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Military Spouse Unemployment: Perspective of Marine Corps Spouses on Hiring Best
Practices

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Military Spouse Unemployment: Perspective of Marine Corps Spouses on Hiring Best
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ABSTRACT

With a Permanent Change of Station every 2 to 3 years, military spouse unemployment has been an issue affecting military families for many years. With an average unemployment rate of 22%, it has gathered the attention of the Department of Defense and many organizations that are trying to close the unemployment gap for military spouses. Finding and retaining employment for the military spouse has been found to directly affect the retention of service members, particularly of those stationed in a location where job conditions are not favorable. Marine Corps spouses face different challenges because of the location of their duty stations. Bases, such as Camp Lejeune, have a negative net job availability, which makes it difficult to find employment. This qualitative phenomenological study researched hiring best practices from the perspective of active duty Marine Corps spouses. This study is based on the theoretical accountability framework of the chaos theory of careers. The methodology is based on semistructured interviews with active duty Marine Corps spouses who were employed at the time of the interview. The results of this study may convince employers to utilize some of the best practices experience by Marine Corps spouses at the time of hiring.

Keywords: Marine Corps, military spouse, employment, unemployment, active duty, hiring, best practices.

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DEDICATION

To the people who make me want to be a better person. To my daughter, Mia. I discovered what unconditional love is when you were born. I want you to know that you can move mountains; you are the bravest and most giving person I've ever known. Every day you wake up, and you are your best self. I want to learn to be just like you, kind, humble, strong, and so determined and full of love. I've embarked on this journey to show you that you can be and do anything you ever want. You bring light and joy to my life; I am incredibly lucky to call you my daughter.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

With an average Permanent Change of Station (PCS) every 2 to 3 years (Cooney et al., 2011), military spouses are one of the largest groups in the United States to find themselves unemployed or underemployed (U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation, 2017). Finding employment opportunities is not an easy task when moving to a new area. Often, the job market is not favorable near military bases, and military spouses get stereotyped as transient workers, which discourages employers from hiring them because of the likelihood of a future relocation (Wilson, 2010). According to Gonzalez et al. (2015),

Previous research has found that, compared with their civilian counterparts, military spouses are more likely to be unemployed (jobless, but actively seeking work) or underemployed (either working part-time involuntarily or having higher levels of education than what is required for their jobs). (p. 1)

This phenomenological study explored hiring best practices from the perspective of active duty Marine Corps spouses. This study was based on the phenomenological research method described by the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* as

The study of structures of consciousness as experienced from the first-person point of view. The central structure of an experience is its intentionality, its being directed toward something, as it is an experience of or about some object. An experience is directed toward an object by virtue of its content or meaning (which represents the object) together with appropriate enabling conditions. (Smith, 2018, para. 1)

The study addressed the personal experiences of active duty Marine Corps spouses who are currently employed.

The study is based on the chaos theory of careers, which according to Pryor and Bright, focuses on the implications that

- Career development does not occur in isolation, rather all aspects of family, friends, culture, and spirituality play an important role, as does environmental systems including perceptions and the reality of markets, economic conditions, and cultural traditions
- Planned and unplanned change unfolds in a non-linear way and impacts individual career development
- 100% predictably or certainty about the future and our career choices is impossible
- Gaining comfort with uncertainty is essential and making decisions with limited or partial information is the norm. (Schlesinger, 2016, para. 3)

Background

Today's military comprises approximately 1.3 million active duty members (Mancini et al., 2020). The active duty population is located throughout the world, with their highest number of service members in the Continental United States (CONUS), followed by Asia and Europe. Of these active duty members, 49.9% of the total force are married (Department of Defense, 2020). With the rate of marriage for active duty service members, military spouse unemployment is an issue that has been affecting the military for many years. Military families face many unique challenges. Separation, instability of the military lifestyle, and the lack of support from family and friends because of moving

so often are just small examples of what these families endure. The military requires its service members to always be ready and available at a moment's notice. The demands put on service members include many sacrifices, such as injury, long- and short-term separation from their family, frequent moves, long working hours, and being stationed in foreign countries. These demands are not necessarily unique to the military, and many other career fields might experience certain hardships, but the military experiences them all and often (Clever & Segal, 2013). Add to that the financial uncertainty of not having dual income, and the result is added stress to an already stressful family nucleus.

