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Research Product 90-06

Exploratory Discussions of Spouse Employment Issues

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Personnel Utilization Technical Area
Manpower and Personnel Research Laboratory

U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences

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obtaining and keeping a job; possible hindrances created by the Army lifestyle for career development; knowledge of available job search assistance sources; education and training needs; and perceptions of how spouse employment relates to soldier readiness and career decisions. For the nonemployed spouses questions focused on need/desire for employment; barriers to obtaining a job or pursuing a career; education and training needs; knowledge and use of available employment assistance programs; and perceptions of how not being employed affects soldier readiness and career decisions. Interviews with Army Program personnel included questions on problems that Army spouses experience in finding employment, types of work desired by spouses, skills possessed by spouses, training needs, and soldiers' attitudes toward spouse employment.

Financial and personal reasons were the most frequently expressed responses for working or wanting to work. Personal reasons for wanting to work included personal satisfaction, the desire to get out of the house, personal challenge, the need to see other adults (particularly when the soldier is away), and a desire to gain self-confidence and skills.

Perceived barriers to spouse employment included lack of employment opportunities in both the civil service and private sectors, civil service procedures, difficulties in understanding and making use of the spouse preference program, reluctance of employers in the private sector to hire Army spouses because of reputed short job tenure, and impediments to career development, including limited job opportunities, frequent relocations, and the limitations of Army lifestyle.

Problems associated with the ability to pursue employment included, in addition to limited employment opportunities, factors such as availability and cost of child care and lack of transportation.

Spouse employment was viewed as having a positive effect on readiness and, in general, spouses reported that the soldier was happier and better able to perform military duties when the spouse was working.

The effect of spouse employment on retention decisions was more ambiguous than it was for readiness. Most spouses indicated that the soldier's career would come first but there was some evidence in the interview material to suggest that there may be a shift to the spouse's career assuming increased importance.

Specific education and training needs included computer and clerical skills training, better advanced educational opportunities, and expansion of the Civil Service internship program to include "portability" of internships from location to location.

Research Product 90-06

**Exploratory Discussions of Spouse
Employment Issues**

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FOREWORD

The Army Family Research Program (AFRP) is a five-year integrated research program started in November 1986 in response to research mandated by both the CSA White Paper, 1983: The Army Family and The Army Family Action Plans (1984-1989). The objective of the research is to support the Army Family Action Plans through research products that will (1) determine the demographic characteristics of Army families, (2) identify positive motivators and negative detractors to soldiers remaining in the Army, (3) develop pilot programs to improve family adaptation to Army life, and (4) increase operational readiness.

The research is being conducted by the U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences (ARI) with assistance from Research Triangle Institute, Caliber Associates, and HUMRRO. It is funded by Army research and development funds that were set aside for this purpose under Management Decision Package (1U6S).

This report presents the results of group interviews with Army spouses and interviews with Army program personnel on issues related to spouse employment. The Army sponsor for this effort, the U.S. Army Community and Family Support Center (CFSC), reviewed and approved an earlier draft of this report. Their comments indicate that the contents of this report will be useful in revising Army programs and policies.



EDGAR M. JOHNSON
Technical Director

EXPLORATORY DISCUSSIONS OF SPOUSE EMPLOYMENT ISSUES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Requirement:

To support The Army Family Action Plans (1984-1989) by examining factors related to the employment problems of Army spouses such as reasons for not working, barriers to employment, education and training needs, and perceived effect of spouse employment on readiness, retention, and family wellness.

Procedure:

Group discussions were conducted with a total of 152 (79 employed and 73 nonemployed) Army spouses and 30 Army program personnel located at 4 interview sites. One interview site was a U.S. Army Forces Command (FORSCOM) installation, one was a U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) installation, and two were U.S. Army-Europe (USAREUR) installations.

A core set of questions was asked of both the employed and the non-employed spouses. Employment-specific questions asked of employed spouses included employment status; satisfaction with employment status; reasons for working; possible barriers imposed by the Army lifestyle for obtaining and keeping a job; possible hindrances created by the Army lifestyle for career development; knowledge of available job search assistance sources; education and training needs; and perceptions of how spouse employment relates to soldier readiness and career decisions. For the nonemployed spouses questions focused on need/desire for employment; barriers to obtaining a job or pursuing a career; education and training needs; knowledge and use of available employment assistance programs; and perceptions of how not being employed affects soldier readiness and career decisions. Interviews with Army Program personnel included items on problems that Army spouses experience in finding employment, types of work desired by spouses, skills possessed by spouses, training needs, and soldiers' attitudes toward spouse employment.

