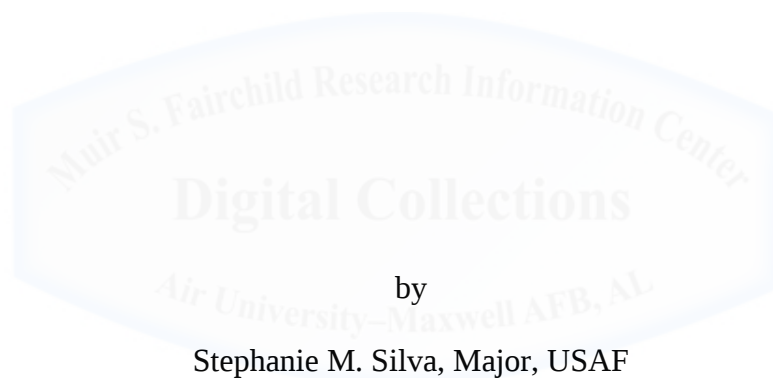


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POSTPARTUM POLICIES FOR MILITARY MOTHERS:
THEIR IMPACT ON RETENTION OF FEMALE AIR FORCE OFFICERS



by

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ABSTRACT

Women are leaving the military at a higher rate than their male counterparts. While there is no one reason that women are separating, work-family balance issues have often been noted as a cause. Recently, the Air Force released multiple policies that could help increase the retention of women in the military including increased maternity leave, increased post-partum deployment deferment, increased exemption time for post-partum fitness assessment, and the career intermission program. This research conducted a literature review in conjunction with interviews of women that are currently serving in the military to determine the effectiveness of these policies to increase the retention of women. The literature review looked at each policy in depth and compared these policies to both the government civilian sector and the private sector. Women from different career fields, ranks and family situations were interviewed to gain a better understanding of why women continue to serve or separate and their perspectives on the new policies. The research concluded that these policies have the potential to increase retention, but that predicting retention is difficult because each career field is different and an individual's priorities change over time. It was determined that the Air Force is viewed as family friendly and supports a good work-family balance but is limited by its mission that must be accomplished.

I: Introduction

Women have served in the military in many different capacities dating back before the United States Civil War. It, however, was not until 1948 when women were officially granted access to serve in the active component of the military during peacetime.ⁱ Shortly after this integration, Executive Order (EO) 10240 forced women who became pregnant or who had children to separate from the service.ⁱⁱ Almost a quarter of a century later, this law was changed. This change has spurred many conversations about female service members who are also full time mothers.

In 2002, the Office of the Secretary of Defense had the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services (DACOWITS) add “family matters” to the issues that they investigate as a committee.ⁱⁱⁱ The Air Force leads all of the other services with 20.5% of officers being women, but retention of women across the DoD has been a problem, with a high separation rate between the ranks of O-3 and O-5 compared to their male counterparts.^{iv} The Air Force recognizes the importance of having a diverse work force so leaders have implemented many programs to help attract, recruit and retain women. The question is whether or not these policies are effective.

This paper will examine the impact of increased maternity leave, increased postpartum deferred deployment, increased exemption of the fitness assessment (FA), and the Air Force’s Career Intermission Program (CIP) on the retention of female officers in the Air Force. Some research has been done to determine if there is a problem with retention, but there has been little done to characterize why this problem exists or how to alleviate these issues.

Women leave the Air Force for many reasons: deployment and operational tempo, work-family balance, higher pay, and outside opportunities are just a few of the reasons. RAND Corporation looked at the retention and promotion rates of women across the DoD and showed

that women and minorities are not well represented at the O-6 and above ranks because many women leave the service at the ranks of O-3 and O-4.^v The study did not specifically look into the reasons why women leave the service, but supported a previous study conducted in the 1990s that identified this same retention issue among women.^{vi} This phenomenon can also be seen with professional civilian women leaving the workforce around the ten-year point as well. According to a study looking at data from the U.S. Census Bureau 2003, a woman is five times more likely to leave at the ten-year point than her male counterparts.^{vii} Some studies have tried to pinpoint and solve the problem of why this occurs, but many contributing factors make it difficult to solve the problem with a single response.

Due to the lack of information to answer the question of “why” women are leaving the service at this time, this research provides a starting point by gathering information from 10 female officers that are currently serving in the Air Force. Each of these women was interviewed to collect information about their perspective on retention when they first joined the service compared to their current perspective. The new policies were only recently released so it is too early to determine whether these policies will increase the retention of women officers during this critical timeframe. The research serves as a launch-point for future work by identifying any trends or themes. It will also capture initial reactions to the new policies. This is qualitative research to build the understanding of “why” women leave the Air Force and to provide other avenues to help increase the retention of women in the Air Force. This research explores the topic of retention, specifically where it ties into family, motherhood, and the work-family balance.

This paper will first analyze the literature surrounding this topic. Once the knowledge gaps are identified, it will lay out the methodology to execute the qualitative research. Then there

will be an analysis of the interviewee responses, identifying common themes among the women. Finally, it will draw a conclusion on the impact of the new policies with recommendations on how the Air Force can move forward to resolve this problem of retention in the future.

II: Background and Literature Review

One of the four top priorities for the Air Force is to retain a high-quality, talented and diverse total force, which includes the role of women.^{viii} As one of its goals, the Air Force wants to identify issues that contribute to the lower retention rate of women as well as implementing exit surveys when both military and civilians decide to end their service to the Air Force.^{ix} These statements make it clear that the Air Force recognizes and is concerned about the retention of women in the Air Force.