According to Williams et al. (2020),

In 2018, for the first time ever, Blue Star Families' annual survey of military families reported that the top stressor among military families was financial issues. The survey also found that 70% of millennial respondents believed having two incomes to be vital to the family's well-being. This finding shouldn't be a surprise; it reflects the rising cost of living felt across the country. (p. 2)

According to the 2020 demographic report by the Department of Defense, 49% of military spouses are employed, 14% are seeking employment, and 36% are not in the labor market (Department of Defense, 2020). Gribble et al. (2019) stated,

Accompanied postings are associated with poorer employment outcomes among US military spouses, with spouses less likely to work fulltime and working fewer weeks during the year compared with their civilian counterparts and male military spouses (Cooke and Speirs, 2005; Hosek et al., 2002). Underemployment due to disparities between the educational requirements of the job market and the

qualifications held by military spouses can also be an issue, especially in isolated or rural areas with fewer job opportunities (Lim and Schulker, 2010). (p. 1)

Programs such as the Military Spouse Employment Partnership (MSEP), which targets military spouse recruitment, including reserve component spouses, aim to help alleviate military spouse unemployment. MSEP focuses on the DoD partnering with public, private, and nonprofit sectors to commit to hiring military spouses (Gonzalez et al., 2015).

The location in which the military members get stationed plays a significant role in the military spouse's employment opportunities. Williams et al. (2020) stated,

Military spouses have long known that it is a very different situation trying to find a job when stationed at the Pentagon compared to Fort Sill, Oklahoma, just as the hot labor market of Washington, D.C, is very different from the tight labor market in Lawton, Oklahoma. (p. 3; see Figure 1)

However, on-demand jobs typically require a higher education level and experience and are also in a more competitive job market. The Deloitte Center for Government Insights found that the labor markets in 44% of the largest military bases have a negative availability of jobs, meaning that there are fewer jobs than people seeking to work (Williams et al., 2020). In addition, Bradbard et al. (2016) stated, "active duty military spouses earn roughly 38% less than their civilian counterparts. The higher the education level, the larger the income gap between active duty spouses and their civilian counterparts" (p. 4).

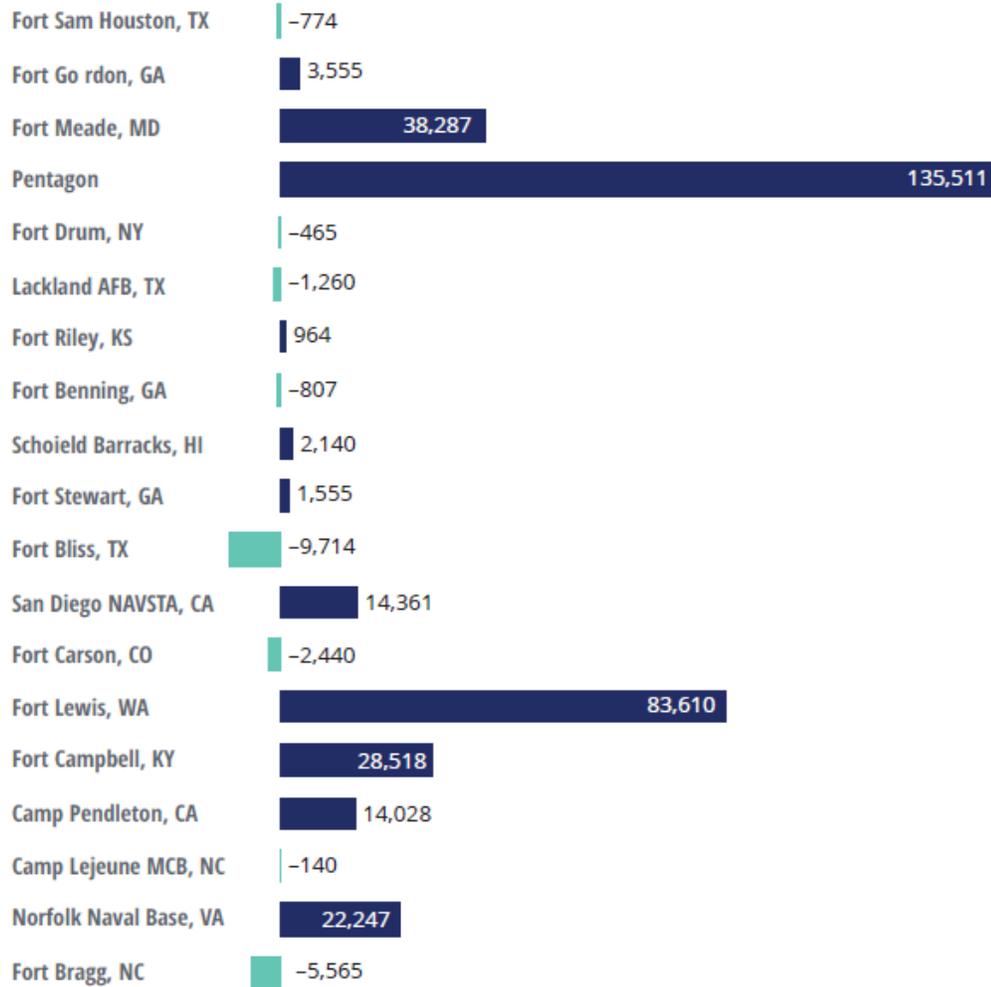
Military spouses come from many different backgrounds, and compared to their civilian counterparts, they tend to have more college degrees. According to the Deloitte