Findings:

Financial reasons and personal reasons were the most frequently expressed responses for working or wanting to work. Personal reasons for wanting to work included personal satisfaction, the desire to get out of the house, personal challenge, the need to see other adults (particularly when the soldier is away), and a desire to gain self-confidence and skills.

Perceived barriers to spouse employment included lack of employment opportunities in both the civil service and private sectors, civil service procedures, difficulties in understanding and making use of the spouse preference

program, reluctance of employers in the private sector to hire Army spouses because of reputed short job tenure, and career development being impeded by having to take jobs below their education and experience levels.

Impediments to career development included limited job opportunities, frequent relocations, and the limitations the Army lifestyle placed on career development.

Problems associated with the ability to pursue employment included, in addition to limited employment opportunities, factors such as availability and cost of child care and lack of transportation.

Spouse employment was viewed as having a positive effect on readiness and, in general, spouses reported that the soldier was happier and better able to perform military duties when the spouse was working.

The effect of spouse employment on retention decisions was more ambiguous than it was for readiness. Most spouses indicated that the soldier's career would come first but there was some evidence in the interview material to suggest that there may be a shift to the spouse's career assuming increased importance.

Specific education and training needs included computer and clerical skills training, better advanced educational opportunities, and expansion of the Civil Service internship program to include "portability" of internships from location to location.

Utilization of Findings:

The Army sponsor for this effort, the U.S. Army Community and Family Support Center (CFSC), reviewed an earlier draft of this report. Their comments indicate that the contents of this report will be useful revising Army programs and policies.

EXPLORATORY DISCUSSIONS OF SPOUSE EMPLOYMENT ISSUES

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EXPLORATORY DISCUSSIONS OF SPOUSE EMPLOYMENT ISSUES

Introduction

The purpose of the research presented in this report is to examine problems and issues relating to the employment problems experienced by Army spouses. Specifically, the objectives were to delineate reasons for working, barriers to employment, education and training needs, and perceived effects of spouse employment on key issues relating to the Army's mission, particularly readiness, retention, and family wellness.

The results obtained from these discussions and interviews were used to help formulate hypotheses for the analysis of the determinants of spouse employment and satisfaction that are reported in The Employment Status of Army Spouses (Schwartz, Griffith, & Wood, 1988). The results will also be used to identify areas for further research; to support, where appropriate, findings from the literature review and survey analyses; and to formulate pertinent questions for the forthcoming Army Family Research Program (AFRP) core survey and other data collection efforts. Additionally, the information will be of value in developing and implementing programs to help meet spouse employment needs.

In this report, we describe the approach used in the exploratory discussion groups and administrative personnel interviews and then present the results obtained from these exploratory data collection activities.

Approach

Four locations (one TRADOC, one FORSCOM, and two USAREUR) have served as sites for the exploratory discussion groups and administrative personnel interviews. At each site, a point-of-contact arranged discussion groups with spouses. Each group was configured by employment status and soldier's pay grade. The objective behind the design was to assess spouse employment and career opportunities at different points in the family life course as well as in the soldier career cycle. While the goal was to have eight spouses present at each group, the actual numbers attending were lower than this, largely because all participation was completely voluntary. Seventy-nine employed and seventy-three non-employed spouses attended the groups. (Most of the spouses in the non-employed groups were actively looking for work; only a few spouses who did not want to work participated in the discussions.) The majority of the spouses participating were female although some male spouses did participate. The numbers present at each group by location, employment status, and soldier's pay grade are presented in Table 1.

Interview guidelines, developed for the discussion groups, took approximately two hours to complete. A set of core questions was asked of both the employed and the non-employed groups, although the employment-specific questions asked were varied by employment status. Key topics for discussion for the employed group included:

Table 1

Number of Spouses Attending Exploratory Meetings by Rank and Employment Status

Rank	Employment Status	FORSCOM	TRADOC	USAREUR	TOTAL
E1-E4	Non-Employed	5	1	9	15
	Employed	0	1	7	8
E5 and above	Non-Employed	5	6	13	24
	Employed	3	4	19	26
O1-03	Non-Employed	3	1	7	11
	Employed	5	2	12	19
O4 and above	Non-Employed	8	0	15	23
	Employed	10	1	15	26
Total		39	16	97	152

- employment status;
- satisfaction with employment status;
- reasons for working;
- possible barriers imposed by the Army lifestyle for obtaining and keeping a job;
- possible hindrances created by the Army lifestyle for career development;
- knowledge of available job search assistance sources;
- education and training needs; and
- perceptions of how spouse employment relates to soldier readiness and career decisions.