RAND Corporation has conducted at least two studies around the retention of minorities and women in the military. The first study concluded women had a lower promotion rate and retention rate as compared to their male counterparts and that women were concerned about the career progression, sexual harassment and family obligations.^x The first study conducted interviews and focus groups to inform its research but overall sample sizes were small. Due to the timing of the first study during the drawdowns after the Cold War and before the attacks of September 11th, along with all of the changes that this event brought in regards to operations and perceptions of the military, a second study was conducted.^{xi} The results, in regards to the retention of female officers across the DoD, had the same overall result: women are not retained at the same rate as their male counterparts. Additional information was collected regarding closed occupations to women and potential impacts on women's careers, but no definitive answers on why the retention of women was lower than men. As of 2012, military women across all services at the rank of O-3 are retained at a rate of 15.1 percentage points lower than their

male counterparts.^{xii} At the O-4 rank, women are retained at a much higher rate but still 3.9 percentage points lower than their male counterparts.^{xiii} At the O-5 rank, women are retained at a rate that is 35 percentage points lower as compared to their male counterparts.^{xiv}

The three most senior leaders in the Air Force signed a Diversity and Inclusion Initiatives Memo in March of 2015 that identified multiple initiatives to increase the diversity of our Air Force.^{xv} Among these initiatives, the Career Intermission Program (CIP) and the deferred deployment of post partum women was introduced.^{xvi} On 27 August 2015, a change was introduced into AFI 36-2905 that extended the fitness assessment exemption for women from six months to twelve months after giving birth.^{xvii} In addition, in Feb 2016, the DoD released a Memorandum that established a standard length of maternity leave for all of the services to 12 weeks.^{xviii} The Air Force released a guidance memo about the CIP in May 2016 and in June 2016, updated the Air Force Instruction (AFI) 36-2110, *Assignments*, publications to officially implement the deployment deferment for women after having a baby from six to 12 months.^{xix,xx}

The CIP allows for top-performing Airmen, both men and women as well as officer and enlisted, to compete for slots that offer a one to three year inactivation from active duty and a transition to Individual Ready Reserve (IRR) status to meet personal or professional needs.^{xxi} The individual will return to active duty after completion of this agreed upon time in the IRR. The purpose of this program is to provide “work-life flexibility” and to retain the experience and training of some of the Air Force’s top talent, which would otherwise be lost due to short-term separation needs.^{xxii} The CIP held its initial pilot program in 2014 with 32 Airmen, and 40 Airmen in 2015.^{xxiii} Individuals selected for this program continue to retain medical and dental benefits, as well as receive one-fifteenth of their yearly pay each year.^{xxiv} The CIP exists to provide a non-traditional avenue to give Airman a break from service to pursue a short-term

opportunity and allow them to easily transition back into the service. Many individuals will use this time to pursue a degree or other professional opportunity, as well as spend additional time with family or meet a family need. An Airman returning from the CIP program will have an Active Duty Service Commitment of two months for every one month on CIP.^{xxv}

The deferred deployment change from six months to 12 months was implemented after the DoD established a baseline of four months minimum deferment to allow for medical recovery of the mother, bonding between the mother and child, and time for families to prepare a child care plan.^{xxvi} Each service was encouraged to look at operational needs to determine how long deployments could be deferred without operational impacts. Analysis was conducted prior to the initial announcement and it was determined that this change would have a negligible impact on manning and deployment levels.^{xxvii} Both the Air Force and the Navy have adopted a 12-month deployment deferment with the Army and Marines a shorter period of six months.^{xxviii} However, these deferments can be waived at the request of an Airman who feels she is ready to deploy earlier.

Women now have 12 months instead of six month to recover from having a child before they are required to take a fitness test. According to the studies conducted by DACOWITS, this change was implemented because it can take women up to 12 months to be able to lose any weight that was gained during the pregnancy.^{xxix} While there has always been the option for doctors to extend this date out for women with medical complications or issues, the concern was women were not given a sufficient amount of time to recover and then get back into shape before taking a fitness assessment.^{xxx}

The DoD implemented the change of maternity leave from six weeks to twelve weeks across all of the services. The real impetus behind this change was the medical impact to help

women heal from the birth event as well as to establish strong bonds with the child.^{xxxii} Maternity leave is convalescent leave and is therefore a type of medical leave. Medical personnel can extend this leave if necessary, but the standard is set for 12 weeks. For all services, except for the Navy, this was an increase in maternity leave. The Navy had recently established their maternity leave policy to be 18 weeks.^{xxxiii} With this new change, they are required to change to 12 weeks like the rest of the services.

Government civilians have different opportunities in regards to maternity leave options and ways to accommodate the work-family balance. One striking difference is the lack of a standard paid leave for a birth like the military is given. According to the *Office of Personnel Management (OPM) 2015 Handbook*, civilian women are able to use accumulated sick leave for any period of time in which they are incapacitated due to pregnancy or childbirth.^{xxxiii} Sick leave means that the employee is away from work, but receives full pay and benefits. Sick leave cannot be denied as long as the woman is still recovering medically which the handbook notes is normally six to eight weeks, and it cannot be used for solely bonding with the child.^{xxxiv} In addition, civilian workers are able to take up to 12 weeks of unpaid maternity leave according to the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA).^{xxxv} This can be used in addition to the use of sick leave and can be used anytime within the 12 months following the child's birth.^{xxxvi} While FMLA leave is not paid, it does ensure that the employer will retain their position or an equivalent position.

Other options for government civilians to support the work-family balance are flexible work schedules and teleworking. Both of these options require pre-coordinated approval by a supervisor, but provide additional options to give mother and child extra time to bond. Flexible work schedules allow an employee to work 80 hours in less than 10 work days.^{xxxvii}

Teleworking, which means working from home, can only take place if the time that is done working at home will not be conducted while caring for the newborn.^{xxxviii} All of these options give government civilians the opportunity to work with their supervisor to find a situation that will work best for both their boss and their family.