Figure 1

Labor Markets Near Military Installations

With the exception of a few locations, many labor markets near military installations are very competitive

Net jobs available in the metropolitan areas close to military bases (monthly average, 2019)
(Largest military bases by military spouse population)



Note: Net jobs calculated as [unique job postings in the closest metropolitan area (monthly average of 2019)] – [civilian job seekers + military spouse job seekers]
Sources: US Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Local area unemployment statistics," 2019; US Census Bureau, "Quick facts," accessed June 23, 2020.

From "Military Spouse Unemployment: Exploring Solutions to a Local Problem of National Importance," by R. Williams, J. Mariani, A. Routh, A. Keyal, and M. Hill, 2020, p. 4 (<https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/industry/public-sector/military-spouse-unemployment.html>).

Center for Government Insights, 45% of military spouses have a bachelor's or advanced degree. In comparison, that number drops to 33% for civilians, yet nearly 25% of military spouses are unemployed, and 31-53% are underemployed (Williams et al., 2020). With the immense diversity that makes up the military spouse community, the career fields they represent tend to be just as diverse. Military spouses come from many different backgrounds. They not only represent each state, but there are also many foreign nationals married to service members. As reported by The Clearinghouse for Military Family Readiness at Penn State, in 2019 the number of active duty military spouses was 605,716, and of those, 64% were under the age of 26 years old. The race and ethnicity of military spouses identify as are 79% White, 15% Black/African American, 9% Asian, 3% American Indian, and 3% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders (Penn State, 2021). The different backgrounds that military spouses represent bring strength to the workforce, and these distinct background can also change depending on the service their active duty member belongs to. They bring individual and unique experiences that they have gained while living the military lifestyle. Moving, deployments, and challenges faced because of their connection to the military make them unique in their contribution to the workforce.

Statement of the Research Problem

Military spouse unemployment and underemployment have been an issue for many years. Therefore, there have been multiple attempts to stabilize the unemployment rate for military spouses, but the numbers have gone unchanged. Military spouse unemployment is one of the largest challenges faced by military families. Williams et al. (2020) stated,

One of the most pressing of those challenges is staggering unemployment (24%) and underemployment (31–51%) among military spouses, rates that have held for years despite hundreds of millions of dollars spent by the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) to address the issue and a complex network of non-profit support.

(p. 1)

By the nature of the service member's line of work, military spouses have additional hardships that influence their careers and their way of life. Add to that moving an average of every 3 years and the lack of opportunities presented on different duty stations for military spouse employment. The situation is aggravated when military spouses claim to be discriminated against because of their spouse's military status. It is common to hear military spouses feel discriminated against when applying for jobs because of their spouse's military status because many companies do not want to invest time and resources on an employee who will move in a relatively short time, and military spouses are not a protected class. Military spouses are at times fearful of identifying as such when applying for employment:

Employers in the local labor market are also likely to have expectations. They may be reluctant to hire civilian spouses of military personnel as they can expect to have to recruit and train a replacement in a relatively short period of time.