For the non-employed groups, questions focused on:

- need/desire for employment;
- barriers to obtaining a job or pursuing a career;
- education and training needs;
- knowledge and use of available employment assistance programs; and
- perceptions of how not being employed affects spouse readiness and career decisions.

Appendix A contains a copy of the interview guidelines used for the discussions.

In addition to the exploratory discussions, a number of interviews with Army Program personnel were also conducted at each of the sites visited. Interview guides were used to conduct these interviews, although questions varied slightly depending on the interviewee's particular relation to spouse employment. Table 2 contains a list of interview participants. Interviews lasted for approximately one hour. Appendix B contains a copy of the interview guidelines used for the administrative interviews.

Table 2

Administrative Personnel Interviews

FORSCOM (1 Installation)	TRADOC (1 Installation)	USAREUR (2 Communities)
Family Member Employment Coordinator	Family Member Employment Coordinator	Family Member Employment Coordinator (2)
	Family Member Employment Education Specialist	
CPO Director	CPO Director	CPO Director (2)
CPO Staff (2)	Family Support Division Chief	
	Director of Outreach Program	Family Support Division Chief
Installation Volunteer Coordinator	Family Action Plan Coordinator	Installation Volunteer Coordinator
Reenlistment Officer	Reenlistment Officer	
CDS Director		Federal Women's Program Director
Education Services Director		Education Services Director
ACS Director		USO Outreach Coordinator (2)
		ACS Director
		ACS Financial Management Coordinator
		ACS Relocation Coordinator
		DoD School Principal

Results and Discussion

The methodology described above provided a rich set of qualitative data that is of value for identifying research issues and for providing a more in-depth understanding of employment-related problems experienced by Army spouses. These data will be useful for hypothesis generation, survey question formulation, and provision of preliminary support of quantitative findings. Additionally, the information and understanding gained will be helpful in the development and implementation of programs designed to target and ameliorate spouse employment needs. It should be noted, however, that the spouses attending the discussion groups were all volunteers (rather than being randomly selected). In addition, the total numbers attending the groups were limited. Thus, generalizations to other locations or to spouses overall are not possible. The results as presented do indicate, however, recurring themes expressed at all the installations visited (unless otherwise indicated), and in most of the groups conducted, suggesting that these issues are likely to be representative of the set of problems and issues of greatest concern for Army spouses.

Reasons for Working

Financial reasons and personal reasons were the most frequently expressed responses given to the question, "Why do you work?" (for the employed group) or "Why do you want to work?" (for the non-employed group), supporting the quantitative findings reported earlier. For the younger enlisted spouses, employment was often considered necessary to "make ends meet" while the financial needs of the older spouses (whose spouses typically were E-5s and above or O-4s and above) indicated that their working would help put children through college, save for retirement, or allow them more budget flexibility.

While financial concerns were important, personal reasons for wanting to work were cited with as great or greater frequency. Reasons in this category included personal satisfaction, the desire to get out of the house, personal challenge, the need to see other adults (particularly when the soldier is away), and a desire to gain self-confidence and skills. One spouse, for example, reported making only \$20 per week after paying child care expenses but considered it worthwhile because it provided an opportunity to get out of the house. Some spouses reported they had become depressed or, in one case, had begun drinking heavily, while not employed because they were spending so much time alone and were bored. Others said that the quality of their marriage suffered because they tended to "lash out" at their spouses, due largely to boredom and resentment for having to stay home alone all day. All the employed spouses who commented reported these negative effects of non-employment virtually disappeared after they started working.

Barriers to Employment/Career Development

Spouses delineated a number of barriers to employment and career development including problems associated with locating and obtaining employment and establishing career tenure, as well as problems that limit the

ability to work, such as inadequate child care and transportation. Issues discussed relating to each of these areas are presented below.

Problems Associated with Locating and Obtaining Employment

Civil Service Employment. Lack of employment opportunities was cited in both the civil service and private sectors. Considerable discontentment and confusion about Civilian Personnel Office (CPO) policies and practices were expressed in each group at all of the locations visited, although the types of complaints varied somewhat by location. The ranking system and completion of Form 171 was particularly problematic, in that spouses did not understand how the ratings were completed and felt they were mistreated, particularly in terms of receiving appropriate feedback as to why they were rated as ineligible for a given position. Others did not know it was necessary to apply for specific jobs, as opposed to applying in a general skill area. Still others expressed a general concern with the treatment they were given by CPO personnel. As one spouse expressed it, "At CPO, I don't find they're very helpful. She accepted my application and a week later I got a note saying the application was late."

