

Married to the Military: Employment Prospects for Civilian Female Spouses

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Abstract

The vast majority of research on the impact of military has considered the experiences of service members during and after their service. However, the impact of military lifestyle on civilian spousal employment is a relatively new topic of research. This research study considers the impacts that Canadian military lifestyle has on the employment prospects of civilian female spouses. Conducting semi-structured interviews, my aim is to consider how employment is affected, what impact childcare has on employment and to understand the perceptions that participants have of military support systems available to military families. Theories on the labour force participation of women and tied migration are instrumental in my analysis of the impacts of military lifestyle on women's employment prospects. I conclude that systemic issues within military lifestyle and the labour force more generally have a negative impact on female spouse's employment prospects. The impacts of childcare and other household responsibilities have an evidently negative impact on labour force participation as well. Support systems were used by military spouses for more traditional services, possibly reinforcing gendered divisions of labour.

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Introduction

“I think [being married to a military member] is a very challenging thing to put people through. It takes a very strong couple, a very tight group to hold it together. It’s challenging – no matter what they say or prepare you for, you can’t imagine the stress. It’s very difficult, it’s not an easy thing. I think being married is difficult – add the stress of being in the military to that and the stress of having to change your job and sort of follow somebody... It’s a very stressful life. It’s not easy.”

Above is a quote from Holly, explaining the challenges that she, and many other women face, as a civilian spouse of a military member. She describes the stress of uprooting from her job and community again and again, acting as the tied migrant in order to support her husband in advancing his career. This quote echoes the sentiments and experiences of many spouses of military members, which will be addressed in this research study.

While the experiences of military members during and after their service have been examined thoroughly in previous research, the experiences of military spouses have been generally disregarded until more recently. However, military spouses tend to be negatively impacted by the challenges that come along with military lifestyle. Due to frequent migration, spousal deployment and other unique aspects of a military lifestyle, military spouses tend to suffer, especially when it comes to their employment. A great deal of the literature has found the careers of that civilian spouses of military members’ tend to suffer while their spouses’ career continues to advance and thrive. The civilian spouse’s career is often left on the back burner while the military member continues to advance, usually migrating to various provinces during the course of their career. (Castaneda & Harrell, 2008; Cooke & Speirs, 2005; Gesit & McManus, 2011; Hisnanick & Little, 2013; Hosek & MacDermid, 2013; Hosek et. al, 2002; Shihadeh, 1991). While military family services, like housing and health care are readily available, military

spousal employment services are available, but do not seem to be as acknowledged in the case of military members and their families (Albano, 1994; Davis, Blaschke & Stafford, 2012).

In this thesis, I explore how civilian spouses of military members' employment prospects tend to be negatively impacted due to frequent migration or spousal deployment while their spouses' career in the military thrives. Therefore, my research question asks how the employment prospects of military spouses are impacted by a Canadian military lifestyle. My two subsidiary questions ask how childcare responsibilities of civilian female spouses impact their employment prospects and how military spouses perceive the military family support systems that are available to them. I will consider female labour force participation and tied migration theories in the analysis of these research questions. The circumstances that military spouses face during migration and spousal deployment seem to exacerbate any existing gender parity issues. Therefore, it is important to consider how civilian women's labour force participation has changed over the years while considering the same changes (or lack thereof) for female military spouses.

I will begin by looking to current literature on military wives and their labour force participation, as well as how childcare and other forms of domestic labour are thought to have an impact on labour force participation of women. Finally, I will consider formal military support systems available to families. Next, I will discuss the research methods I used to collect and analyze the data. Finally, I will summarize and analyze the research findings. To conclude, I will provide potential directions for future research on similar topics.

As Hosek et al note, today's military is made up of military families; to support our troops, we should also consider the support that military families are in need of (Hosek et. al, 2002). Without calling attention to the support that military families might need, we are ignoring a

major role that the family plays in the Canadian military. This research will attempt to highlight some of the systemic issues surrounding military spouse's employment prospects and what factors are impacting their labour force participation. As well, it will consider the support systems that are available to military families and how these are helping or hindering military spouses.

Literature Review

Female Labour Force Participation

As we begin to consider female labour force participation, it is important to note that the labour force participation of female civilian spouses of military members has not increased to the same extent as the labour force participation of female civilian counterparts in recent decades (Castaneda & Harrell, 2008; Cooke & Speirs, 2005; Hisnanick & Little, 2013; Hosek & MacDermid, 2013; Payne, Warner & Little, 1992). Because of this, it is often the case that older feminist literature outlining women's struggles in entering the labour force is still relevant for this population than they are relevant for civilian female workers.

