

## **Introduction**

The 21st century is witnessing unprecedented changes in work and family relations in India. As the work environment is changing globally, newer trends of work and career mobility are emerging. India is witnessing a major shift in the workplace, as more and more women are joining the workforce at different levels and in different capacities. Over the years, in India, as in most countries, the number of educated women has increased, resulting in their increased participation in organised and industrial sectors. According to Indiatat.com, the employment of women in the organised sector went up from 52.59 lakh in 2010 to 59.54 lakh in 2011, registering an increase of 6.63 per cent. The share of women in organised sector vis-à-vis men is reported to be 20.5 per cent in 2011 as compared to 19.4 per cent in 2010.<sup>1</sup> India has the largest population of employed women and the largest number of certified women professionals in information technology, finance, and healthcare services just after the USA.<sup>2</sup>

These changes are not only influencing the economies, industries and organisations at a macro level but their effects are also visible on families and individuals at the micro level. The increasing career-orientation in women is leading to growing number of educated women in technical, professional and managerial positions and is resulting in an increase in the dual career families in India.<sup>3</sup> Balancing between two equally demanding domains namely the family and the professional becomes a Herculean task for dual career couples, especially for the women. The challenges get further exacerbated for aspirational couples, when the male spouse opts for a demanding profession like the Army.

## **Military Life and Spouse Employment**

The military of today is increasingly a military of families. On the average one in seven of those entering the eighth year of service are married and many have children. Military families, like civilian families, may rely on a second income. At the same time, military spouses may encounter unique obstacles to pursuing work, including the rigid and unpredictable demands on the military member's time as well as frequent relocations and changes of residence.

Challenges in military life are different from those faced by civilians, both in terms of emotional security, psychological equilibrium and physical well-being. One distinguishing characteristic of employment in the Indian military is frequent relocation of serving personnel and their families. Many large corporations transfer executives and their families to different cities, particularly early in their careers. However, corporations tend not to ask their rank-and-file workers to move. The military is unique in the Indian labour force in the extent to which it expects its rank-and-file personnel and their families to relocate, and the long distances that it moves them. It is not unusual for the armed forces to move their personnel every two to three years.

## **Employment Status and Kinds of Employment**

The lives of military wives are as a result riddled with change, unpredictability, and uncertainty. These come as a result of being unsure of when their husbands will return from a deployment or training, uncertainty regarding when he will unexpectedly be called to duty, and not knowing where the next permanent change of station (PCS) will take them. Amidst all of this upheaval and ambiguity, many military wives wish to work outside the home, and many military wives do. However, the options available to them are not as promising as those available to civilian wives. Due to the few or undesirable job opportunities for military wives, many choose to remain unemployed. For those who don't choose to remain unemployed, a few military wives may be able to transfer within their company to a local location, but the majority will not. The limited number of job opportunities for military wives may be a result of the wives being unfamiliar with the area and the options available, which may greatly limit their possibilities from the very beginning. However, it may also be due to the reluctance a number of employers exhibit while hiring these transient workers. Some organisations may be averse to hiring military wives due to the finite amount of time that they will be in the local area. Others believe that military wives only desire to work part-time. These beliefs can create a bias against hiring them, even though many military wives have the knowledge, skill and drive to become highly productive employees.

For those organisations that do hire military wives, many do not wish to train them. Employers know that they will only be in the area for a few years, and many are unwilling to put forth the time, effort, and money to train them to perform the duties they were hired to do, much less offer training for positions higher up in the organisation. This affects not only the performance and ability in the current position, but also doesn't allow the wife to expand on her abilities and take new skills to the next duty station.

Unlike their civilian counterparts who may move to optimise labour force opportunities, military wives are virtually always tied movers and are not necessarily moving advantageously. Military bases may be in localities with low wages and limited employment opportunities for military wives. The pattern of relatively frequent PCS moves may cause military wives to engage in less job search, resulting in a lower return to their human capital. The returns to search will also be lower if military installations are in low wage areas with few high wage jobs for highly educated military wives.

Consequently, military wives may be induced to accept lower-wage jobs than if they were in major labour market areas. Military wives may also be self-selected, placing a high priority on the military lifestyle, with its unique opportunities and limitations. All in all, the relocations of military families have negative impact on the training and employment possibilities of military wives.

## **Comparison of Earnings**

A prominent area of research regarding the effects of relocation on military wives is the comparison of the current wages and earnings over time of a military wife to a civilian wife. Research abroad has found that military wives earned 19 per cent less than civilian wives.<sup>4</sup> Much of this can most likely be attributed to the lack of seniority one is able to

attain and the lack of training that employers are willing to provide to such short term employees. Another reason for the earnings gap could be the type of employment that the military wives are able to obtain. The types of employment that allow for the flexibility or part-time employment that some military wives need or desire tend to be in the teaching, services and retail sectors, which are typically characterised by low wages. Furthermore, studies have shown that the average time that it takes for a military wife to gain employment after a permanent change of station is approximately ten months, which further decreases the amount of time she spends in employment and the amount of money she is able to earn.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, the relocations of military families have negative effect on the earnings of military wives, except for those who have government jobs.

