household duties split or do you perform normative female gendered labor (second shift)?
- f) Are you happy with the military lifestyle? If not, do you think your negative feelings about the military negatively influence your relationships, perception of the military, and your overall well-being?
- g) Have you ever heard the terms dependapotamus or dependasaurus? Do you use these terms yourself? Do you feel that these terms are attached to enlisted wives? Junior enlisted wives? All personnel (enlisted/officer) wives?
- h) Do negative stereotypes of enlisted wives negatively affect your perception of yourself?
- i) Do you feel that your class or social status, or race/ethnicity if applicable, limit or impact your military lifestyle or personal perception in any way?

Conclusions

- a) Do you have ideas you'd like to share on how the spouse employment and assistance programs can be improved?
- b) Do you think the programs answer your needs or do you think other areas such as childcare assistance are more of a priority for you?
- c) What would you consider the hardest part of being a military wife?
- d) Do you have any suggestions or changes that would positively impact your military lifestyle?
- e) Would you recommend the military lifestyle to a friend or family member? If so, why?
- f) Would you be interested in a program where the Department of Defense pays for military spouses' Bachelors' degrees (and advanced degrees if applicable, example Masters Social Work) in areas where there is a consistent shortage across military installations (social work/accounting/finance/human resources) in exchange for a five year commitment to service aboard an installation or in a different local federal government capacity?

APPENDIX B

GAO.gov Open Recommendations for DoD Spouse Education and Career Opportunities (SECO)
Submitted 23 Dec 12 remain open as of 27 Jul 15
<http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-13-60>

- **Recommendation:** To enhance collaboration among the various entities involved in delivering employment services to military spouses and to better monitor the effectiveness of these services, the Secretary of Defense should consider incorporating key practices to sustain and enhance collaboration when developing and finalizing its spouse employment guidance, such as agreeing on roles and responsibilities and developing compatible policies and procedures.

Agency: Department of Defense

Status: Open

Comments: DOD partially concurred with this recommendation. While DOD said it would incorporate collaboration practices as the Spouse Education and Career Opportunities (SECO) program matures, it has already taken initial action in this area. For example, DOD noted that it created the advisory group, as well as partnerships developed with various organizations. These are laudable efforts, however, they do not directly address the specifics of our recommendation to develop and finalize guidance for spouse employment programs. Incorporating key collaboration practices into the guidance that DOD is developing, such as agreeing on roles and responsibilities, would be beneficial.

Recommendation: To enhance collaboration among the various entities involved in delivering employment services to military spouses and to better monitor the effectiveness of these services, the Secretary of Defense should consider incorporating key attributes of successful performance measures when developing and finalizing performance measures, such as ensuring reliability of the data used in the measures

and covering key program activities.

Agency: Department of Defense

Status: Open

Comments: DOD partially concurred with our recommendation, noting that it intends to improve performance measurement but has already taken steps to incorporate key attributes of successful performance measures. For example, DOD said it is developing employment data collection for military spouses directly from Military Spouse Employment Partnership (MSEP) partners and anticipates completion by winter of 2013. GAO recognizes these efforts, but believes that it would be beneficial to incorporate attributes of successful performance measures as DOD develops its performance monitoring system.

APPENDIX C

IRB approved Recruiting Scripts

Unheard Voices: Education and Employment Perspectives of Enlisted Military Wives

Sampling

Phone script

“I got your name from _____ who said she spoke with you about participating in a research study about enlisted military wives and their perceptions of their education and employment.” (Affirmative response.)

“First I need to confirm your husband’s rank is in category [E1-E3, E4-E6, or E7-E9].” (Response. Go or No Go. If a category I need then move on with a description of the research, if not, thank her and let her know I will not need to conduct an interview.)

“I’d like to go over a few things before we set up a time for the interview. I’m not sure if _____ told you that I’m an enlisted military wife too? I’m a Marine wife and I am the only researcher on this project so you can speak freely and use all the acronyms you want. OK?” (Affirmative response)

“You’ll need to agree to your voice being recorded. The recording will then be transcribed but it will have a pseudonym attached that will keep your identity confidential. Only your pseudonym will appear in any published materials. Is this OK with you?” (Affirmative response)

“There are no benefits to you as a participant other than to further research in contributing, in your own words, your opinions, perceptions, and experiences in the areas of military spouse education and employment. Findings will be forward to the appropriate Department of Defense policy makers and family program decision makers for consideration in making future funding and programming decisions. There is no risk to you for participating in this project. Do you understand this?” (Affirmative response)

“I apologize for taking so much time but I want to make sure that we’re on the same page before we set up an interview. You’ll see many of these same comments in a consent form I will ask you to review and sign before the interview.” (Affirmative response.)