In his studies on labour force participation of married women, Becker (1965) notes that different household and labour market demands for women could affect the timing of their labour force participation. He notes that variation in labour force participation is common in married women, and also considers that responsibilities for childcare, food preparation and other household tasks prevent women's earning power from increasing as much as their male counterparts (Becker, 1965; Becker, 1985).

Armstrong and Armstrong (1984) state that women continue to have more household responsibilities than men and are now increasingly encouraged to join the job market, holding

two jobs instead of just one like their male spouses. Education can raise the achievement expectations of women, but continued job segregation is still a reality and the contradiction becomes even more apparent as women's education improves but their job prospects do not. As this continues to happen to more and more women, Armstrong and Armstrong note that it is difficult to explain this as individual inadequacies in female workers but rather as a systemic issue (Armstrong & Armstrong, 1984). While generally, households can negotiate a more equal division of labour, the fact still remains that the pressure women feel to take responsibility of childcare and household tasks is still present. As the literature states, the circumstances that military families face through migration and deployment will likely exacerbate any existing gender parity issues.

Tied Migration

Jacob Mincer links theories of women's labour force participation with the impacts that migration can have on employment. He created the theory of Tied Migration, defining a "tied migrant" as an individual who earns less than their spouse, such that the primary earner's higher income would compensate for any losses from moving and loss in earnings of the tied migrant. This spouse's economic gain from migration due to job opportunities outweighs the tied migrant's economic loss. When a spouse's employment attachment is more permanent, they are less likely to move or act as the tied migrant. However, Mincer shows that migration tends to increase the unemployment of women while decreasing the unemployment of men, showing that female spouses tend to be tied migrants. This interruption of work from migration leads to slower growth of wages over the lifespan, and this especially impacts female spouses. Mincer has likened tied migration to child rearing in terms of its negative impact on women's wage evolution (Mincer, 1977).

It is argued that the role of the tied migrant has negative effects on military spouses in terms of hours worked and labour market status held (Cooke & Speirs, 2005). Payne, Warner and Little find that military wives are less involved in the labour force and less likely to reach traditional educational and employment milestones than civilian wives due to frequent migration (Payne, Warner & Little, 1992). Further, the fewer economic resources a wife has in relation to their husbands, the more likely they are to play a subsidiary role in migration. Because of this, families tend to move in response to the husband's opportunities, with wives' employment opportunities acting as less of a concern (Shihadeh, 1991). Finally, Geist and McManus note that women who migrate in order to benefit their husband's careers are likely to be affected by significantly lower financial earnings than married women who have not migrated (Geist & McManus, 2011).

Childcare Responsibilities

The presence of young children in the household has been argued to have a negative impact on military spouses employment prospects. Military spouses with children are less likely to seek employment – Castaneda and Harrell note that this is likely due to childcare and household responsibilities (2008). Hisnanick and Little and Hosek and MacDermid reaffirm that the presence of children (especially young children who require constant care) in the house will likely result in military wives lower labour force attachment, connecting this directly to childcare responsibilities (Hisnanick & Little, 2013; Hosek & MacDermid, 2013). Hosek and MacDermid find that due to less flexibility in their work schedules alongside frequent migration, military spouses are less likely to be involved in the labour market – and if they are involved, it is likely in a part-time position, even if they would prefer full-time work (Hosek & MacDermid, 2013). Hayghe supports this, noting that 35% of military wives hold jobs in sales and service

occupations, and were less likely to hold professional specialty jobs, likely due to the fact that the sales and service sector can offer part-time work. Armstrong and Armstrong echo this statement, noting that the largest factor in women's low wage jobs is their high concentration in low-wage job sectors, explaining that this is due to occupational segregation and women's concentration in domestic labour, including childcare responsibilities (Armstrong & Armstrong, 1984).

Hosek, Asch, Fair, Martin and Mattock consider that the value of time spent at home rather than in the labour force might be higher for military wives than civilian wives in order to provide childcare, deal with unexpected changes or take up extra work around the house when their spouse is deployed. This especially demanding lifestyle might cause labour force participation to be less likely in military spouses (Hosek et. al, 2002). Luxton notes that it is in "the double day of labour" that the oppressive gendered division of labour becomes most obvious – instead of minimizing the workload on either end, women must meet the requirements of both wage work and domestic work (Luxton, 1980).