A substantial number of spouses expressed discontentment with the implementation of spouse preference. A great deal of this dissatisfaction was probably due to a lack of understanding of the system, in that preference given to spouses is secondary to preference given to others (for example, veterans or local nationals in USAREUR). Additionally, Civil Service policy is extremely complex and understandably difficult for the untrained person to comprehend. This point was highlighted by the fact that policy translations differed across CPOs, as well as within CPOs, suggesting that even CPO personnel may find the regulations confusing at times.

Some administrators, within both CPO and the Family Member Employment Program (FMEP), suggested a great deal of the dissatisfaction with CPO could be eliminated by helping spouses to understand CPO policy and practices. One suggestion for accomplishing this was to educate FMEP staff on CPO policies, regulations, and procedures so they can better advise spouses. This is already being done at some locations. Seminars on completing the Federal Government's standard application blank, called the Standard Form 171 or SF 171, were also suggested. One post visited had already conducted a class in this area and the administrators thought it had been very helpful to spouses.

Although most of the same complaints towards CPO were expressed by spouses at each of the locations, a unique set of problems emerged in the USAREUR locations. Specifically, spouses complained that their applications were being rated by local nationals who, according to the spouses, may not have the working knowledge of the language necessary to interpret applications. As one spouse expressed it, "I don't think [CPO] is fair as far as the ratings go . . . because they don't believe the same word means the same thing." This problem, as well as other CPO-related concerns, is particularly serious for USAREUR spouses since their employment opportunities in the local economies are extremely limited.

Spouses also report difficulties in obtaining jobs in the private sector. Barriers, in general, include a reluctance of employers to hire spouses

because of their reputed short job tenure (predominantly due to frequent PCS moves), and the limited numbers of jobs available, particularly in isolated or economically depressed areas. In spite of the contribution the post makes to the local economy, spouses report jobs typically go to long-term community residents. This hiring discrimination apparently takes both obvious forms (e.g., the employer asks applicants if they are military family members) and subtle ones (e.g., the job requires a local driver's license). Spouses typically report that the jobs available to them in the community are low status, low paying jobs that offer little advancement potential. Examples of such areas include fast foods and hotel/motel service work.

Limitations for Career Development. A number of spouses expressed dissatisfaction about the impediments Army life created for career development opportunities which is largely due to limited job opportunities. Limited job opportunities result in employment below the level of spouses' experience and training. Frequent relocation requirements limit upward mobility in a given job or career path, with spouses often starting at low-level jobs after relocating. Spouses of officers voiced these concerns more frequently than other groups although the discontentment was not limited to this group. A number of spouses of enlisted personnel also expressed significant dissatisfaction with the limitations the Army lifestyle placed on their career development potential.

Underemployment which is defined as employment below one's perceived skills and/or educational level is apparently a serious problem for the Army spouses interviewed. Among the employed spouses, only a small number considered their current employment to be appropriate for their education or skill level. The majority of spouses did not perceive that their jobs afforded them opportunities to utilize their abilities and skills fully. As the wife of a junior officer expressed it, "I have a mechanical engineering degree and I fill out forms." According to another, "You cannot reach for and achieve your goals [if your husband is in the Army]." Civil Service employment, which is sometimes thought to provide career development opportunities for Army spouses, is lacking in this regard, according to a number of spouses. Several spouses with college education or advanced degrees, for example, reported they had been forced to take GS-3 clerical positions as these were the only opportunities available. According to several program administrators, spouses are encouraged to take lower level positions to "get into the system" and work their way up. Several spouses suggested, however, that this practice has serious limitations because of time-in-grade requirements. Furthermore, difficulties experienced in obtaining a civil service job after a Permanent Change of Station (PCS) move may result in the spouse losing her civil service status, thereby necessitating reentry into the system at a low level once again. Low level entry was particularly prevalent in USAREUR because of the local national hiring preference requirement. As one CPO staff member reported, it is almost impossible for a spouse to enter the system at a level higher than a GS-5 since local nationals typically apply and are hired for any jobs above this level. In general, our qualitative data tend to support the quantitative findings reported earlier that unemployment and under-employment are problems for Army spouses (Schwartz, 1988; Schwartz, Griffith, & Wood, 1988; Wood, 1988).