The private sector has seen a trend among some of the larger companies toward greater maternity and paternity leave packages in order to show their family-friendly structures. Companies such as Netflix give employees “unlimited” time off for the first year following a birth.^{xxxix} Adobe provides 10 weeks of medical leave and 16 weeks of paternity leave, totaling 26 weeks of paid leave.^{xl} While there are some companies that are offering twenty weeks or greater of paid leave, many companies average between 12 to 16 weeks.^{xli} However, many do not offer any paid leave to their employees. According to the Department of Labor, as of 1993 the FMLA requires all eligible employers, including all public agencies and private sectors that employ over 50 people within a 75 mile radius, to provide qualifying individuals with 12 weeks of unpaid leave within the first year of a child’s birth while holding their position.^{xlii} Those businesses that do not fall under these rules or employees that have not worked with the company for at least a year with a minimum number of required hours are not guaranteed unpaid time off while keeping their jobs intact. Depending on the job, maternity leave varies by company.

An issue that likely influenced the increased deployment deferment is the fact that more women are breastfeeding their infants. There has been a 4.3 percent increase in the number of babies that were breastfed from 2000 to 2008, which is a 10 percent increase in the number of babies that were still breastfeeding at 6 months and a 7.4 percent increase of babies that were breastfeeding at 12 months.^{xliii} In 2012, the American Academy of Pediatrics reaffirmed both the

short and long term benefits of breastfeeding, emphasizing that women should exclusively breastfeed for 6 months with supplemental breastfeeding for 12 months or longer as complimentary food is introduced and should continue longer as agreeable to both the mother and child.^{xliv} Air Force Instruction (AFI) 44-102 falls in line with these recommendations, affirming exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life will provide optimal nutrition for an infant.^{xlv} The AFI highlights “extensive medical research has documented that breastfeeding has significant health, nutritional, immunologic, developmental, emotional, social, and economic benefits to mother and baby” and that deferment from deployment for 12 months will give breastfeeding mothers the “full medical benefit of breastfeeding.”^{xlvi} This AFI also dictates that supervisors should work with breastfeeding mothers to adjust work schedules to accommodate a 15-30 minute break every three to four hours to pump breast milk.^{xlvii} It emphasizes that a suitable location must be provided and that a restroom does not qualify.^{xlviii} This instruction has required many supervisors to advocate for their Airman to get a suitable location established.

Women, as well as men, separate from the Air Force for many reasons. Some officers never plan to spend more than five years in the service. Others, while planning their career, are deterred due to bad assignments or lured by outside career opportunities and the associated monetary compensation. Some get tired of the continuous force shaping or reduction in force programs that left them uneasy about their future with lack of job security. Still, some of the most common reasons individuals leave are deployments, high operations tempo and family issues. It is difficult to isolate a single issue since most often there are multiple reasons that contribute to a woman’s decision to separate. Due to this issue, it is even more difficult to solve the retention problem if it cannot be isolated to a single reason.

Deployments and high ops tempo are common reasons that women separate from the Air Force. Depending on the career field, an officer could be deployed frequently due to manning or the criticality of the position. However, if an officer only deploys within their AEF cycle, deployments will occur every two and a half years. After the events of September 11th, there have been sustained conflicts in the Middle East and other locations around the world which have required a steady stream of deployments for many service members. Deployments require a service member to be separated from their family, friends, and sometimes coworkers for approximately six months. Depending on the deployment location and job, this could be a very stressful six months that is filled with intense, life-threatening experiences. Other deployments may be more low key and in a less hostile environment, but still require time away from their home and family. Many service members are at their peak performance on a deployment, finally getting to put their training to use. Some members will prefer the deployed environment to home station. In 2002, RAND Corporation concluded that there was a positive correlation to those service members that had high deployment rates in non-hostile environments with high retention.^{xlix} The retention was higher for those that deployed to hostile environments compared to those that did not deploy at all.¹ Unfortunately, this study was conducted primarily at the end of the Gulf War and there was no data that broke down these associations by gender. Since then, deployment rates have increased and have lasted over a longer period of time. Still, the impact of deployment on airmen that have a family may be different.

Deployments can be hard on families. When a parent leaves, everyone is required to adjust, routines change, and those left at home must adapt to fill the gap of their loved one that is away. Children are affected as well with studies showing that younger children are vulnerable to behavior issues, showing aggression and depression, while slightly older children can have

difficulty at home and with their friends.^{li} One study noted that the effects on children 18 months to 3 years seemed to be less impacted by deployments than any other child age. This is when attachment relationships are being formed and since often this attachment is with the mother, assuming that it is the father that is deployed, there is less impact on the child.^{lii} Following this assumption, the impact would be even greater when a mother deploys during this time period. Other problems that have been noted among children with parents that are deployed include sleep problems, anxiety, stress, declining grades, and overall maladaptive behaviors.^{liii}

Another issue that affects women in military regarding family issues is childcare. While every Air Force Base has a Child Development Center and Youth Center with the cost of care subsidized by the government, if childcare desires are not effectively met, it could affect retention. In 2006, a survey on the status of the military childcare system across the DoD found that only 10 percent of the respondents claimed to have an unmet need, however, over 50 percent of the respondents said that they preferred different care than what was provided.^{liv} This study reported that a third of the respondents said they were willing to separate from the military due to child care needs not being met.^{lv} Not only does it need to be accessible, but it also needs to support the dynamic hours that some military members must work. In addition, single parents and dual military couples were much more likely to leave the military due to childcare issues.^{lvi} This finding may highlight the challenge of raising children in the military environment.