Military Family Support Systems

When it comes to support for military families, the effects of military lifestyle on the family were not considered a primary responsibility until the Second World War. At this time, research was mostly focused on children being separated from their father figure (Albano, 1994; Davis, Blaschke & Stafford, 2012). Albano notes that it wasn't until the 1960's that researchers considered how military spouses were impacted by deployment, feelings of alienation and loss of community. Eventually, more focus was put into the psychosocial effects of military lifestyle on spouses and children of military families. Services like the Military Family Resource Centre (MFRC) are now commonly available for services like daycare, deployment support, mental

health services and career counseling for military members and their families. These are generally located on military bases or in towns with a large population of military families (Family Force, 2016).

Literature Review Conclusion

The extensive research on military spouses, women's labour force participation and the impact of migration and support has provided a solid starting point for my own research interests. However, the research is lacking in a Canadian context. English noted that the Canadian and American militaries contrast greatly due to distinct cultural, historical and social differences (English, 2004, p. 115). Further, there are contrasts in labour force participation trends in Canada and America, which would lead to differences in military spouses' employment prospects overtime (Statistics Canada, 2014b). Finally, much of the research done on military families have been done quantitatively – while this gives us the opportunity to see a more exact estimate of labour force participation and income in military spouses, it can leave out the possibility to better understand the individual experience of military spouses and their families (Bouma et al, 2012). With this in mind, my own research will provide some worthwhile contributions to the current literature.

Methodology

Having grown up in a military family, I can understand the struggles that military wives are likely to encounter when it comes to employment. By witnessing my own parents' employment, as well as family friends' employment, I have been able to indirectly observe the impacts that a military lifestyle can have on a civilian spouse's employment prospects.

My research consisted of five semi-structured interviews with civilian female spouses of Canadian military members. Asking semi-structured interview questions yielded rich data, and allowed the interviewee to touch on topics or aspects of their own experiences that I had not previously considered. This allowed for participants to speak about the experiences that have been most significant for them, whether they were directly related to my questions or not, and helped me to get a better idea of what themes would be most important to include in my analysis (Bouma, Ling & Wilkinson, 2012).

Four of the women interviewed resided in Nova Scotia and one resided in British Columbia. Place of resident did not drastically affect my responses, due to the fact that many military families move frequently within Canada and the living conditions from city to city are relatively similar. Further, in the interviews, many of the participants drew from past experiences living in different areas across the country to better illustrate their experiences, making the current location in which they live just as important as any other location they have lived in Canada. My inclusion criteria were simply individuals who were either a female civilian wife or common-law spouse of a Canadian Forces member. Since common-law spouses of military members receive many of the same benefits that married spouses do, and would deal with migration and deployment the same way that a married spouse would, I chose to include this population as well.

I used a mixture of convenience sampling and snowball sampling to recruit my participants. As a child of a military member, I was able to reach out to people in my own personal network for recruitment. Snowball sampling involved recruiting people via word of mouth or email, and asking my participants to reach out to individuals from their networks to see if anyone was interested in participating (see Appendix A for recruitment email). This recruitment method was ideal for an honours size project. A weakness of convenience and

snowball sampling is that it can create biases in the research, because the sample is not chosen at random, and generalizations cannot be made from the sample (Bouma et. al, 2012). However, my study is a small, qualitative study so I am aware that I am unable to make generalizations from the data. However, with this sample I was able to gain a better understanding and provide new insights into the impacts of Canadian military lifestyle on civilian spouses.

Another limitation is that I only spoke to female civilian spouses. Although speaking to spouses of other genders would have given me a better insight into the military spouse experience depending on gender. Since the majority of military members are still overwhelmingly male (Statistics Canada, 2014a), I felt that choosing to interview female spouses would be a good starting point for an honours research project.

The interviews were completed either over the phone or in person and lasted about half an hour to over an hour. All interviews were recorded using a digital audio recording device. I developed an interview guideline that had four main sections. The first were simple demographic questions, which aimed at better understanding the income variations from participant to participant and the variation between their own income and their spouses' income. This section also allowed me to become familiarized with important background information – how often families moved, the military spouse's rank and the formal education the civilian spouse has received. The next section asked questions pertaining to the civilian spouse's past and present employment. This section was crucial in understanding the types of jobs these women have held in the past and present, whether these jobs were full or part time, and whether they found these jobs to be fulfilling or if they were in the field they had wanted to work in. Next, I asked participants more broadly about any challenges they faced as a military spouse. I asked specific questions about childcare if this was applicable, as well as questions about moving and their spouse's deployment. Finally, I asked participants to tell me about their

experiences with support systems – whether they depended on family and friends or organizations designed to offer support to military families, or both (see Appendix B for interview guide).