Problems Associated with the Ability to Pursue Employment

In addition to limited employment opportunities, spouses also noted problems in other areas, such as child care and transportation, that limited their ability to work. Child care concerns included the cost of services, limited availability of spaces in on-post facilities, quality of services, and hours at which services were available. Several spouses indicated that the Family Child Care Certification (FCC) program had been helpful in terms of expanding the hours for which child care was available (e.g., on weekends and overnight), although others expressed concerns about the quality of the care provided and, at one location, the enforcement of FCC regulations. Given the long and varied hours often worked by soldiers, spouses with children frequently considered quality child care with flexible hours and at reasonable costs to be an important factor in determining their ability to pursue employment.

Lack of adequate transportation can also be a barrier to the spouse's employment opportunities. Often, the family has only one vehicle (particularly among the spouse of junior level enlisted personnel). Considering the hours the soldier typically works, as well as the fact that the soldier is often "on call" 24 hours per day for extended periods of time, the soldier's need for the automobile often takes precedence over the spouse's, leaving the spouse without transportation to work. This is a particularly serious problem when the spouse works on-post but lives off-post, or when the spouse works off-post in an area where an inexpensive public transportation system between the post and the town is not available. Thus, child care problems and transportation problems both may limit the spouse's ability to work, even if job opportunities are available in the area.

Effects of Spouse Employment on Readiness and Retention

Effects On Readiness. The majority of spouses and administrative personnel viewed spouse employment as contributing positively to soldier readiness and retention. Readiness was defined as both the ability to perform daily duties and the availability for short-term and long-term deployment. Only one case was cited in which the soldier's ability to perform daily duties was adversely affected by the spouse's employment. In general, spouses reported that the soldier was happier and better able to perform military duties when the spouse was working. For example, a number of the spouses reported the soldier felt less financial stress because of the extra income the spouse could contribute when working. Others indicated that they were happier working and this, in their opinion, improved soldier productivity. As one spouse put it, "The wife who is working is happier . . . and the soldier's performance is closer to 100% . . ."

Spouses say that household duties, child care, and scheduling are primarily the spouse's responsibility, and, according to all who commented on the subject, are not an impediment to the soldier's ability to perform daily duties. One spouse expressed it as follows, "It is the spouse's responsibility to adapt to the situation and pick up the pieces."

Similar opinions were expressed in terms of the effects of spouse employment on the soldier's availability for deployment. A number of spouses, for example, indicated that the soldier's performance while deployed was enhanced if the soldier knew the spouse had a job and was financially "okay" while others suggested that the soldier would worry less about the spouse being alone and about the spouse's personal happiness while the soldier was away if the spouse was employed.

In essence, most spouses in both the employed and non-employed groups indicated they felt the soldier's readiness improved, or at least not negatively affected by their employment, and that, in general, the soldier is supportive of the spouse working.

Effects on Retention. The reports of spouses suggested that the effect of spouse employment on retention decisions was more ambiguous than it was for readiness. Discussion with spouses at different family life course and soldier career stages provides important insights into spouse views and, especially, into the effects of societal trends and cohort differences in spouse job/career expectations. Most spouses indicated that the soldier's career would come first and their own employment was a secondary concern. As one spouse said, "He does his 20 years and then I'll do mine." Another spouse expressed it as follows, "When he's done, I start . . . there's no contest on that one." According to an officer's spouse, "We've agreed my number one job is to support my husband's troops." When asked, "Suppose you had the ideal job and your husband was transferred, would you try to influence his career decisions?," most spouses indicated they would follow the soldiers. As one spouse succinctly put it, "I'd quit and leave. My first loyalty is to him."

While most spouses commenting indicated they would support the soldier's career at the expense of their own, some suggested that this loyalty was shifting, particularly among the young officers' wives. As one of the older wives (whose husband was a senior enlisted man) expressed it, "[we] discussed how [the wife] needed to work based on the husband's schedule and the children . . . [I] never thought of having a career because [I] was limited by my husband's and children's needs. Now I see the younger wives . . . they know what they want and they're going to get it . . . we're still taking any kind of little sluff-off [employment]. The new wives are saying, "Husbands, move over!"

Several spouses (particularly young officers' wives) suggested that their jobs/careers were given consideration in their husband's career decision making process. According to one wife, "If I can't get a degree while he's in the Army, then he'll get out so I can have a career." Another spouse said, "Soldiers who were ambivalent when they got in may be more likely to be affected by the spouse's job satisfaction, and if the spouse was happy, they might stay in." At least two other spouses of officers indicated that the officers did not intend to remain on active duty because of the spouse's limited career opportunities. A few younger spouses of enlisted personnel also reported the service members did not plan to reenlist. In these cases, however, the spouse's employment status did not appear to be the most

important driving force in the decision process (as it apparently was for the officers); rather, for these couples, the spouse's employment situation apparently interacted with the soldier's ambivalence about an Army career, thus leading to his decision not to reenlist. Thus, while Army spouses typically are supportive of the soldier's career, some evidence suggests a possible shift in the future, with the spouse's own career assuming increasing importance and becoming likely to play a greater role in the soldier's career decisions. These data suggest this shift may first appear among young officers, although other groups are not exempt from its effects on the member's career decision making process.