The balance of work and family is not isolated to military members nor does it fall solely on women. Lewis Coser, author of *Greedy Institutions: Patterns of Undivided Commitment*, discussed how the different institutions claim a person's time, energy and focus. These insights were written over 40 years ago, and with the advent of technology, there are probably more "institutions" that garner for this time. Coser stated, "Such competition for loyalty and

commitment is a perennial problem because these are scarce resources. Not only do human beings possess only finite libidinal energies for cathecting social objects, but their resources of time are similarly limited. As a consequence, various groups having a claim on individuals' energies and time compete with one another in the effort to draw as much as they can, within normative limits, from the available pool of resources.”^{lvii}

Segal looked at the conflicting greedy institutions of family and military that can still be seen today and reflected upon the work-family balance.^{lviii} While women are the primary family member that is torn in this fight of time and energy devoted to the family, men are certainly not free from this pressure. Segal notes that the family goes through different life phases in which it is greedier than others.^{lix} Obviously younger children need constant supervision. Finding daycare for an infant and toddler during normal work hours can be a challenge, but once a child enters the school age years, afterschool care has to be considered since most schools are released before the end of the workday. Once a child enters the teenage years, a time which is formative to their young adult years, they are often involved in extracurricular activities which require a completely different kind of support, demanding a lot of emotional energy.^{lx} This ranges from being able to pick up and drop off kids at activities to being able to attend and support them during their events. This often requires the attention of both parents, helping their child to navigate through the complicated stage of adolescence.^{lxi} Segal predicts that as time progresses, men will pick up more of the burden that has been traditionally the women's role, and while there have been some strides made in this direction, women still struggle the most regarding the work-balance issue.^{lxii}

The retention of women is not just an issue within the military, but is also a problem in the private sector. Patti Miles attempted to understand this issue as companies were seeing

professional women leave the workforce at a rate of five times that of their male counterparts at or around the ten-year point.^{lxiii} This number has doubled since 1989, showing that this phenomenon has increased despite the high education rates of women, which has been relatively equal to men, and increased employment opportunities with continually less jobs shut off to women.^{lxiv} Working women tend to the majority of the burden for childcare and housework, following traditional gender roles, despite a spouse's income or time spent working.^{lxv} Another study showed that even when women made more money and worked more hours than their spouse, women still conducted more household work, childcare and chores than men.^{lxvi} Women fall under societal pressures to not only rise through the employment hierarchy, but these same outside pressures are not always put on their male counterparts.^{lxvii} This work-balance issue will play a role in the decision-making of women to continue within the workforce, not only in the military but in the civilian sector as well.

Women are more intrinsically motivated in their jobs compared to men who are more extrinsically motivated.^{lxviii} This means that while men are motivated by pay and promotions, this is not necessarily the case with women; however, studies have been inconclusive on what does motivate women.^{lxix} Some research indicated women preferred organizations that had supportive attributes, in general showing a history of working for fewer organizations with less of a desire to relocate compared to male counterparts and preferred flexible schedules.^{lxx} While there has been nothing conclusive on why women leave the workforce, this research does indicate that women may not follow the same career tracks that are typical for their male counterparts. Women sought out flexibility in their work; however, many did not choose part-time flexibility, likely due to the perceived damage it would do to their career.^{lxxi} The overall conclusion from this research was that women desired flexibility and support for work-family

balance, but this does not look the same for every woman.^{lxxii}

III: Methodology

While a lot of research talks about retention of women, pinpointing the actual causes for separation continues to be sought. Often, when a woman decides to depart the military, she is interviewed by her commander to ensure that this decision is well thought out and to hopefully identify any issues within the institution that can be addressed. The way these interviews are conducted and what is done with these interviews is unknown since this information was unable to be found. To bridge this gap of data, this research includes data from 10 interviews with women that are currently serving. The interviews capture their perspectives on new policies and determine the potential impact of these new policies on retention. This is a qualitative analysis of the topic, which provides a unique method to allow the researcher to conduct in-depth interviews, lending to a more descriptive research.^{lxxiii} In addition, it allows the researcher to probe for deeper understanding on any particular question, which means that each interviewee does not undergo the exact same interview questions but more detailed information is drawn out from the results than could be found alone in a survey.^{lxxiv}

Ten women were selected and agreed to participate in this research. These women were selected based in part on availability but also their willingness to participate. These women were interviewed either in person or over the phone due to their various locations across the country. Each interviewee was selected in an attempt to gather a diverse subset of women from different ranks, career fields, backgrounds, and family situations. Due to the small sample size, only officers were interviewed. These women included officers from the ranks of First Lieutenant to Lieutenant Colonel. Interviewees include officers in the pilot, intelligence, personnel, acquisition, engineer, logistician, and mental health fields. Some of these women do not have

children, some do have children and some plan to eventually have children. While this does not cover every scenario, the diversity was increased as much as possible.

Interviewees were only asked to participate knowing that the research was about the retention of women in the Air Force and the impact of new policies that had recently been released. Each of these women was asked some baseline questions to get standardization across the breadth of these individual interviews. Information about their age, rank, years of service, Air Force Specialty Code (AFSC), marital status, number of kids, ages of kids, undergrad location, commissioning source, number of deployments, and average work day length were asked at the beginning of each interview. From here, each of the interviewees were asked open-ended questions in order to provide more profound answers and to allow the interviewee to provide unsolicited answers. The goal was not to lead any answers but to allow each woman to drive the direction of the answers allowing for follow-up where needed. Each interviewee was asked to provide some background information about herself and why she decided to join the Air Force and her goals or plans when she joined. She was then asked to talk about her career up to this point in time to include whether she had any female mentors. After receiving this overview, each interviewee was asked why she is currently still serving and what her current goals and plans in comparison to when she started. Each woman who did not have children was asked whether she planned to have kids and if she foresaw any challenges of being a mother in the Air Force and then conversely, whether she saw any benefits of being a mother in the Air Force. For those that were already mothers, the same question was asked about challenges and benefits they have experienced. Then, the interviewee was asked about each of the new policies: deferred deployment, increased maternity leave and the CIP and whether or not she was familiar with them. If not, each policy was explained. The follow-up questions to this were about her

reactions to these policies and whether or not she thought that these would mitigate any of the earlier challenges mentioned above. Finally, each woman was asked about her overall perspective of the Air Force in regards to being family friendly and supporting a good work-family balance. The final question asked if there was anything that she thought could be done or implemented that would make the Air Force more family friendly. Additional questions were asked to each interviewee dependent on her answers to the standard questions above.