(Cooney et al., 2011, p. 363)

In the 2019 survey conducted by Blue Star Families, an organization dedicated to research and military community empowerment, 48% of military spouses interviewed reported that military spouse employment is their number one issue with military life (Blue Star Families, 2019). The survey conducted by Blue Star Families is an all-

embracing study that looks into military families' challenges and experiences. Many of the issues brought up in the survey are tied to the unemployment rate of military spouses. Issues such as lack of availability of childcare can influence the unemployment rate for military spouses. This is mainly because children between the ages of birth and five years old make the largest group of children for active duty members, followed by children between the ages of 6 to 11 (DoD, 2018). According to the Blue Star Families report (2019),

Over half of service member respondents with children report the unavailability of childcare had negatively impacted their pursuit of employment and/or education. Of those who report childcare problems moderately, significantly, or completely negatively impacted their pursuit of education and/or employment, 50% report it was difficult to find a childcare provider they could afford. (p. 8)

Military spouses seem to be left out of the workforce, and it is not due to their lack of credentials. They are affected by the lack of opportunity in various duty stations, gaps in their resumes with every PCS, and being outcast for eventually moving with their service member. Cooney et al. (2011) stated,

The military requirements of the service member, who must remain relatively close to the installation at which he or she is stationed, limit the ability of the civilian spouse to take advantage of migrating to a more advantageous labor market for individual gain (Payne, Warner, & Little). (p. 362)

Location challenges and military dependency discrimination play a crucial role in military spouse employment. In 2013, the Military Spouse Employment Survey showed that 58% of those who responded felt that identifying as a military spouse would make

the employer less inclined to hire them. In addition, 46% reported being asked by potential employers whether they were military spouses (Gonzalez et al., 2015). Personal readiness is key to the success of the military, which is why financial stability and military spouse satisfaction are important factors for the military. According to the Clearinghouse for Military Family Readiness at Penn State, 56% of active duty military spouses are satisfied with the military lifestyle, yet one in five is dissatisfied (Penn State, 2021). Blue Star Families conducts annual research in their Military Family Lifestyle Survey; the survey for 2020 identified five main issues affecting military spouses: military spouse employment, time away from family, children's education, family quality of life, and military pay (Blue Star Families, 2021). Personal readiness for the service member can encompass any of the above-mentioned issues and many more. If a service member is having financial difficulties or marital issues, it is directly correlated to their lack of readiness for the military. Deployment and Temporary Duty Assignments can aggravate the issues that service members are facing, and they may at times not be deployable because of the lack of their personal readiness. The military's stance of work-life balance cannot be compared to that of civilian employers, it is a known fact that the needs of the military will come before their own. Yet issues such as food insecurity, which was reported by 29% of military families (Blue Start Families, 2021), is a significant issue that affects the readiness of military families. Moving and lack of continuity in one location cause these issues to exacerbate, and they add stress on the service members and their family. Therefore, mitigating issues that will affect service members and their families are key to keep the force ready at all times.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to explore hiring best practices from the perspective of active duty Marine Corps spouses. Although the Marine Corps has a robust reserve component comprising over 35,000 Marines, this study only focused on active duty Marine spouses. In addition, active reserve Marine spouses were not part of this study as they are not always asked to relocate. The reasoning behind only selecting active duty Marine spouses is due to the longer time commitment required of the Marine, which means having to go through a PCS, which is one of the critical factors affecting military spouse unemployment. With a PCS comes employment turnover, and the cost of hiring military spouses is not always affordable to employers. The cost of training and hiring a replacement is roughly 33% of that person's salary (Olya, 2021). This is due to the investment that an employer must make to recruit, onboard, and train a new hire, who in this case will move when the spouse is given orders. Many factors contribute to military spouse unemployment, including limited childcare, lack of family support, work and life balance when the service member is deployed, among many more. However, some companies have taken into account the stressors of the military spouse and still seek to hire the military spouse. This phenomenological study compared the hiring best practice from the perspective of active duty Marine Corps spouses.

Research Questions

1. What are the perceived best hiring practices experienced by active duty Marine Corps spouses?
2. What are the perceptions of active duty Marine Corps spouses regarding the contributions they make to the workforce?