Education and Training Needs

Perceived education and training needs of spouses were also investigated in the exploratory discussion groups and administrative personnel interviews. All spouses who commented enthusiastically endorsed the need for the Army to do more for spouses in these areas. Generally, the education and training needs reported fell into two categories:

- those that would be beneficial for spouses with limited education and work experience; and
- those that could help spouses with advanced training pursue a career within the limitations imposed by the military lifestyle.

Almost everyone responding indicated that providing computer and clerical skills training would be beneficial for a large number and range of spouses. These skills were stressed because of their "transportability" to different locations and because they provide a clear "entree" to the Civil Service System. Thus, for spouses with limited educational background and/or work experience, clerical and computer skills would improve their employability and career development potential, even if the soldier pursues a military career.

Spouses with professional career ambitions pose a different problem for the Army. As mentioned earlier, it is very difficult for a spouse to pursue a career since, at each move, the spouse must essentially "start at the bottom." Spouses confronted with this problem suggested that the Army could provide better advanced educational opportunities so that they could, as one spouse expressed it, "at least pursue their education" while the soldiers were in the service. Additionally, spouses suggested that the Army could develop a structure that allowed for, rather than impeded, their career development, in spite of the spouse's PCS moves. One idea, which received support from both spouses and administrative personnel, was the expansion of the Civil Service internship program. Within this program, spouses are recruited into lower level Civil Service positions with the understanding they will be given varied training with less restrictive time-in-grade requirements. Spouses support this program but would recommend the incorporation of more professional development activities, more positions created and more "portability" of internships. Specifically, if a spouse is involved in an internship at one location, the spouse should be guaranteed a position in the same grade at the

new location if the soldier must move. In addition to benefiting Army spouses, this internship program could help meet Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) needs by assisting more female spouses in obtaining higher positions within the Civil Service system.

References

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- Schwartz, J. B., Griffith, J. D., & Wood, L. (1988). The employment status of Army spouses (Contract No. MDA903-87-C-0540). Alexandria, VA: U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences.
- Wood, L. (1988, October). Family economics and the retention intentions of Army enlisted personnel. Paper presented at the ORSA-TIMS Annual Convention, Denver, Colorado.

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW GUIDELINES - EXPLORATORY DISCUSSIONS WITH ARMY SPOUSES

Discussion Group Guidelines

Task 4 - Spouse Employment

MOST IMPORTANT QUESTIONS ARE INDICATED BY THE USE OF ALL CAPITALS.

I. INTRODUCTION

- Introduce Facilitators
- Introduce ARI study
SEE HANDOUT DESCRIBING PROJECT AND TASK 4.
- Explain goals of groups
- Introduction by Participants

II. Problems of Army Spouses

-HAVE YOU HAD A JOB OR TRIED TO GET A JOB WHILE YOUR SPOUSE HAS BEEN IN THE ARMY? WHY/WHY NOT?

- HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED ANY PROBLEMS OR BARRIERS RELATED TO GETTING A JOB (DUE TO YOUR SPOUSE'S PARTICIPATION IN THE ARMY?

- Are there other problem areas that make it difficult for Army spouses to obtain work or pursue a career?

Examples of some possible problem areas might be:

- (1) the attitudes of Army leadership,
- (2) child care needs,
- (3) needs for training or counseling.

- HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED ANY PROBLEMS WITH JOBS AFTER GETTING THEM (DUE TO YOUR SPOUSE'S PARTICIPATION IN THE MILITARY?) WHAT WERE THEY?

III. Type of Work and Employment Opportunities

- WHAT KINDS OF JOBS ARE YOU INTERESTED IN GETTING, EITHER NOW OR IN THE FUTURE? FOR INSTANCE, ARE YOU INTERESTED IN FEDERAL JOBS, JOBS IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR, OR SELF-EMPLOYMENT? WHY?

- HOW WELL DO THE SKILLS AND ABILITIES OF ARMY SPOUSES TRANSFER TO DIFFERENT JOBS (BASED ON YOUR EXPERIENCES AND THOSE OF OTHER SPOUSES YOU KNOW)?