In any research project, the researcher must be aware of the chance of ethical risk. My study of military spouses was a minimal risk research study. Although participants might have experienced mild discomfort in discussing their experience as a spouse of a military member, none of the participants seemed to be distressed during the interview. In case that this were to happen, I had the contact information of military counseling centers on hand for the participants. The participants were notified before the interview started that they could end at any time or skip any question they felt uncomfortable answering. Finally, my information as well as my supervisor's information was provided in case of any concerns about the study or their participation (see Appendix C for consent form).

Findings

Participant Demographic Information

To understand the experiences of my participants, I believe it is important to consider some of their basic demographic information. This information, like their educational background, their household income versus their personal income, the number of children they have and the different types of jobs they have held will allow us to better understand their experiences as a spouse of a military member and their experiences with labour force participation.

All of my participants were currently married to a member of the Canadian military and currently employed themselves, whether part-time or full-time. Interestingly, but unsurprisingly based on the literature, all participants were working in a service, sales or clerical occupation.

Based on the personal income range they belong in, a few were working for minimum wage.

Based on the household income compared to their personal income, the majority of the participants were likely making a lower income than their military spouse. Some of the women were college or university educated, although this seemed to have little bearing on their income level or current labour force participation. Finally, three of the women worked part-time hours. All but one participant had children, although only one participant had young children, while the rest had children in their early teens or older. All of this information is outlined clearly in Appendix D.

Interrupted Careers: Participant's Employment Prospects

As much of the literature predicted, the majority of my participants were mostly working part-time work hours. All of their jobs were currently in sales, service or administrative positions, and none of the participants held “professional” specialty jobs, like careers in medicine or law. This reflected the need for flexible work hours, as well as frequent migration of military families. Michelle noted that throughout her employment history, she searched for jobs that worked around her lifestyle, stating that her children were priority: “that was my job more than anything”. It is usually the case that jobs that are able to work easily around schedules are part-time and generally in the service or sales industry, and it is no coincidence that military spouses with demanding lifestyles are more likely to work in these positions.

A recurring theme in the findings was that many of the women were currently choosing or had chosen in the past to wait to advance their own career due to current household responsibilities. The participants chose to make sacrifices in their own careers to allow for their spouse to advance in their career. To do so, the participant generally had to take on more household responsibilities, including childcare, due to their spouse's career demands. This

meant that many of the women chose to work part-time, flexible hours or not at all due to an already demanding schedule. This also meant that many of the women were not working in the area they would prefer. As Claire noted,

I'm an administrative assistant, but prior to that I was a counselor for victims of criminal acts. That's what I studied but because we – we moved I had to find something else. [...] That was my passion to be a counselor with victims of criminal acts. All my studies were around that but you know, when you move...

This sacrifice is shown in Claire's experience, as she is simply unable to be guaranteed work in the career she is trained in and wishes to work in due to frequent moves. As the tied migrant, Claire's husband's employment becomes the priority while her career becomes secondary. Claire is one of the participants who does have a university degree, and has previously worked in her field, yet her career is placed on the back burner due to frequent migration. Another participant, Sara, had noted that even her search for a part-time retail job was difficult as there were simply no jobs available when she had moved to Halifax and she was unable to get a transfer from her other job.

As Armstrong and Armstrong (1984) noted, job segregation is still a reality for women, and this was reflected in the population I studied. Education can raise expectations for women's career potential but with continued job segregation, the gap between education received and job prospects is growing wider. Two of the women I had interviewed had a Bachelor's degree but were working at jobs requiring fewer qualifications than they currently have. Although one might argue that a Bachelor's degree does not necessarily guarantee a well-paying, rewarding job, it seems like the contradiction that Armstrong and Armstrong discuss is at an increased likelihood for women and even more likely for women married to military members based on my own data. For these women, finding a high-wage job, especially when they have other responsibilities, a demanding lifestyle, which means they are at times the only parent in the

house, or that they might be moving in the near future, has proven to be extremely difficult. As a few participants noted, they took whatever job they could, so long as it was flexible and worked with their schedule, which at times meant sacrificing the ability to work in the field they studied in.

Other respondents described having to wait to advance their careers due to childcare and other household responsibilities. Finding the time to work, much less attend school, is hindered by frequent migration and household responsibilities. Further, those who are highly educated might not have the opportunity to find high-wage work in some military postings – especially small towns – causing spouses with higher education to take lower-wage jobs (Hosek et. al, 2002). Hosek, Asch, Fair, Martin and Mattock (2002) also point out that military bases may be located in areas with limited employment or educational opportunities for women, so the women are not necessarily provided with the opportunities to advance their career during their family's postings. Sara echoes this statement, as she had recently moved back from an isolated posting in northern Alberta. She states:

My original plan was to become a hairstylist or esthetician. It does require being able to go to school and, you know, different skills. Now I can't, because of my children. I have one at home still, and until she's in school there's really no way. But in Alberta, there was nowhere near me to go to school. If I wanted to go to school, it had to be in Edmonton, which was a 4-hour drive.