Significance of the Problem

One of the military's most important tasks is to be efficient and effective. To do so, it must consider career retention as key to these efforts, and it can only be obtained when the service members and their family have a satisfying work-life balance. It is important to note that for the military, work-life balance is not likely going to look the same as it does to a civilian. Military members have demands that most civilians will never encounter, and they will unlikely have an 8-to-5 work schedule. However, work-life balance for the military does imply financial independence and personal readiness. This could be achieved by closing the gap related to military spouse unemployment because that would alleviate many of the stressors affecting service members and their families. Although the federal government has acknowledged the problem of military spouse unemployment and has created many programs that are meant to help alleviate the unemployment gap for military spouses, there has not been a significant impact on the unemployment rate for military spouses over the last 12 years (DoD, 2020). The military has the responsibility to be accountable for the programs it funds to help reduce military spouse unemployment. The functionality of these programs and their outcome influences the readiness of service members; therefore, it is important to maintain accountability for the results of such programs that work to close the gap of military spouse unemployment to maintain a strong military force. As times change, it is becoming increasingly challenging to be a single-income family in the military, which can pressure the service member to leave the military for financial security, causing a snowball effect with military retention. The need for dual income is now necessary to get by with increased education and housing cost over the last 50 years (Lopez, 2019).

In the United States, 50% of marriages are made up of dual-income couples. That number rises to 63% in couples with children (Su, 2019). Such numbers are not the same for military families because military spouses have a higher unemployment rate than their civilian counterparts. Financial stress added to the military family can aggravate the path of service members or even worse, lessen their time in the armed forces. Financial readiness is critical for service members to perform their duties without outside pressures that can diminish the focus of the mission. When military spouses cannot find employment, the service member's retention in the military can be jeopardized. Readiness is the key to a successful military force, and for many years, military retention has been affected by military spouse unemployment. The need for accountability from the DoD to ensure its programs are helping secure employment for military spouses is necessary to solidify the military family nucleus, which in turn is necessary for military readiness. Military spouses with higher levels of education looking for career opportunities at a mid to senior level are being affected the most by the lack of accountability for programs that are designed to help them find employment. Many of the programs offered by the DoD help support entry level positions and don't focus on higher level employment resources. If the home unit is not solid, it is an added stressor for service members, and this will affect their service to the military by impairing their readiness.

Definitions

The following section highlights relevant terms that are utilized throughout the study.

Active duty. The Department of Defense (DoD) defines active duty as

Full-time duty in the active service of a Uniformed Service, including full-time training duty, annual training duty, full-time National Guard duty, and attendance, while in the active service, at a school designated as a Military Service school by law or by the Secretary concerned. (DoD, 1999, p. xliv)

Best practices. Practices already existing and possessing a high level of widely agreed effectiveness (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012).

Commissioned officer. The DoD (1999) defines commissioned officers as follows: “Unless otherwise qualified, means a member of the Uniformed Services having rank or grade of second lieutenant, ensign, or above, either permanent or temporary, in any of the Uniformed Services” (p. xlvi). A service member who holds a position of authority or command in the military.

Duty station. The DoD (1999) describes a duty station as “the place at which the member is assigned for regular duty; also, the place at which the member performs an assigned duty” (p. xlviii).

Enlisted member. Enlisted members are described by the DoD (1999) as “person enlisted, enrolled, or conscripted into a Military Service” (p. xlviii).

Military spouses. For the purpose of this study, a military spouse is defined as a person married to an active duty U.S. service member.

Permanente change of station (PCS). The DoD (1999) classifies a PCS as “the assignment, detail, or transfer of a member or unit to a different duty station under competent orders which neither specify the duty as temporary, nor provide for further assignment to a new station, nor direct return to the old station” (p. liii).

Underemployment. Underemployment is being defined per the Merriam-Webster (n.d.). definition as “the condition in which people in a labor force are employed at less than full-time or regular jobs or at jobs inadequate with respect to their training or economic needs.”

Organization of the Study

This study encompasses video interviews with Marine Corps spouses currently employed. Participants were asked 10 questions regarding their experiences on hiring best practice from the perspective of active duty Marine Corps spouses. The interviews were recorded and transcribed using NVivo transcription. Following that, the data were manually coded by the researcher using Excel. In Chapter 2, the focus is on the literature review related to military spouse unemployment. Chapter 3 discusses the methodology of this phenomenological study, and Chapter 4 shows the findings of the study.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Military spouse unemployment and underemployment has affected military families for many years. This study explored hiring best practices from the perspective of Marine Corps spouses. This chapter focuses on the review of the literature that supports this study; it specifically addresses military family demographics, history of unemployment of military spouses, financial statistics of the military family, and military spouse education levels. Many of the issues faced by military spouses directly correlate to the instability of the military lifestyle. Frequent moves and the intensity of the service member's work schedule, including deployments and temporary duty assignments, mean that the military spouse has the household's heavy weight on their own. This study explores the issues that affect the unemployment and underemployment of military spouses.