“The only time commitment you will need to make is to the interview that will take approximately 30 minutes. Ideally it will be conducted in person and I will come to you at your convenience. We can meet on base or somewhere else nearby. Will that work for you?”

Set time for in-person interview.

Email script

“I got your name and email from _____. She said that your husband is an E_ and you may be willing to participate in a research study on enlisted military wives and their perceptions of their own education and employment. I’ll tell you a bit about it and then you can decide.

This research is being conducted to gather the perceptions, needs, and experiences of enlisted military wives in the areas of education and employment. Rarely are there opportunities for military wives to voice their own opinions in an open, constructive environment where the findings may be reviewed by those in a decision-making capacity for military spouse programming. This is that opportunity.

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to take part in an in-depth, in-person interview of approximately 30 minutes after you need to agree that your voice can be recorded. The interviews are casual and conducted by me, a Marine spouse, so it’s a pressure-free event where you can feel free to use acronyms.

The interview will then transcribed and analyzed. Your identity will remain confidential and you will be given a pseudonym that will be appear in any published material.

There are no foreseeable risks for participating in this research.

There are no benefits to you as a participant other than to further research in contributing, in your own words, your opinions, perceptions, and experiences in the areas of military spouse education and employment. Findings will be forward to the appropriate Department of Defense policy makers and family program decision makers for consideration in making future funding and programming decisions.

Some of this language is taken directly from a consent form I will need you to complete before we set up a time for the in-person interview. Please respond and let me know if this is something you would like to participate in. You can also call me to discuss the project in more detail should you have any questions. My number is XXX XXX XXXX.

Thank you.

R/ Felicia Garland-Jackson

APPENDIX D

Unheard Voices: Education and Employment Perspectives of Enlisted Military Wives

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

RESEARCH PROCEDURES

This research is being conducted to gather the perceptions, needs, and experiences of enlisted military wives in the areas of education and employment. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to participate in an in-depth interview of approximately 30 minutes. All Interviews will be audiotaped, transcribed, and coded thematically. Final study findings will be included in a thesis and will include direct quotes from participants using only pseudonyms.

RISKS

There are no foreseeable risks for participating in this research.

BENEFITS

There are no benefits to you as a participant other than to further research in contributing, in your own words, your opinions, perceptions, and experiences in the areas of military spouse education and employment. Findings will be forwarded, without participants' names or any identifiable information, to the appropriate Department of Defense policy makers and family program decision makers for consideration in making future funding and programming decisions.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The data in this study will be confidential. You will be given a pseudonym and details such as your husband's duty station, job, and deployments will be excluded from the study. Information such as your specific location, employer, and ages of children will also be excluded. The researcher will have the only key to the pseudonym identification information and this will not be shared with any other researcher. Audio tapes and transcribed files will be secured in a central location for five years after the conclusion of this project. Files will then be destroyed.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason. If you decide not to participate or if you withdraw from the study, there is no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. There are no costs to you or any other party.

CONTACT

This research is being conducted Felicia Garland-Jackson at George Mason University. She may be reached at XXX-XXX-XXXX for questions or to report a research-related problem. The faculty advisor for this research is Dr. Yvette Richards Jordan, who may be reached at XXX-XXX-XXXX. You may contact the George Mason University Office of Research Integrity & Assurance at 703-993-4121 if you have questions or comments regarding your rights as a participant in the research.

This research has been reviewed according to George Mason University procedures governing your participation in this research.

CONSENT

I have read this form and agree to participate in this study.

_____ I agree to audio taping.

_____ I do not agree to audio taping.

Name

Date of Signature

Version date: January 15, 2015

APPENDIX E

<i>Participants' Demographics</i>								
Rank of Husband	Branch	Place of birth	Race/Ethnicity	Interracial Marriage	On/Off Base Housing	Education Level	Emp.Status	Children
E8	Army	VA	Caucasian	No	Off	MA	Employed	0
E6	Army	CA	Caucasian	No	Off	BA	Employed	0
E2	Army	PA	Caucasian	No	Off	Some College	Unemployed	0
E9	USMC	VA	Caucasian	Yes/AA	Off	Some College	Unemployed	2
E6	USMC	Mexico	Hispanic	No	Off	Some College	Unemployed	1
E3	USMC	TX	Hispanic	Yes/C	On	Some College/Trade	Unemployed	2
E7	Navy	CA	Caucasian	No	Off	LPN	Unemployed	1
E6	Navy	Japan	Japanese	Yes/C	Off	MA	Unemployed	2
E3	Navy	TN	AA	No	Off	Some College	Employed	1
E8	AF	NH	Caucasian	No	Off	BA	Unemployed	2
E6	AF	OH	Caucasian	No	Off	Trade	Unemployed	2
E3	AF	CA	Hispanic	No	Off	No College	Unemployed	2
AF=Air Force			AA=African-American		C=Caucasian			

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