Sara's career aspirations would likely suit a military lifestyle – service jobs are commonly held by military spouses and they are also commonly available in most cities. However, her currently inflexible schedule, as well as her previous lack of access to education hindered her chances at advancing her career prospects. This creates a cycle, as the female spouse's employment and education is continually less attached than their military spouse, who is always guaranteed a stable, well-paying job with benefits for the family after a move. This makes it more likely that the family will move regularly for the military member's career, putting the civilian spouse in the

role of the tied migrant time and time again. Michelle restated this, saying that while her husband always had a job after a move, she had to “uproot” her job. She notes that not only did she have to uproot her job, but also she had to leave friendships and a community she had grown accustomed to. She recalled that during all of their moves as a family, her husband was guaranteed a job, but he was also likely to know some of his coworkers in the new location, where she was starting fresh every time. This “fresh start” would make it extremely difficult for one to even attempt to make career advances. Michelle asked an important question that many military spouses find themselves wondering: “How do you settle on a career when you don’t know when you’re going to be moving next?” According to the findings, the answer is that settling down in a career is not an easy task for a military spouse.

More Than a Labour of Love: The Impact of Childcare and Household Responsibilities

The debate over who completes childcare and other household responsibilities has been ongoing for decades. With more dual-earner families and more women working outside of the home, the need for childcare in Canada has grown steadily (Statistics Canada, 2015). However, an interesting finding in my research showed that of the women who did have children, all agreed that they were the parent who did the most amount of childcare in the home. This included parents whose children were currently at an age where they needed constant care as well as parents whose children were older but had required care in the past. Each of these parents communicated their own difficulties managing childcare along with part or full time work, their spouse’s deployments and other responsibilities.

Claire, the participant who did not have any children, was aware that although it was difficult when her spouse was away, she did not have the added pressure of taking care of

children on top of work and household responsibilities. She stated that it was probably “an easy part” of her experience compared to the many spouses of military members who do have children and juggle childcare with other daily tasks. She notes that while she takes care of things around the house when her husband is gone, it can get lonely, which she found difficult. Those participants who did have children generally noted that their employment decreased, especially when their children were younger (in this case, usually preschool to elementary school ages). All of the participants with children stated that when their children were younger, their labour force participation was on a part-time basis or not at all. Most noted that they worked when it was suitable for them; that if they could find a job that suited their lifestyle and accommodated their childcare responsibilities or other needs, they would be happy to work there, but otherwise, their labour force participation was not their priority. It was important to be able to have a job that could be worked around their children’s schedule as well as their spouses, and one that could accommodate any last minute changes. All the women who worked to some extent while their children were young (all of the participants did, however sometimes the work was on and off) and each of them worked part-time in the service or sales industries. Tracy notes that she took a part-time retail job when her children were younger, but could not even consider moving up in the company until the family was more “settled”:

I knew what kind of schedule I would have to pull as a manager or an assistant manager and it just wouldn’t jive with the kind of family life that I was having at the time with no husband [around].

Tracy is now working the highest wage job out of all of my participants. However, her journey to this current position was not straightforward and required quite a few years of part-time retail work when her children were younger. If her husband is deployed now, she is still able to work long hours or a night shift while her youngest child stays at home. This reaffirms studies that found that the presence of children in a military household will decrease the civilian spouse’s

labour force participation due to less flexibility, as well as frequent migration and spousal deployment. In Tracy's case, her spouse's deployment prevented her from working anything more than part-time hours as the sole parent in the house. Overall, as noted in the literature, the participants who had children were not very likely to be involved in the labour force, especially when their children were young and required the most amount of constant care.

As the literature states, it can make more sense for some military families to value time spent at home over the time spent in the labour force for military spouses. Sara's experience reflects this cost-benefit analysis that many families consider when thinking about the value of time spent at home rather than at work for the civilian spouse (Hosek et. al, 2002). This is especially true for military families, as they are more likely to deal with unexpected deployments or moves. Sara's experience demonstrates the struggles she faced during her husband's deployments:

There have been challenges when he's been away and I have the kids – I don't drive. When we lived in Alberta and he'd be gone for two months or a month and a half, I didn't drive. So I had two kids at home and no mode of transportation [...] and when he was gone I wasn't able to work at all. I was a stay at home mom who could not drive anywhere.