History of Military Spouse Unemployment

Military spouse unemployment is not a new issue. Studies and research began as early as the 1980s. In 1990, the U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences published a study titled *Family Impacts on the Retention of Military Personnel* (Orthner, 1990). That study was published 30 years ago, and the findings showed that

spouses who are most dissatisfied and who are likely to encourage the service member to leave the military are those who are unemployed and looking for work (Wood, 1988). These spouses are the most discouraged with military life and their spouses receive the greatest pressure to leave the armed services, irrespective

of whether they are in the continental United States (CONUS) or outside the continental United States (OCONUS). (Orthner, 1990, p. 5)

Even with the higher visibility this issue has had in recent years, military spouses' unemployment rates continue to be high. It can affect the service member's career retention, and lower retention rates will ultimately impact national security and the quality of service members in the military.

Service member retention is an issue that has been studied in relation to military spouse employment for many years. Another Army study published in 1993 showed that almost 30 years ago, military spouse employment was a contributing factor to the retention of Army personnel (Segal & Harris, 1993). Segal and Harris (1993) found,

In general, it is not whether a spouse is employed or not that is likely to affect support for soldier retention. Rather, what is important is the extent to which the spouse's employment outcomes (whether employed, type of work, pay, etc.) meet his/her expectations. (p. 18)

Their study's results might not have linked unemployment to military retention directly, but the findings support the assertion that satisfaction with the job market, salary, and career do. In the end, suitable employment of military spouses is key to the retention of service members.

The Department of Defense (DoD) has published different studies and articles highlighting the importance of employment for military spouses. In 1983, the Army Chief of Staff published a paper in which military spouse employment started casting light on the military spouse's reality. According to Wickman (1983),

Employment of the spouse in a military marriage is open on a temporary or part-time basis and at lower pay, due to frequent and unpredictable military moves. However, career development (combining long and short-term goals, training, education, and meaningful volunteer or salaried jobs) has become a frequent demand among Army spouses and military members. Increasingly, spouses' career development has forced military families to choose between one career or the other. (p. 9)

Different DoD branches addressed military spouse unemployment as early as 40 years back. Yet the focus it has received has done little to close the gap for military spouse unemployment, and the DoD should be accountable for the programs it has in place to help with military spouse unemployment because their functionality is an issue that affects military readiness. Yet unfortunately, after all these years and millions of dollars in funding toward multiple programs, the same issues keep affecting military spouses in the workforce, and the military spouse unemployment rate remains unchanged. The impact of these programs has not been significant. A high unemployment rate directly affects the economy because those unemployed no longer have purchasing power, which can create a ripple effect affecting other businesses and contributing to the unemployment rates (Picardo, 2020). The missed opportunity for income also increases, depending on the education level. In most cases, as reported by the U.S Bureau of Labor Statistics, unemployment lowers. Vilorio (2016) reported,

For example, workers with a professional degree had the highest median weekly earnings (\$1,730) and lowest unemployment rate (1.5 percent) in 2015 of all groups shown. That's more than triple the earnings (\$493) and less than one-fifth

the unemployment rate (8.0 percent) of workers with less than a high school diploma. (para. 3).

Military Family Demographics

Less than 1% of the U.S. population serves in the military, with today's military comprising approximately 1.3 million active duty members (Mancini et al., 2020). Military families play a significant role for the DoD because 50.6% of the total active duty force have spouses and/or dependents, with the Marine Corps being the military branch with fewer dependents compared to all other branches (DoD, 2020). The active duty population is located throughout the world, with their highest number of service members in the Continental United States (CONUS), followed by Asia and Europe (DoD, 2018). With the high rates of marriage for active duty service members, military spouse unemployment is an issue that has been affecting the military for many years. Although the service members' career field relocates the family often, military spouses still seek to be in the labor market, mainly because their economic status depends on it.

