



BEYOND UNEMPLOYMENT: AN ASSESSMENT OF UNDEREMPLOYMENT, DISSATISFACTION, AND CAREER IMPACT AMONG U.S. MILITARY SPOUSES ENROLLED IN THE MILLENNIUM COHORT FAMILY STUDY



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BACKGROUND



- While the military spouse unemployment rate is a known challenge, hovering near 20% for the past decade, the quality of employment for those who are working is poorly understood.
- Structural barriers inherent to military life make it difficult for spouses to find and maintain high-quality jobs.
- Building on previous research, this study aimed to identify the primary reasons spouses are not working full-time and to quantify the prevalence and predictors of poor employment quality.



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OBJECTIVES

1. Estimate the prevalence of underemployment, work dissatisfaction, and career impact among military spouses.
2. Identify the top barriers preventing military spouses from working full-time.
3. Examine how three key factors (military-related mobility, work-family spillover, and access to resources) serve as modifiable risk and protective factors for employment quality.



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METHODS



Study Population

- Participants were military spouses enrolled in the Millennium Cohort Family Study (MCFS; Panels 1 and 2).
- Spouses of currently serving personnel (all branches/components), who responded to the 2019-2021 MCFS survey cycle were eligible.
- Barriers for employment were limited to all spouses who were not working full-time (N=9660).
- Underemployment (N=7,459) and dissatisfaction (N=7,453) were limited to those who were employed full-/part-time.
- Career impact was limited to spouses who were married as of the 2019 survey and were employed or looking for work (N=8,288).



METHODS



Outcomes

Underemployment

- "Do you feel you have more training and/or experience than is required for your current job (i.e., Do you feel overqualified for your current position)?" OR
If *part-time* employed, "Would you prefer to have a full-time job?"

Employment Dissatisfaction

- "How satisfying is your current employment?"

Military life impact on career

- "Please indicate to what extent you feel being a military spouse has impacted the following aspects of your...Career development"



METHODS



Predictors and Covariates

- Military mobility: permanent change of station (PCS)
- Work to family conflict: military-related work-family conflict, service member's time away from home
- Family to work conflict: caregiving for serious medical need, number of children, parent demands
- Support resources: urban/rural living location, federal employment status, educational attainment, social support, military support, belonging
- Demographics: sex, age, race and ethnicity, student status
- Service member military characteristics (DMDC archival records): component, pay grade, separation status, service branch



METHODS



Analyses

- Descriptive statistics identified reasons military spouses were not working full-time.
- Multivariable regression models were used to cross-sectionally examine the associations between the predictors and three measures of employment quality:
 - Underemployment
 - Employment dissatisfaction
 - Perceived negative impact of military life on career development

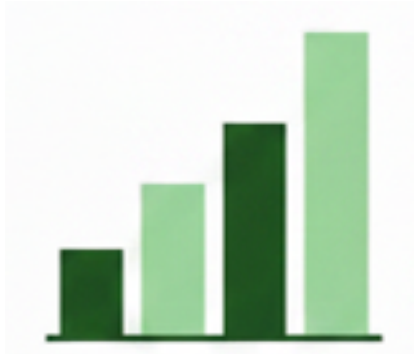


RESULTS



Objective 1: Prevalence of Employment Outcomes

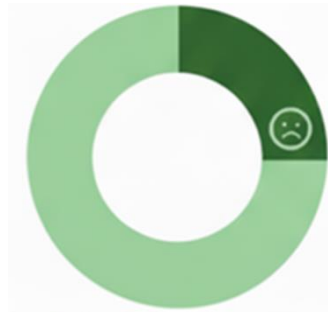
Underemployment



42%

of working spouses
were underemployed.

Job Dissatisfaction



15%

of working spouses
were dissatisfied with
their current job.

Career Impact



40%

of working spouses or those
looking for work perceived
the military negatively
impacted their career.



RESULTS



Objective 2: Barriers preventing military spouses from working full-time included:

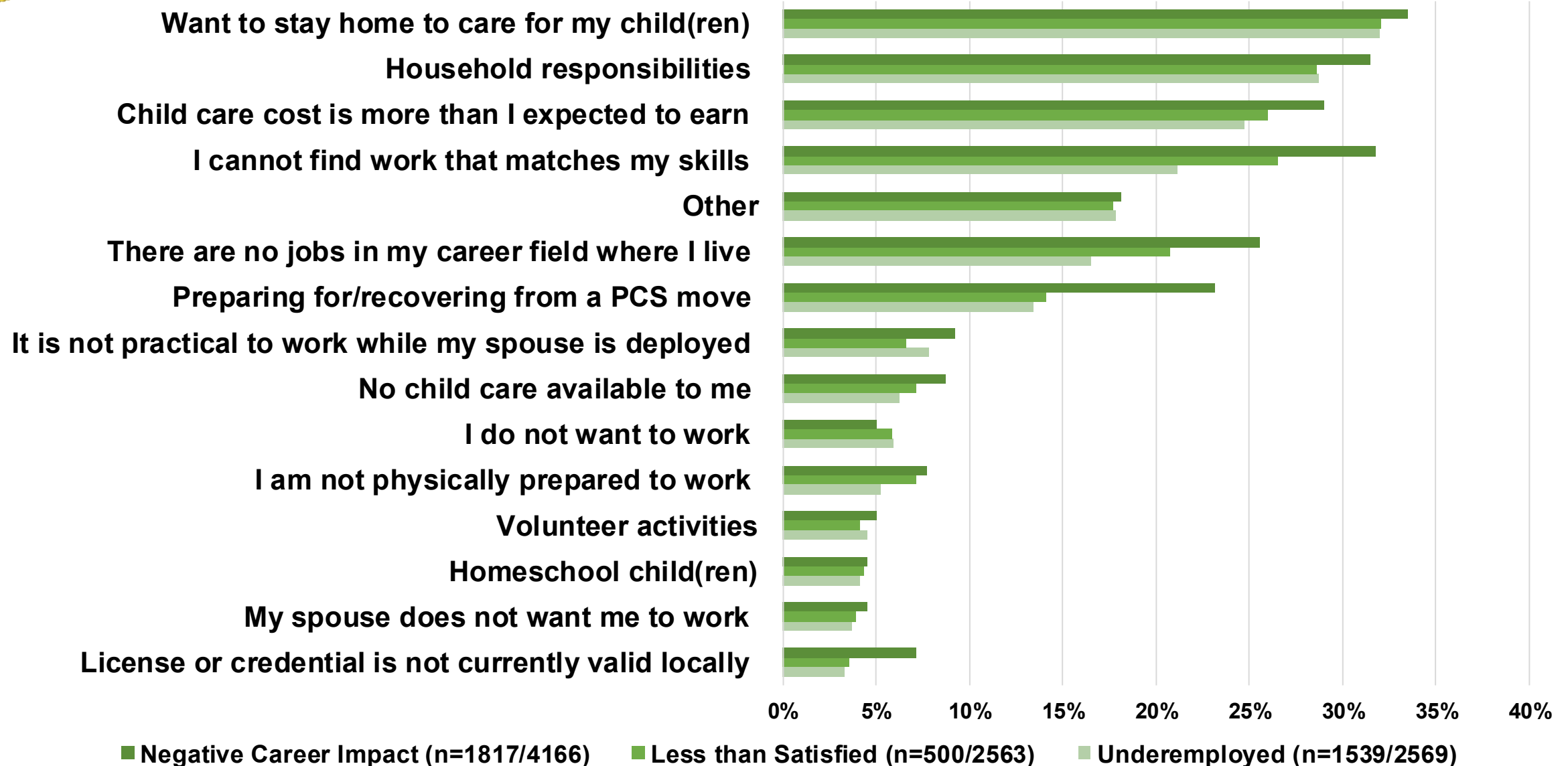
- Family responsibilities, such as a desire to stay home with children (41%) and manage household duties (31%).
- External barriers, such as childcare costs (24%) or a lack of jobs matching spouses' skills (14%) and career field (12%).



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RESULTS



■ Negative Career Impact (n=1817/4166) ■ Less than Satisfied (n=500/2563) ■ Underemployed (n=1539/2569)



ADJUSTED RESULTS



Objective 3: Modifiable risk and protective factors for employment outcomes

Mobility

- Experiencing a PCS move was significantly associated with spouses reporting an increased perception that the military negatively impacted their career.
- Not significantly associated with underemployment or job dissatisfaction.



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ADJUSTED RESULTS



Objective 3 continued

Work to Family Conflict

- Military-related work-family conflict significantly increased the odds of underemployment and a greater perception of negative career impact.
- Service member's time away from home was not significantly associated with any outcome.



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Family to Work Conflict

- Spouses who assumed a caregiving role for a disabled or ill family member felt their careers were more negatively impacted by military life.
- Number of children in the home and coping with the demands of parenting, were not significantly associated with any outcome.



ADJUSTED RESULTS

Resources

- Spouses currently serving in the military were significantly less likely to be underemployed and perceived the military had less of a negative impact on their career but reported greater career dissatisfaction.
- Higher education was associated with less career dissatisfaction but a stronger perception that the military had negatively impacted their careers.
- Informal support (marital quality, social support) and formal support (military satisfaction, spouse pride) consistently protected against poor employment outcomes.
- Rural living location and federal employment status were not significantly associated with any outcome.



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CONCLUSION



- Findings demonstrate that the severity of military-related work-family conflict, the burden of systemic barriers (e.g., affordable childcare, job market mismatches), and the strength of protective relational resources (e.g., marital quality, community connection, and military pride) can all be directly targeted.
- These findings outline how the Department of War and support organizations can transition from simply creating jobs to improving military spouses' employment experience.

RESOURCES

DoD Spouse Education and Career Opportunities Office and Military OneSource

- Support spouses who would like to support their career development and educational attainment



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Study Team

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<https://www.familycohort.org/>



ANY QUESTIONS?

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