Sara's childcare responsibilities, like many other military families, prevented her from joining the labour force at all. Any family with young children will experience stressful situations, but when one spouse is not around, it can become even more difficult to deal with. Trying to juggle this while also trying to working outside of the home can be almost impossible.

Through Thick and Thin: Support Systems for Military Spouses

Having been asked about the types of support systems they relied on, the participants had varying opinions and experiences dealing with institutional support systems. While many of the participants, until prompted, spoke mainly to the experiences they had with formal support

systems, like the MFRC and other institutional supports, I also considered informal support systems that the women could rely on, like close friends and family. Both of these forms of support play a crucial role for military families, albeit in very different ways (Albano, 1994; Davis, Blaschke & Stafford, 2012).

Each of the women had used formal support services at least once, whether it was for language classes, volunteer or paid work, counseling or children's activities. However, all of the women agreed that social supports like friends and family were the most helpful in times that they needed comfort or encouragement. Also noted was the importance of having friends who are also in military families, as they are believed to have a better understanding of the daily demands and struggles some women faced. Tracy recalled relying on a close friend whose husband was also in the military for things like last minute childcare emergencies. Some women expressed that while they did not feel that they were in need of the formal support services themselves, they believed that others might be and saw them as generally beneficial to the military family community.

Overall, most of the participants had agreed that their experiences with the MFRC and other institutional support systems had been positive. Holly, who worked and volunteered for the MFRC in her town, stated:

I just happened to be lucky I think – I just met the right people and got involved and worked in the daycare and applied to work at the MFRC [...] It was a really tight knit little community on the base. It was a good MFRC, a good base, a good community so it made a big difference for [myself and my children] when we were there.

Holly's quote shows that in her experience, being able to depend on both formal and informal support systems had a positive impact on her and her children during the posting. Sara recalled using MFRC counseling services when her husband was away on deployment and she was home alone with her two children. She stated:

When I first moved [to Alberta] with [my husband], he was gone more than he was home. And when I was up there alone, I had no family around, I had nobody, you know, that kind of took a toll but I did get used to it and I did know that's what I was signing up for, but for the first while I felt very isolated and just extremely alone and kind of depressed [...] I called on [the MFRC] emergency counseling service and that was fantastic.

Some participants recounted some more negative experiences with formal support systems. Tracy stated that a coffee time activity, a time for children to play and parents (typically mothers) to relax “turned into women sitting around, having coffee and trashing other women”. Claire also noted that while she can see how the services might be beneficial for others, she did not like the idea of “another woman telling [her what to do] or how to feel”. Although it was only one participant (and therefore not generalizable in this study) who explicitly mentioned this, I believe it is important that almost all of the participants felt like they were not in need of the support services. This is not to say that all of these women *should* be accessing MFRC support services, but perhaps more women would take advantage of the services available to them in different circumstances or if they had more knowledge on the benefits of the services or the services available. More research into this could perhaps tell us that the formal support systems are failing to promote their support services in a way that is welcoming women in to receive support for a number of reasons. Instead, it seems as though family events are quite popular while employment counseling or placement were not mentioned at all by any of the participants. Although, we could argue from previous findings on lower labour force participation of military spouses that some military spouses career prospects might benefit from employment counseling.

Overall, I had expected to hear more from participants on MFRC services focusing on employment of spouses. Because employment has proven to be such a complex matter for military spouses, in terms of difficulty finding jobs, especially high-wage jobs, I was surprised that none of the participants had accessed the MFRC for career counseling services. Many of the

women simply took it upon themselves to find work that was suitable for their schedule. Overall, I found that the services were accessed more for emotional or peer support and quite a few of the formal support systems focused on more traditional, family-style events like “coffee time” for mothers or children’s activities. I believe this in itself speaks volumes as to the services being offered and promoted within formal military support systems, as mentioned above. These types of services, while helpful for many, might be working to further contribute to gendered norms and divisions of labour in the family.

Conclusion

This research has given me a greater insight into how military spousal employment is impacted by such a unique lifestyle. Getting to study the impact of childcare, migration, deployment and other aspects unique to military lifestyle on spousal employment has offered a glimpse into how civilian spouses of military members experience and understand their employment prospects within a military lifestyle.

Looking back to my research questions, I believe it is clear from the findings that as a spouse to a military member, my participants’ employment prospects were negatively impacted. Acting as the tied migrant means that the participants were often unable to guarantee work, especially in the field that they had hoped to work in. At times being the only parent at home also meant that attending school to advance their career was not always an option. As Michelle noted, the military member spouse was always guaranteed a job, while the civilian spouse had to uproot herself and find a new job each time the family moved.