- WOULD JOBS SKILLS TRAINING BE BENEFICIAL TO YOU?
- IF SO, WHAT KINDS OF SKILLS TRAINING WOULD BE USEFUL?
- HOW COULD THE ARMY ASSIST YOU IN MEETING THE SKILLS TRAINING YOU HAVE?

IV. Reasons for Working

-FOR THOSE OF YOU WHO ARE CURRENTLY WORKING OR ACTIVELY
LOOKING FOR A JOB, WHAT ARE YOUR MAIN REASONS FOR
WORKING OR WANTING TO WORK?

-FOR THOSE WHO ARE NOT WORKING AT THE PRESENT TIME,
WHAT ARE THE MAIN REASONS WHY YOU ARE NOT WORKING
NOW?

V. Soldier's Opinion Regarding Spouse's Employment

-HOW DO SOLDIERS FEEL ABOUT THEIR SPOUSES' WORKING?

VI. Effects of Employment Situation:

-HOW WOULD YOU SAY A SPOUSE'S EMPLOYMENT
AFFECTS THE SOLDIER IN TERMS OF:
(Read each of the following examples:)

- DAILY DUTIES:

- PARTICIPATION IN SHORT-TERM TRAINING ASSIGNMENTS:

- READINESS FOR DEPLOYMENT:

- SATISFACTION WITH WORK:

- WILLINGNESS TO ACCEPT TRANSFERS:

- HOW DOES IT AFFECT HIS MILITARY CAREER PLANS?
SPECIFIC EXAMPLES INCLUDE:
 - RETENTION:

 - TRAINING:

 - PROMOTIONS:

- WHAT ROLE DOES THE SPOUSE'S EMPLOYMENT (OR LACK OF
EMPLOYMENT) PLAY WHEN IT IS TIME FOR THE SOLDIER TO
MAKE CAREER DECISIONS?

VIII. Knowledge of Available Services

- ARE YOU AWARE OF ARMY PROGRAMS OR SERVICES THAT CAN HELP ARMY SPOUSES WITH THEIR JOB NEEDS, SUCH AS EMPLOYMENT-ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS?
IF SO, WHAT ARE SOME OF THESE PROGRAMS?

PROMPT (USE ONLY IF NEEDED:)

- Are you familiar with any other Army programs and services that help enable you to work, for example, child care services, transportation assistance, or education and training programs?
- If yes:
 - How did you learn about these programs?
 - Do you think the Army does an effective job of letting people know about these programs?
- CAN YOU SUGGEST MORE EFFECTIVE WAYS FOR THE ARMY TO INFORM PEOPLE ABOUT THESE PROGRAMS?

MODULE 1: EMPLOYMENT/UNEMPLOYMENT QUESTIONS

*REMEMBER TO INCLUDE CRITICAL INCIDENT MATERIALS IF TIME IS AVAILABLE.

I. Questions for Employed Spouses

1. Job/Career Information

-Do you consider your current employment a job or a part of a career?

- How does your current employment fit in with your long-term plans for your life? For example, are you interested in pursuing a career, either now or in the future?

- Do you perceive yourself to be taking steps toward your career goals? (If so, how? If not, why not)

- Do you think your current level of employment is in line with your education, experience, abilities, and skills?

VII. Knowledge of Available Employment Assistance Services

- How did you find your current job? (For those not working, how did you find your last job?)

- Did you experience any problems in finding a job? If so: what were they?

- Were Army-sponsored employment assistance programs available to you? If so, have you used any Army-sponsored employment assistance programs to help you get a job?

- What activities/services were available?

- What activities/services did you participate in or use?

- What activities/services were most helpful to you?

- Did you find a job as a result of your participation in the program? If so, were you satisfied with the job you obtained?

POSSIBLE PROBES AT THIS POINT INCLUDE QUESTIONS REGARDING:

- Satisfaction with program;
- Ways to improve program; and
- Barriers preventing full use of program.

II. Spouses Who Are Not Currently Employed

1. Employment Goals

-Are you currently looking for a job?

-Have you looked for a job (successfully or unsuccessfully) in the past 6 months?

-Do you want to work at some point in the future?

- Are you interested in pursuing a career?

- How has the Army affected your employment/career plans?

-If not currently interested in obtaining employment, why not?

2. Use of Employment Assistance Programs

-If currently looking/have recently looked:

-Are you experiencing problems in your job search?

If so, what kinds?

-Are you using or have you ever used any employment assistance programs or activities (either sponsored by the Army or other agencies)?

If yes:

-What activities?

-How helpful have these activities been to you?

-Are there other less tangible features of the employment programs that you feel are beneficial to your job search (e.g., social support, networking or information-sharing)

-How could the Army change its current policies to make it easier for you to obtain employment?