In terms of geographic mobility, research has found that those spouses who move less frequently are more likely to be in the labour force and to find a job (especially one in which the spouse is able to work full time and/or use the skills that they have on that job).<sup>6</sup> Similarly, the amount of time a spouse is at a given geographic location is positively related to labour force participation, employment (vs. unemployment), full-time work (vs. part-time work), and whether the spouse is able to utilise her skills in her current job. It was also found that those spouses who live closer to a population centre are more likely to be in the labour force and employed and that those who are stationed overseas are particularly disadvantaged. Having children, especially young children, is associated with lower labour force participation, employment, and full-time work. Education appears to have a particularly strong, positive effect on the likelihood of a wife being in the labour force, being employed full-time, and using her skills in her current job.<sup>7</sup>

### **Many Spouses Opt Out of the Workforce because of Conditions which are Unique to the Military Lifestyle**

A sizable number of spouses are neither working nor seeking work because of military service related barriers, including day care problems, local labour market conditions, or demands of the military lifestyle, that hinder their employment.<sup>8</sup> Although day care and local labour market conditions are issues that large numbers of civilian spouses also face, many military spouses viewed these conditions as the result of their military lifestyle, either because they were removed from extended family that could help with the parenting responsibilities, because they would not have self-selected the location to which the military sent them, or because military demands such as deployments and long hours precluded their service member from assisting them.<sup>9</sup>

### **A Majority Believe that Military Life Negatively Affected their Employment and Education**

The clearest indicator of the challenges of military spouse employment is the fact that most spouses feel that being a military spouse has a negative impact on their work opportunities. The most frequently cited cause was frequent and disruptive moves.<sup>10</sup> Other causes cited were service member absence and the related heavy parenting responsibilities as well as child care difficulties. These spouses also referred to the inflexibility of the military workplace to accommodate the needs of military parents.<sup>11</sup> Finally, some spouses cited an employer bias against or stigmatisation of military spouses, often driven by the employer's concern that the spouse will be forced to leave abruptly. As with frequent moves and service member absence, this perceived cause is uniquely military.<sup>12</sup>

### **Retention and the Armed Forces**

The country's unemployment rate is estimated to be at 4.7 per cent as per the latest Annual Employment and Unemployment Survey Report for 2012-13. The irony is that leading newspapers report that the armed forces are still facing a shortage of over 13,000 officers. The 1.3 million strong Indian military today faces a shortage of 24-26 per cent of officers.<sup>13</sup>

The recruitment and retention of high-quality personnel is a perennial concern for the army and policy makers alike. Many factors have contributed to this downward trend. The demands on the military leadership have since increased considerably with new threats and challenges to national security. Many studies have estimated the effect on retention of military compensation, bonuses, and environmental factors such as the civilian unemployment rate. No study in India has examined the effect of spouse employment on retention behaviour. It therefore seems important to understand how military life affects family earnings, particularly spouse earnings, and—in future research—to understand how family earnings affect the member's decision to stay in or leave the military.

### **Retention and Spouse Employment**

Spouse employment is thought to be an important factor in the soldier's commitment to military life, job performance, military readiness, and the retention of enlisted personnel and officers. The previously discussed issues faced by military wives when attempting to have a career of their own not only affect them and their families, but also the military as a whole. Recent research has indicated that wives dissatisfied with the career options available to them may encourage their military husbands to leave the service at the first available opportunity.<sup>14</sup> Studies have found that "spouse influence on military retirement or resignation decisions has increased with the rate of military spouses working outside the home.<sup>15</sup> This indicates that as long as the tendency of military wives to work outside of the home increases, but the job opportunities available to them do not, a decrease in the number of military members can be expected. This does not bode well for the size and quality of our military in the future

### **Steps to Improve Employment and Educational Opportunities and thus Enhance Quality of Life of Military Spouses**

Systematic researches conducted on army spouses in countries across the world have resulted in various policies, programmes and partnerships internationally to assist the military spouse in the employment process. The lack of research on the effect of spouse earnings on retention in India is due to a lack of data. Regularly maintained databases on military members do not include information on either a spouse's current and future earnings or on whether the member should stay in, or leave, the military. Based on a literature review of studies abroad the following preliminary suggestions are offered to mitigate the problems associated with military spouse employment :-

- (a) Create a separate Indian Army Family Research Institute with a specific time bound Army Family Action Plan to enable research that investigates the determinants of military quality of life and provides solutions to enhance it.<sup>16</sup>
- (b) Conduct periodic Defence Survey of Officer and Enlisted Personnel and their Spouses in order to assess the ground truth, or actual reality constraints military spouse face in employment.<sup>17</sup>
- (c) Design employment programmes or policies that recognise that different groups of spouses work for different reasons.
- (e) Pursue relationships with local employers and large, nationally prevalent employers working to aid military spouses in finding and identifying portable jobs at great businesses, as well as reduce the wage gap between military and civilian spouses.<sup>18</sup>
- (f) Create Military Spouse Employment Partnership (MSEP), which connects military spouses with corporations who are ready to help spouses explore career options for their mobile lifestyles.<sup>19</sup>
- (g) Consider incentives or requirements for military contractors to prioritise hiring military spouses.
- (h) Establish Military Spouse Career Centres, consisting of a call centre and a website for military spouses to obtain counselling and information.<sup>20</sup>

## Conclusion

Military spouses are a unique and traceable population. Many are trailing spouses over multiple decades. In order to better understand the outcomes of geographic mobility, which include the overall economic impact and career progression of the civilian spouse more robust research efforts are needed. These research findings may answer the question regarding the military spouse's disability to secure employment and determine if her employment status is a factor in the military spouse's decision to support the active-duty service member to remain in the military.

## End notes

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