Each of these women told a unique story about their career in the Air Force; each woman has a reason that she joined and a reason why she still continues to serve today. While this research is a snapshot in time, intended to capture and highlight the motivations behind a woman's service, the goal is to try and identify what impacts her decision about retention. Of course, these are just snapshots and the answers that were provided are not set in stone. However, understanding these motivations are critical in determining and implementing new retention methods. From these interviews, common themes will be identified and comparisons will be made and examined across the range of interviews. The reactions to the new policies, combined with motivations, will provide some initial feedback on the effects that these policies may have on retention since their actual impact will not be understood for a few more years. This will provide a foundation to conduct future research on the retention of women in the military

IV: Results and Analysis of Interviews

One of the major themes for why women continued to serve is because they love what they do with a passion for the Air Force mission. While many of the women joined the service for convenience, free education or stable job, they believe their service is important, regardless of career field, and the work they contribute helps to accomplish the greater Air Force mission.

Jessica, a married mother of three teenagers, has been in the service for 17 years as a

logistics officer. Ten of those years she was active duty, seven years as a reservist. Six of those seven years she was an active reservist meaning she worked full time like an active duty member instead of a “weekend warrior”. Jessica had always intended to continue her service until retirement, but she had to switch from active duty to the reserves because her active duty husband had been medically removed from the Air Force and was dealing with a serious medical condition. They had three children at the time, and she was tasked with a 365-day deployment. With her husband medically unable to take care of the children and no one to take care of him, she decided to take the seven-day option and turn down the deployment to take care of her family. This was not an easy decision. Jessica wanted to continue her service and joined the Reserves. She had already previously deployed twice, once when her son was eight months old. Her motivation behind her service is that she thinks it is important for her kids to see that life is not always about them, but that their lives, no matter what they should choose to do, are about serving others.^{lxxv}

Dana, a divorced single mother, has served for 12 years and is a pilot in the Air Force. She continues to serve to show others, especially young women, they can be strong and overcome difficult challenges. She says that life is not always easy, but if what you are seeking to accomplish is worthwhile, you can do amazing things.^{lxxvi} This point is evidenced by the fact she had her first child right before pilot training and then started pilot training with a three-month-old son. Her husband at the time was also in pilot training and had to move away when their son was six months old. Despite these challenges, she was able to successfully make it through pilot training with the support of her husband from afar and the help of parents and family. However, a high operations tempo and rotating deployments all while raising a child had its toll on the family. She split up with her husband after almost ten years of marriage. Now, she

continues to serve because she has had so many great leaders that have influenced her life for the better and she hopes to make that same impact on others.^{lxxvii}

Retiring from the Air Force is another reason many women continue to serve. For the women who had not reached ten years of service, there were a lot of unknowns about their future and decision to remain in the Air Force. While one course of action was to stay in, they were always looking at other options. Women, who had ten years of service or greater, were more focused on staying in until retirement. While a few women had ambitions beyond the twenty years of service with goals focused around achieving command, the majority hoped to make twenty years knowing they would accept any sacrifices in order to earn that retirement.

Every woman, at some point, had considered separation. Whether it was during a deployment causing family separation, working for bad leadership, or consideration of outside opportunities, each woman stated that she had wavered on her commitment to stay at some point in her career. Upon reaching the ten-year point, whether it was by taking one assignment at a time or having a ten-year flying commitment, the possibility to separate diminished because they were now over halfway to earning a retirement that would provide healthcare and a paycheck for the rest of their lives. Many women stated they would join the Reserves so they could earn some sort of retirement benefit. Christy, a single, thirty-year-old services officer with no children, has always wanted to be an interior designer. She was recruited to play basketball for the Air Force Academy and was told that she could major in interior design. To her surprise, this was not an offered major so she chose human factors behavioral science. She plans to go back to school and pursue her dream as an interior designer. With seven years of service completed, she plans to transition to the Air National Guard or Reserves in the next few years to finish her twenty years of service and earn a retirement so she can pursue her dream.

Medical care was one of the main benefits cited for being a mother in the military. Even those women who were not mothers saw how easy and beneficial medical care is for mothers. From prenatal care, to covered labor and delivery bills, and then medical coverage for the family, there were only positive comments about this benefit. Elizabeth, who has served for six years and does not have children, stated that even though she has not used this benefit with regards to childcare, she cannot imagine what people pay on the outside and thought this would be the most valuable benefit.^{lxxviii}

Flexibility to take time off in order to care for children was another benefit that was popular among the women interviewed. The overall perception was flexibility in this area varied by leadership, but it erred on the side of flexibility versus rigidity. However, there was concern about the impacts this has on different career fields. There are some jobs that do not allow this type of flexibility due to the nature of the work. For those working shift work, taking the day off to care for a sick child, or coming in early or leaving early, can greatly affect the workload on that shift. A majority of the women said the Air Force tries hard to be flexible, but sometimes the nature of the work is inherently not flexible. Still, other career fields such as acquisitions have more predictable and consistent work hours where flexibility can be implemented.

The most cited reason that women would separate was deployments. It was not the deployment itself, but the instability that is created by deployments and temporary duties (TDYs). Depending on the career field and job, an Airman may not know how often they will have to go or for how long they will be away. For Dana who is a pilot for the Air Mobility Command, deployments and TDYs came often. She found herself volunteering for executive officer assignments mid-career just to minimize the impact. While this type of job is often guaranteed to require long hours and long days, it meant that she could not be deployed for that

time. At the time, her husband was flying the same aircraft, and they would try their best to not overlap their deployments so that one of them could be home with their son. This, however, was not always possible.

