

## Family and Work in the Air Force

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## Abstract

Multiple regression models relating attitudes on job performance, job related satisfaction, and retention in the Air Force to family variables are presented. Variance accounted for ranged from 12% To 55%, with member's perceptions of family attitudes and spousal attitude toward retention contributing heavily.

In recent years, family issues have become increasingly important to the Air Force. This interest reflects many concerns, among which are the impact of the all volunteer force, problems in recruiting and retaining personnel, and the effects of demographic changes, reflective of society as a whole, in Air Force families. Several major research efforts, such as the Families in Blue studies (Orthner, 1980; Orthner & Bowen, 1982), and comprehensive literature reviews (Black, 1982; Hunter, 1982) have highlighted some critical research concerns in Air Force family matters.

Despite the increased concern for family issues, many questions remain unanswered. Recently, the Air Force Leadership and Management Development Center (LMDC) at Maxwell AFB, Alabama, developed the U.S. Air Force Spouse Survey (AFSS) as a research instrument to help investigate the relationships between family attitudes and job and retention variables (Ibsen & Austin, 1983). An important feature of the survey is that it matches spousal responses with the responses of the military member on another survey, the Organizational Assessment Package (OAP), which measures the member's attitudes on a number of relevant job and retention dimensions. Thus, one is able to examine direct correlations between the attitudes of military members and their spouses. Based on OAP and AFSS results, the present research develops models relating attitudes on job performance, job related satisfaction, and retention to family issues.

Variables Included in the Models

Many factors have been proposed as family influences on the military member's job performance, satisfaction, and decision to remain in the military service. Not surprisingly, the factor suggested most often is the influence of the spouse's attitudes toward, and commitment to, the military lifestyle (Lund, 1978; Orthner, 1980; Szoc, 1982). Spousal attitudes are particularly important in influencing the retention decision (Lund, 1978; Orthner, 1980). Spousal support also appears to influence job performance and satisfaction (Schneider & Dachler, 1978). Other family variables suggested as influences on retention include

family separations (Lund, 1978), member's perceived impact of work on the family (Schneider & Dachler, 1978), dual career considerations (Black, 1982), traditional versus egalitarian family models (Black, 1982), family integration into the military community (Wood, 1982), time for family interaction (Szoc, 1982), quality of life and family income (Szoc, 1982), and family disruptions caused by the job, such as frequency of moves (Szoc, 1982).

In addition to the factors mentioned above, there are several general family variables which researchers and theorists suggest may affect job variables. Included among these are family life cycle, stress, and cohesion (McCubbin, Cauble, & Patterson, 1982); family size, coping style, and commitment to the Air Force (Orthner & Bowen, 1983); family structure variables such as single parenthood, etc. (Orthner, 1980); feelings of status, spousal autonomy, and family patterns of external social interaction (Schneider & Dachler, 1978); marital satisfaction (Szoc, 1982); and a variety of family economic and support (e.g., medical care) concerns (Schneider & Dachler, 1978; Szoc, 1982).

Based upon these studies, a general model was constructed for predicting job related satisfaction (JRS), perceived work group effectiveness (PWGE), and career intention (CI) to remain in the Air Force (all measured by the DAP) from family variables (as measured by the AFSS and DAP). After reduction of variables in the AFSS via factor analysis, a multiple regression model was developed including the following predictor variables from the AFSS: time on present station; length of marriage; number of children; number of children at home; spousal employment patterns; compatibility of spouse's and member's work schedules; spousal identification with the Air Force; perceived economic security; family separation frequency and duration (i.e., temporary duty [TDY] assignments); perceived influence of temporary separations on family life; satisfaction with job benefits; satisfaction with recreation services; spousal identification with the military job; satisfaction with basic family services; perceived time pressure from the job; spouse's interest in the member's job; satisfaction with medical/dental services; perceived job-provided status; attitude toward move frequency; spousal desire for career retention; congruence between spouse's and member's desire for a military career; perceived demands on spouse to "participate" in activities enhancing member's career; perceived importance of spousal attitudes toward member's career decisions; and perceived equity of compensation. One predictor variable from the DAP, member's perception of family attitude toward the job, was also included.

### Results

The regression models were developed based on the matched responses of 4337 Air Force workers and their spouses. The workers included: 21% officers, 67% enlisted, and 12% civil servants; 20% with less than four years of service, and 37% between 4 and 12 years; 23% with less than one year on station, and 48% between one and three years; 48% with less than one year in their present jobs; 12% minority group members; 3% unmarried, 11%

married to military spouses, 34% married to civilian employed spouses, 52% married to unemployed spouses, and 3% separated geographically from their spouses; 29% college graduates; 50% supervisors of at least one person; 32% on shifts other than the normal day shift; 15% rated personnel; and 90% males. The spouses included: 25% age 25 or under, 50% age 30 or under, and 90% age 42 or under; 30% married less than four years, 49% less than eight years, and 91% less than 20 years; 52% living off base; 12% minority group members; 17% college graduates; 25% with no children at home, 24% with only one child at home, and 35% with two children at home; 72% (of those who worked) working normal day shift, and 40% of working spouses working due to financial necessity.