MODULE 2: USE OF ADDITIONAL SERVICES

- How are each of the following related to the employment-related needs of military spouses? By employment-related needs, we mean those that enable you get and keep a job or to pursue education or training options designed to help you reach your employment goals.

- Education and Training

POSSIBLE PROMPTS MIGHT INCLUDE:

- Availability;
- Appropriateness for meeting spouse needs;
- Barriers to programs;
- Ways services could be improved; and
- Satisfaction with services.

- Army Child Development Services

(EXAMPLES OF PROMPTS ARE AS FOLLOWS:)

- Nature
- In-home care vs service organizations
- Hours
- Cost
- Quality
- Age restrictions
- Ability to cope with sick children
- Barriers
- Ways to improve services
- Satisfaction with services

- Transportation

- Is transportation a problem for you in regard to your employment-related needs?

POSSIBLE PROMPTS INCLUDE:

- Costs
- Hours
- Barriers
- Ways to improve
- Satisfaction

- Additional Programs

- Are there other program areas that help you in your job search activities?

- Could you suggest additional programs that would improve your employability or employment options?

MODULE 3: VOLUNTEER WORK

- Are you currently involved in any volunteer work?
If so:
 - Is it military or civilian work?
 - What kind of work is it? (Examples include: children-related such as PTA; social services; other):
 - how many hours per week?
- How is your volunteer work related to your current job?
- Does your volunteer work relate to future job/career plans you have? If so, how
- Has your employment altered your performance of volunteer work?
- How does your performance (or nonperformance) of volunteer work relate to your spouse's career?

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW GUIDELINES - ADMINISTRATIVE INTERVIEWS

INTERVIEW FORMS FOR ADMINISTRATIVE PERSONNEL

Interviewer:
Installation:

Date:
Time:

Interviewee:
Position:
Organization:

1. How does spouse employment relate to your work?

2. Do you think Army spouses experience problems in finding employment, or finding appropriate employment?
PROBE: WHY/WHY NOT?

3. What are some of the barriers to employment or careers that Army spouses may experience?

4. How about after they are on the job, do they typically experience problems then? If so, what kinds?

5a. What kinds of jobs do spouses want?

PROBE 1: ARE THEY MOSTLY FEDERAL, PRIVATE SECTOR OR SELF-EMPLOYMENT?

PROBE 2: ARE THEY PROFESSIONALLY ORIENTED OR DO THEY SEEK JOBS FOR THE SAKE OF HAVING A JOB, FOR EXAMPLE, TO MEET IMMEDIATE INCOME NEEDS?

5b. What kinds of job skills do spouses need?

5c. What kinds of job skills training do spouses need?

6. In general, how readily do spouses' skills transfer from one job to another?

PROBE: CAN YOU THINK OF SPECIFIC EXAMPLES?

7. Do you think spouses know about employment-services (e.g., job search assistance, training, and daycare) that are provided by the Army?

PROBE:

IF YES, WHY?

IF NO, HOW CAN THIS INFORMATION BE BETTER COMMUNICATED?

NOW, I WOULD LIKE TO ASK A FEW QUESTIONS ON THE EFFECTS OF SPOUSE EMPLOYMENT ON SOLDIERS.

8. Do you think, in general, soldiers want their wives to work?

9. How do spouse employment and employment problems affect the soldier's:

daily work activities:

readiness (for eg, for deployment):

decision to reenlist:

10. Do employment problems change for the Army spouse if the soldier chooses to stay in the Army for a number of years? How/Why?

NOW LET'S FOCUS SPECIFICALLY ON SPOUSE EMPLOYMENT NEEDS AND PROGRAMS HERE AT FT. _____.

11. What are the needs of Army spouses at Ft. _____?

- PROBES:
- HOW ARE THESE NEEDS BEING MET?
 - HOW ARE THESE NEEDS NOT BEING MET?
 - ARE THERE PROGRAMS OR POLICIES (EITHER OPERATIONAL OR PLANNED) THAT WILL HELP TO ENSURE THESE NEEDS ARE BETTER MET?

HOW ABOUT FOR THE ARMY, OVERALL:

12. How do you think Army leadership views spouse employment?

13. Do you know of any policy or program changes that may affect spouse employment?

14. What would you recommend that the Army do in terms of policies or programs to decrease the employment problems of Army spouses?

PROBE: ARE ANY OF THESE CURRENTLY BEING IMPLEMENTED?

16. We are deciding what additional kinds of information or data we will collect in the study. Is there particular information on spouse employment that you would find useful?