Maggy has served for over 16 years and is also married to another military member. They are both engineers in the Air Force. One of her biggest concerns as a mother of two children under the age of three is ensuring that they both do not get deployed at the same time. Her husband was deployed during the birth of their second child, which coincidentally matched up to Maggy's first command job. So not only was she required to learn how to balance the care of two children on her own, but she had huge strains in her time with the new position. As a commander, she does her best to ensure that all of her Airmen who are military married to other military are in separate AEF buckets so that this issue is minimized as much as possible.^{lxxix}

The work-family balance was another reason that was noted for possible reasons to separate. Sarah is an intelligence officer that is married to a C-17 pilot. She has served for three years and while she originally wanted to be a pilot, she loves her job and finds it very rewarding. Sarah has always intended to serve a full career and retire from the military, but recently her priorities have changed. They want to have kids and she is unsure whether she will be able to balance the responsibilities of working full time and raising kids while her husband is gone over half of the year. She is a person who always wants to give her best at whatever she is doing and has realistically assessed that she might not be able to do this once they have kids because of her husband's high operations tempo. On average, most of the interviewed women were working 10 hours days on average, with some women averaging 12 or more hours. These long hours make it difficult for young officers to see how they can add any more activities to their day such as caring for a child.

Outside opportunities are another reason that women consider separating. Certain career fields require a lot of training such as pilots and intelligence officers. If airlines are hiring, it is difficult to keep pilots in the Air Force after their service commitment is up. According to Dana, she is waiting to see what new flying bonus may be released in this next year.^{lxxx} While this is not her primary motivation to stay in, it does give an extra incentive to stay in and continue with this unstable life instead of trying to start building a civilian career.

Hannah is a single woman with four years of service and is an intelligence officer. She has been looking heavily at outside agencies for jobs. With the training that she has received for intelligence, she has received offers from multiple agencies. She is fluent in Korean and also speaks Chinese. These skill-sets make her marketable to other agencies that are doing similar work. While she is not currently married, she is dating someone in the same career field and finding jobs that would support both of them having a career and living in the same location is important.^{lxxxi} While the prospect of children is still far off, Hannah is more concerned about making her relationship work with two demanding careers in the near term.

One of the great challenges of being an Air Force mother is that it is primarily a male dominated environment. Almost all of the mothers noted that even with an engaged father, the responsibility of taking care of a sick child primarily falls on the mother. It is often the mother that will play the role of primary caregiver and therefore she sees her career impacted the most with taking days off or coming in late and leaving early. This is consistent with the literature stating women are still carrying a majority of the burden for childcare and housework.^{lxxxii} Maggy noted that working within the male majority and telling your boss that you need to leave and take care of your child is not always well received or understood.^{lxxxiii} She also explained that the viewpoint on work-family balance within the Air Force would change with different

bosses. For some, if family was not a priority in that leader's life or if they didn't have a family, it was not encouraged to make family a priority for their people. However, women like Elizabeth think that the Air Force does a better job with flexibility than the private sector.^{lxxxiv} As a personnel officer, she has seen many women given more flexibility to take care of their family than she suspects would be seen in any other job.

Another challenge to being an Air Force mother is the regular PCS moves that are required in an officer's career. While most assignments are every four years, some assignments require a move at three years and as a person gets higher in rank, they could move every one to two years. This is challenging because every move requires a lot of research to determine the best school district in the area and then finding a home within that school district along with before or after school options. For every mother that had a school age child, this was a main concern. In addition, children seem to prefer to stay in one spot as they get older and as their primary circle of friends developed. The moves create an instability that can challenge children. Some women stated this instability could contribute to why they would separate, but for the most part it was seen as a challenge that needed to be constantly resolved for each move.

Childcare was another challenge that was mentioned by many of the women, especially those in career fields that required shift work or consistent long working hours. The lack of accessible 24-hour childcare on military bases makes it challenging for women to make it work, especially those that are single or where both spouses work. Hannah told how a woman she supervised in her 44-person flight was a single mom and the amount of time leadership had spent trying to help her accommodate her personal life within a shift-work job. They have moved her to a day shift because she has been unable to find childcare support working a night shift. While this has been a temporary fix, there is additional burden on the new flight where she is working,

and a gap that needs to be filled in the night-shift work that she left. The need for 24-hour childcare, especially in cases like these, is an example of the non-traditional needs that arise with the unique military lifestyle and can put additional pressures on mothers.

Many women do not have woman mentors. While many have talked to other women in the career fields to get their perspective on the job, only a few women had a higher-ranking female officer that mentored them, but they were not in their service or necessarily in their same career field. It was unclear whether this was due to a lower number of women in the Air Force at the higher ranks, if those that were in those positions were not inspiring to these women, or if mentorship has been lacking throughout the Air Force as a whole. Some of the younger women that had recently graduated from the United States Air Force Academy (USAFA) did note that they received some minimal mentorship from mandatory women's forums. These biannual forums brought together active duty women working on the USAFA staff and encouraged small group discussions where cadets could ask hard questions about life as a woman in the Air Force. Alison, who went to USAFA to start her journey as an astronaut, noted that it was positive reinforcement to see women flying and still having a family. It was clear that there were sacrifices, but it was possible. These discussions made active duty women from different career fields accessible to cadets as they made decisions about their future and provided a safe environment to ask hard questions.

Overall, the reactions to the new policies were generally positive by all the women interviewed. The CIP was the least known and understood policy and required additional explanation for over half of the women. Everyone was familiar with the new maternity leave, deployment deferment and extended FA exemption policies. Even those women that did not have children, it was well known and everybody knew someone that was affected by these new

policies.

Every woman agreed that the increased maternity leave was a good change. Jessica emphatically stated, “It’s about fricking time. Outstanding decision!”^{lxxxv} In general, all of the women agreed that 12 weeks seemed to be about the right amount of time off. One woman commented that the 18 weeks maternity leave that was previously done by the Navy was probably too long. At 18 weeks, plus an additional 30 days of leave, that is almost a half a year that a new mother would be away from work. It would be challenging for a supervisor to equally rate that woman against a peer who had been working the entire time. She also mentioned the challenge it would be on a woman in a command position. Still, all of the women agreed that the previous six weeks was not enough for both the mother and child. It is difficult to leave a six week old at daycare or in some cases to find a daycare that will take a child that young.