The impact of childcare and household responsibilities has also proven to have a negative impact on the spouse’s labour force participation. My participants who had children had significantly decreased their labour force participation, especially when their children were

young and required the most care. Some women chose to work part-time while others chose to not work and stay home with their children instead. This effect was intensified for those who were raising or had raised children. Every mother interviewed agreed that they had done the most amount of childcare work in their houses, usually due to the demands of their husband's job outside of the home or their deployment schedule. Many of the women took care of their children by themselves from time-to-time while their husband were deployed.

Finally, the findings showed that participants tended to rely on informal support systems over formal support systems in times of need. Every participant spoke to the benefits of having friends to hang out with and lean on in times of need, while many added that it did not hurt if those friends were also in military families. Many of the participants agreed that while formal support systems "weren't for them", they could see the overall benefits and how they might help some families. Additionally, I argue that formal support systems seemed to focus on more traditional, family activities more so than their support services for military families. While these results were not generalizable, it is worth noting the lack of knowledge that many of the participants had on formal support services that are available to them.

One thing that the majority of spouses I interviewed stated was that they "knew what they were getting into" when they married someone in the military, and recognized that it was not a lifestyle that everyone could handle. I think this perfectly illustrates the responsibility that many women feel they should claim when it comes to the pressures of employment, childcare or other household duties and other major lifestyle changes. I think it is important for me to note that my research and data analysis is in no way intending to place blame or judge women for making the choice to be less involved in the labour force market, act as the tied migrant, or focus on childcare or household duties. Rather, I intended to approach the topic with choice feminism in mind - recognizing that every individual has a different perspective and that multiple

definitions of feminism and empowerment can exist simultaneously for individuals (Snyder-Hall, 2010). With this project, I hope to highlight the systemic issues, which continue to have an affect on civilian spouses of military members, rather than the individual labour force participation choices made by the participants. As Armstrong and Armstrong argued, the pressures and inequalities that women are likely to face are better understood as systemic issues rather than personal inadequacies (Armstrong & Armstrong, 1984).

It is important to reiterate that my study was based in Canada and I only interviewed female spouses of male military members. This is significant, as I am only capturing a small group of women and their experiences as military spouses. My findings may only be relevant in the cultural context in which the research took place.

Future research should consider how gender and sexuality might have an impact on the military spouse experience. As previously stated, I had limited my study to female spouses. Considering how male or non-binary civilian spouses compare to female civilian spouses would benefit the current research. My study was also heteronormative; I only spoke to spouses in heterosexual marriages. The impact of non-heterosexual marriage on spousal experience could be of interest to future research as well.

Future research might also consider the impact of geographical location on the experience of military spouses. As I learned while interviewing one of my participants, living in an isolated town in Northern Alberta had taken a toll on her mental health. I would assume that Sara was not alone in this type of experience. Research considering the contrasting experiences that spouses have in different postings in all areas of the country would be extremely beneficial in better understanding military family experience and in future policymaking.

There is no set experience for military spouses and of course, some women are able to make advances in their career while their spouse in the military does the same. However, based

on this study and others, it seems like that is not the case for the majority of civilian spouses of military members. Many women find juggling a childcare, household responsibilities and labour force participation to be a difficult task, but when we consider what this is like for military families, it can be profoundly difficult to strike a balance. While this was just a small, qualitative study, it nonetheless offers a starting point for further research into the experience of military spouses, specifically pertaining to employment and labour force participation.

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A: Email Invitation to Participate

Hello,

My name is Hannah Vigneault and I am currently completing an honours thesis for my undergraduate Sociology degree at Dalhousie University. I am researching the impact of military lifestyle on the employment prospects on military wives. I am interested in finding out whether certain features of military lifestyle, including migration and deployment, impact the employment prospects of military wives.

I am looking to conduct single interviews that will last between 45-90 minutes. You are eligible to participate if you are the civilian wife of a Canadian Forces Member.

If you are interested in learning more about my study, or if you are interested in participating, please contact me by phone or email. If you know of anyone who is eligible and might be interested in participating, please pass this information along.

Thank you for your time, and I look forward to hearing from you!