Regressions for the full models obtained the following results: (1) for JRS,  $R = .74$  ( $R\text{-square} = .55$ ),  $p < .001$ ; (2) for PWGE,  $R = .36$  ( $R\text{-square} = .13$ ),  $p < .001$ ; and (3) for CI,  $R = .53$  ( $R\text{-square} = .28$ ),  $p < .001$ .

Restricted models were constructed using stepwise inclusion where the criterion for inclusion was  $p < .05$ . Regressions were as follows: (1) for JRS,  $R = .74$  ( $R\text{-square} = .55$ ),  $p < .001$ ; (2) for PWGE,  $R = .35$  ( $R\text{-square} = .12$ ),  $p < .001$ ; and (3) for CI,  $R = .53$  ( $R\text{-square} = .28$ ),  $p < .001$ . One predictor variable, member's perception of family attitude toward the job, appeared in all three restricted models. Predictors included in the regressions for both JRS and PWGE were number of children, spousal identification with the military job, and spouse's interest in the job. Predictors unique to the JRS regression included: perceived time pressure from the job, compatibility of spouse's and member's work schedules, whether or not the spouse was employed, and attitude toward move frequency. Predictors unique to the PWGE regression included: time on present station, family separation (TDY) duration, and perceived equity of compensation. Finally, predictors unique to CI included: spousal desire for career retention, length of marriage, number of children at home, congruence between spouse's and member's desire for a military career, perceived influence of family separation on family life, satisfaction with recreation services, family separation (TDY) frequency, perceived economic security, and satisfaction with job benefits.

Beta weights indicated that member's perception of family attitude toward the job was the most important contributor in the restricted regression models for JRS and PWGE. The second heaviest contributor for JRS was spousal identification with the military job. All other variables in the restricted JRS model contributed roughly equally. For PWGE, all variables other than perception of family attitude contributed about equally to the restricted model. The greatest contributor in the restricted model for CI was spousal desire for career retention. This was followed by length of marriage, member's perception of family attitude toward the job, and number of children at home, all with similar weights. The remaining variables in the CI model all contributed lesser, and similar, weights.

Regression models excluding the member's perception of family

attitude toward the job were also derived. These regressions predicted JRS, PWGE, and CI based only on spousal responses. Substantial reductions in predictive ability accrued for JRS ( $R = .42$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and PWGE ( $R = .20$ ,  $p < .001$ ), but not for CI ( $R = .51$ ,  $p < .001$ ). In these regressions, the heaviest contributors were spousal identification with the military job (for JRS and PWGE), and spousal desire for career retention (for CI).

Examination of the simple regressions for predictor variables on JRS, PWGE, and CI showed that predicted scores all improved as the member's perception of his/her family's attitude toward the job improved. Likewise, as spousal identification with the job increased, so did JRS and PWGE scores. There were also positive correlations between number of children and both JRS and PWGE. Time pressure contributed negatively to JRS. Finally, for CI, intention to stay in the Air Force correlated positively with spousal desire for the member to stay in, length of time married, and number of children at home.

### Discussion

These results are encouraging for further exploration of the relationships between job and family. Although there are significant relationships between the two, causal sequences are not clear. Does the family's attitude toward the Air Force job cause the member to develop similar attitudes, or is it the member's attitude that infects his/her family? Perhaps the relationship is synergistic, with a mutual evolution and reinforcement of attitudes between the member and the family. Research (e.g., Szoc, 1982) suggests negative family attitudes toward the member's military career, no matter how these attitudes develop, have a negative impact on the member's career intentions. Our assessment is that military leaders would be wise to continue efforts to improve family life in the Air Force as a way of improving productivity and retention.

The present research suggests several steps leaders might take, where possible, to improve family life. For example, leaders might try to increase spousal identification with the job by expanding the interface between the job and the family (e.g., open houses, etc.). Consideration could be given to more time off to be with family and to scheduling members so that member/spouse work schedules are compatible. Family moves and TDY separations should be held to a minimum. Attention should also be directed toward improving economic security, recreation services, and medical/dental services.

Although the models presented here show significant relationships between family and work variables, the amount of variance accounted for is small to moderate (55% for JRS, 12% for PWGE, and 28% for CI). Other family variables not assessed in the current AFSS, such as marital satisfaction, may be needed to improve the models. Furthermore, one should not forget that work influences such as supervisory, co-worker, and task variables contribute significantly to JRS, PWGE, and CI. Since removal from

the models of the member's perceptions of family attitudes substantially reduced predictive ability for JRS and PWGE, such work-related variables may be more important in influencing the worker's perception of how his/her family views his/her work than are the actual views of the family. Further research is needed to clarify the relative contributions of work and family variables to the productivity and retention of Air Force personnel.

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