It was unanimous agreement that the deployment deferment was a good policy change. Every woman agreed that it was beneficial to both the mother and child for this additional deferment. Those women without children thought it was a good idea, but one confessed that she was concerned that she would have to take additional deployments if she was in a squadron with a lot of other women. Another woman brought up the point that squadrons do not get less deployment taskings with women on deployment deferment. Therefore, fewer individuals would have to carry the burden of the same amount of deployment taskings and this could require some Airman to be sent back out without traditional dwell time.

The CIP was the least known and understood program. Some women did not know that the program existed at all. Others did not know that it was available for use outside of a desire to have a child. When I shared that it could be used as time off to pursue a degree, one woman became extremely interested in it. There was a lot of speculation on the way this program would

be executed and the ability for an individual to be able to come back into the Air Force at the exact spot they left. More specifically, there was concern that this program could be held against someone in regards to promotion against their peers. Since this program is so new and few, if any, have matriculated back into the Air Force, the effectiveness of the reintegration is unknown. Those women in career fields that are required to maintain currency were concerned about the impact this would have on their reintegration. The other negative comment about the CIP was the two for one buy-back on the commitment. There were a few women that viewed this commitment as a high cost compared to the incentive of the program.

The change for the FA to one-year post birth received many negative comments. A majority of the women felt that this was too long to require someone to get back into shape and in many cases, would likely cause more issues for women waiting until the last second to prepare for the FA. While many agreed that there are some medical cases that would prevent a woman from successfully completing their test at six months, there are medical interferences that can be implemented to mitigate those specific cases. Most women think there will be a negative trend with women passing their FA at the one-year point since most will wait until the last minute to prepare at which point they may have gotten too far behind in their preparations.

V: Conclusion and Recommendations

This research took a subset of women and provided the untold narratives describing their motivation for retention and separation. Retention is complex and lacks a single formula to motivate or encourage women to stay in the Air Force. Overall, the interviewees thought the Air Force is family friendly and supports a good work-family balance considering the unique mission its members serve. The deployments, TDYs, long work hours, shift work, and PCS moves are inherent to the job. These aspects are not always conducive to a family friendly

lifestyle and cause the greatest challenges for service members. The impacts of these issues are career field dependent. For those career fields with a high operations tempo, these issues were magnified. Regardless of a woman's goals when she began her service, it was evidenced that priorities can change and there is little the Air Force can do to prevent this from happening.

In general, the policies were favorably received by the interviewees and they have the potential to help increase retention. Deployments were named as one of the greatest challenges for female mothers and the new policies address this issue and mitigate this for the first year after birth. Still, the struggle to balance work and family will continue to be a reason that women will separate. Even with all of the favorable responses by the interviewees, the new policies do not completely eliminate their concerns.

Based off of these results, it is recommended that the Air Force continue to keep its manning levels as high as possible. The more personnel cuts, the more responsibility and work individuals are taking on which equates to longer work hours and more deployments. This will increase the strain on the already challenging work-family balance.

In addition, leadership should continue to focus on making the work-family balance a priority. Individual leaders play an important role in work-family balance. If a commander does not make this a priority, or doesn't have action to support his or her words regarding this topic, then subordinates will feel its negative impact and increased strain will be put on their own family relationships.

Every career field has different demands that cannot be changed. Many of the women determined that the Air Force is as flexible as the mission allows and anything more might affect good order and discipline. There should be more focus on female accessions and ensuring women join for the right reasons. The small sample size is not conclusive but there may be

positive correlations to retention for women that joined the Air Force because of a desire to serve rather than for self-serving reasons such as free education or other opportunities.

Finally, there should be more emphasis on encouraging women to mentor other women, especially in the same career fields. If women do not have other women to look up to, or as a mark of confirmation that there is a way to balance work and family, then they will continue to separate. The new policies were proven to be a step in the right direction, but they will not reverse this trend alone and the Air Force will have to continue its focus on retention.

This research covered a small subset of women but it is recommended that this type of research be continued with a focus on the specific career fields with the highest retention issue. In addition, more data should be gathered from individuals when they decide to separate to better identify reasons for separation and potential factors for retention. Only time will tell whether these policies will actually increase retention.

ⁱ CAPT Lory Manning, *Women in the Military*, 8th edition, February 2013, 8.

ⁱⁱ Ibid, 9.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid, 13.

^{iv} DoD Workforce Data, https://www.dmdc.osd.mil/appj/dwp/dwp_reports.jsp.

^{iv} Beth Asch, Trey Miller and Alessandro Malchiodi, *A New Look at Gender and Minority Differences in Officer Career Progression in the Military*, RAND National Defense Research Institute, Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2012, 1.

^v Ibid.

^{vi} Ibid, 4.

^{vii} Patti Collett Miles, “Why Do Educated, Successful Women Leave the Workforce?”, *American International Journal of Social Science*, Vol. 2, No. 2, March 2013, 1.

^{viii} Air Force Global Diversity Division, AF/A1DV, “United States Air Force Diversity Strategic Roadmap”, 12 Mar 2013, 15.

^{ix} Ibid.

^x Beth Asch, Trey Miller and Alessandro Malchiodi, *A New Look at Gender and Minority Differences in Officer Career Progression in the Military*, RAND National Defense Research Institute, Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2012, 3.

^{xi} Ibid, 4.

^{xii} Ibid, 20.

^{xiii} Ibid.

^{xiv} Ibid.

^{xv} Deborah Lee James, Mark A. Welsh, and James A. Cody. *Diversity and Inclusion Initiatives Memo*, March 2015.

^{xvi} Ibid.

^{xvii} Air Force Instruction (AFI) 36-2905, *Fitness Program*, 21 Oct 2013 Incorporating Change 1, 27 August 2015, 40.

^{xviii} Directive-type Memorandum (DTM) 16-002. *DoD-Wide Changes to Maternity Leave*, 5 Feb 2016, 1.

^{xix} Air Force Guidance Memo (AFGM) 2016-36-02. *Air Force Guidance Memorandum for Career Intermission Program (CIP)*, 23 May 2016, 1.