Hannah Vigneault
hannah.vigneault@dal.ca
1 (902)-237-1306

Appendix B: Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Demographic questions:

- Are you originally from Nova Scotia?
 - (if no) How long have you lived in Halifax?
 - What was your reason for moving to Halifax?
- What is your personal income?
 - Range:
 - \$0- \$20,000
 - \$20,000-\$50,000
 - \$50,000-\$75,000
 - \$75,000-\$150,000
 - \$150,000 +
- What is your household income?
 - Range:
 - \$0- \$20,000
 - \$20,000-\$50,000
 - \$50,000-\$75,000
 - \$75,000-\$150,000
 - \$150,000 +
- What is your spouse's military rank?
- What is the highest level of education you have received?
- Are you currently employed?
 - Could you tell me more about your current and past employment?
 - What types of jobs have you held in the past?
 - Part-time/Full-time?
 - Have the jobs you've held most recently been in your field? (if they have received any post-secondary education) / Have the jobs you've held been in your preferred field?
 - Were these jobs fulfilling? Why/why not?
 - Would you like to work in the same field that you studied in? Is this possible?
- Do you have any children? How many/ages?
 - (If yes) Who has done/does the most amount of childcare in your house?
- Have you faced any challenges that might come along with military lifestyle?
 - What kinds of challenges?
 - Frequent migration, deployment etc.
 - Were you expecting to face these challenges?
 - Have any of these challenges impacted your employment?
 - In what ways?
 - Impacted career developments etc.
- Do you feel as though you have support systems that are available to you?
 - Whether this is help with employment, emotional advice, familial advice etc.
 - What kind of supports are they? What do they offer or what do they lack?
 - Are civilian employers understanding of your situation?

Appendix C: Consent form – see overleaf

CONSENT FORM

Military Wives: Employment Prospects for Civilians Living in a Military Lifestyle

You are invited to take part in research being conducted by me, Hannah Vigneault, an undergraduate student in Sociology, as part of my honours degree at Dalhousie University. The purpose of this research is to look at the impacts of military lifestyle on the employment prospects of civilian wives. I will interview civilian wives of Canadian military personnel to gain understanding of the ways they have experienced, navigated and perceived the labour market as a military wife. I will write up the results of this research in a paper for my class, called the honours thesis.

As a participant in the research you will be asked to answer a number of questions about your own experiences as a military wife, specifically pertaining to your employment prospects. The interview should take about 45-90 minutes and will be conducted at a location convenient for you. The interview will be audio-recorded. Information that you provide to me will be kept private and will be anonymized, which means any identifying details such as your name will be removed from it. Only the honours class supervisor and I will have access to the unprocessed information you offer. I will describe and share general findings in a presentation to the Sociology and Social Anthropology Department and in my honours thesis. If I quote any part of your interview in my honours thesis, I will use a pseudonym, not your real name, and I will remove any other details that could identify you from the quote. Nothing that could identify you will be included in the presentation or the thesis. I will keep anonymized information so that I can learn more from it as I continue with my studies.

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You do not have to answer questions that you do not want to answer and you are welcome to stop the interview at any time if you no longer want to participate. If you decide to stop participating after the interview is over, you can do so until March 1. I will not be able to remove the information you provided after that date, because I will have completed my analysis, but the information will not be used in any other research.

The risks associated with this study are no greater than those you encounter in your everyday life. If you encounter any questions that make you uncomfortable, you are welcome to take breaks or stop the interview at any point. At any time during the interview you wish, we can take a break or stop the interview altogether. I will also have information available for military related counselling services if you feel that you need to talk to someone further about your experiences.

There will be no direct benefit to you in participating in this research and you will not receive compensation. The research, however, will contribute to new knowledge on the impact of military lifestyle on civilian wives' employment prospects. If you would like to see how your information is used, please feel free to contact me and I will send you a copy of my honours thesis after April 30.

If you have questions or concerns about the research please feel free to contact me or the honours class supervisor. My contact information is hannah.vigneault@dal.ca and (902)237-1306. You can contact the honours class supervisor, Dr. Emma Whelan, at the Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology, Dalhousie University on (902) 494-6752, or email emma.whelan@dal.ca.

If you have any ethical concerns about your participation in this research, you may contact Catherine Connors, Director, Research Ethics, Dalhousie University at (902) 494-1462, or email ethics@dal.ca.

Participant's consent:

I have read the above information and I agree to participate in this study.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Researcher's signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix D: Table of Participants

Participant	Highest Level of Education	Personal Income (Range)	Household Income (Range)	Job	# of Children
Holly	Bachelor Psychology	\$0-\$20,000	\$75,000-\$150,000	Service (Part-time)	2
Tracy	Business College	\$50,000-\$75,000	\$75,000-\$150,000	Retail Management (Full-time)	2
Claire	Bachelor Social Work	\$20,000-\$50,000	Unknown	Office Admin. (Full-time)	0
Michelle	High School	\$20,000-\$50,000	\$75,000-\$150,000	Retail (Part-time)	3
Sara	High School	\$0-\$20,000	\$75,000-\$150,000	Retail (Part-time)	2