^{xx} Air Force Instruction 36-2110. *Assignments*, 23 June 2016, 8.

^{xxi} Air Force Guidance Memo (AFGM) 2016-36-02. *Air Force Guidance Memorandum for Career Intermission Program (CIP)*, 23 May 2016, 2.

^{xxii} Ibid.

^{xxiii} Deborah Lee James, Mark A. Welsh, and James A. Cody. *Diversity and Inclusion Initiatives Memo*, March 2015.

^{xxiv} Air Force Guidance Memo (AFGM) 2016-36-02. *Air Force Guidance Memorandum for Career Intermission Program (CIP)*, 23 May 2016, 2.

^{xxv} Ibid, 4.

^{xxvi} *Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services 2015 Annual Report*, 2015, http://dacowits.defense.gov/Portals/48/Documents/Reports/2015/Annual%20Report/2015%20DACOWITS%20Annual%20Report_Final.pdf, 76.

^{xxvii} Deborah Lee James, Mark A. Welsh, and James A. Cody. *Diversity and Inclusion Initiatives Memo*, March 2015.

^{xxviii} *Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services 2015 Annual Report*, 2015, http://dacowits.defense.gov/Portals/48/Documents/Reports/2015/Annual%20Report/2015%20DACOWITS%20Annual%20Report_Final.pdf, 68.

^{xxix} *Ibid*, 76.

^{xxx} *Ibid*.

^{xxxi} *Ibid*, 80.

^{xxxii} Directive-type Memorandum (DTM) 16-002. *DoD-Wide Changes to Maternity Leave*, 5 Feb 2016, 2.

^{xxxiii} *Handbook on Leave and Workplace Flexibilities for Childbirth, Adoption, and Foster Care*. United States Office of Personnel Management, April 2015, 11.

^{xxxiv} *Ibid*.

^{xxxv} *Ibid*, 14.

^{xxxvi} *Ibid*.

^{xxxvii} *Ibid*, 23.

^{xxxviii} *Ibid*, 25.

^{xxxix} New and Expanded Employer Paid Family Leave Policies (2015-2016). http://www.clasp.org/resources-and-publications/publication-1/2015-New-Expanded-Employer-Paid-Family-Leave-Policies_final-.pdf.

^{xl} *Ibid*.

^{xli} *Ibid*.

^{xlii} “Wage and Hour Division”, United States Department of Labor, <https://www.dol.gov/whd/regs/compliance/1421.htm#2a>

^{xliii} *Progress in Increasing Breastfeeding and Reducing Racial/Ethnic Difference – United States, 2000-2008*, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, February 2013, https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm6205a1.htm?s_cid=mm6205a1_w.

^{xliv} *Breastfeeding and the Use of Human Milk*, American Academy of Pediatrics, 2012, <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/pediatrics/129/3/e827.full.pdf>.

^{xlv} Air Force Instruction 44-102, Medical Care Management, 17 March 2015, 44.

^{xlvi} *Ibid*.

^{xlvii} *Ibid*.

^{xlviii} *Ibid*.

^{xlix} Ronald D. Fricker Jr., *The Effects of Perstempo on Officer Retention in the U.S. Military*, RAND, 2002, xii.

^l Ibid.

^{li} Trenton James and Jacqueline Countryman. "Psychiatric Effects of Military Deployment on Children and Families: The Use of Play Therapy for Assessment and Treatment." *Innovations in Clinical Neuroscience* 9.2 (2012), <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3312898/>.

^{lii} Ibid.

^{liii} Ibid.

^{liv} Susan Gates, Gail Zellman, Jos Moini, with Marika Suttorp, *Examining Child Care Need Among Military Families*, RAND Corporation, 2006, 31.

^{lv} Ibid.

^{lvi} Ibid, 37.

^{lvii} Lewis A. Coser, *Greedy Institutions: Patterns of Undivided Commitment*, (New York: The Free Press, 1974), 1.

^{lviii} Mady Wechsler Segal, "The Military and the Family as Greedy Institutions", *Armed Forces & Society*, Vol. 13 No. 1, Fall 1986, 6.

^{lix} Ibid.

^{lx} Ibid.

^{lxi} Ibid.

^{lxii} Ibid.

^{lxiii} Patti Collett Miles, "Why Do Educated, Successful Women Leave the Workforce?", *American International Journal of Social Science*, Vol. 2, No. 2, March 2013, 1.

^{lxiv} Ibid.

^{lxv} Ibid.

^{lxvi} Michael Bittman, Paula England, Nancy Folbre, Liana Sayer, and George Matheson, "When Does Gender Trump Money? Bargaining and Time in Household Work", *American Journal of Sociology*, July 2003, 109, 1.

^{lxvii} Patti Collett Miles, "Why Do Educated, Successful Women Leave the Workforce?", *American International Journal of Social Science*, Vol. 2, No. 2, March 2013, 2.

^{lxviii} Ibid.

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- ^{lxi} Ibid.
- ^{lxx} C. O'Reilly & O. O'Neill, "Women's Careers: The Impact of Sex and Gender Identity on Career Attainment", Stanford Working paper series, Research Paper No. 1775, 2004.
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- ^{lxxii} Ibid.
- ^{lxxiii} *Leading the Conversation in Qualitative*, Qualitative Research Consultants Association, 2 Oct 2016, <http://www.qrca.org/?page=whatisqualresearch>.
- ^{lxxiv} Ibid.
- ^{lxxv} Interview with a major from USCENCOM, interview by the author, 6 Oct 2016.
- ^{lxxvi} Interview with a major from USAFA, interview by the author, 6 Oct 2016.
- ^{lxxvii} Ibid.
- ^{lxxviii} Interview with a captain from USCENCOM, interview by the author, 4 Oct 2016.
- ^{lxxix} Interview with a lieutenant colonel from AFMC, interview by the author, 7 Oct 2016.
- ^{lxxx} Ibid.
- ^{lxxxi} Interview with a major from USAFA, interview by the author, 6 Oct 2016.
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