Active Duty Spouses

Of the 597,736 active duty spouses on the DoD's 2020 demographics report, 90.7% of spouses are female, and the average age for military spouses is 31.9 years. Of all military spouses, including male and female spouses, 49% are employed, 14% are seeking employment, and 36% are not in the labor force. The numbers between enlisted and officer spouses facing unemployment are relatively comparable, with 49% of enlisted spouses being employed while 50% of officers' spouses are employed (DoD, 2020).

These statistics are essential to understand that military spouses should be at the prime of

their careers. Compared to their civilian counterparts, military spouses are not growing in the workforce at the same rate.

Consequently, military spouse unemployment has remained almost unchanged in recent years, with reports showing the rate of military spouse unemployment in 2010 was 26%, in 2013 the rate was 23%, and in 2017 it was 24% (DoD, 2018). Many of the issues with military spouse unemployment are related to the frequent moves because of the active duty member's orders. On average, according to the United Service Organizations (USO), military families move every 2 to 3 years (DeSimone, 2018). Cooney et al. (2011) stated,

Civilian spouses are tied movers because they must move (assuming the desire to maintain joint residency), despite the personal cost to themselves. Once a spouse has relocated, however, he or she may also be seen as a tied stayer. The military requirements of the service member, who must remain relatively close to the installation at which he or she is stationed, limit the ability of the civilian spouse to take advantage of migrating to a more advantageous labor market for individual gain. (p. 362)

Of those military spouses who work, 49% of male spouses have reported having a job compared to 27% of female spouses (Bogen, 2019). Education does not seem to be a characteristic that impacts the career of military spouses because "89% of Active Duty spouses have some college education or higher (with 28% having attained a 4-year degree, 14% having an advanced degree)" (Chapman & Levan, para. 4)

Different studies have presented contradicting information on whether it is easier or more challenging to find employment if the spouse is married to an officer versus an enlisted service member. As referenced by Lara-Cinisomo et al. (2020),

Researchers speculated that officers' wives were more likely to have better networks and were less likely to be discriminated against due to service-member rank. In contrast, in 2010, researchers found that wives of officers were less likely to seek employment than enlisted wives and those of lower rank officers (Lim & Schulker, 2010). These same researchers found that officers' wives, who likely have higher incomes, were also more likely to work part-time on a voluntary basis compared to wives from other ranks. A better understanding of the role service-member rank has on employment in military spouses can help inform interventions and help programs that target women who are interested in being employed but experience additional challenges such as poor mental health. (p. 400)

Because officers are required to have a college degree to serve in the military, their spouses most likely tend to have a degree as well.

Along with unemployment, military spouses have also been facing issues with underemployment for more than 30 years. In a study published in *Armed Forces & Society* in 1991, the results revealed that military spouses can find themselves underemployed and willing to take any job to fill the income gap regardless of whether they have higher skills and training than the job requires (Schwartz et al., 1991). Some research has pointed out that a staggering 90% of military spouses find themselves underemployed. According to Hire Heroes USA (2014),

A new survey conducted by the Military Officers Association of America and the Institute for Veterans and Military Families at Syracuse University reveals a staggering statistic about female military spouses: 90% of spouses of active duty service members are underemployed. This means that those who are able to find employment – despite their 30% greater unemployment rate compared to their civilian counterparts – accept positions that they are overqualified for. As a result, female military spouses make an average of 38% less total income than female civilian spouses. (para. 1)

Underemployment of military spouses is as significant an issue as unemployment. With each move, military spouses experience an average loss of income of \$3,100 (Burke & Miller, 2016).

In a study conducted by Wilson (2010), the findings showed that 22% of military spouses reported being underemployed (beneath their education and experience level). Another 13% reported taking part-time work until they found a full-time position. In total, only 20% of the military spouses who responded to Wilson's research stated they were satisfied with their employment. Underemployment is an issue as significant as unemployment to military spouses. In research conducted by RAND, the differences between military spouses and their civilian counterparts were studied:

Comparisons of military wives with their look-alikes—a group of weighted civilian wives, show that military wives have a much greater tendency to be underemployed. Military wives are much more likely than their look-alikes to be NILF [not in the labor force]. Military wives are more likely to involuntarily work part-time and to have relatively high education for their jobs than their

civilian counterparts. Finally, military wives are substantially less likely to be adequately full-time employed compared with similar civilian wives. Thus, there does appear to be a significant level of underemployment among military wives, even after controlling for relevant labor market characteristics. (Lim, & Schulker, 2010, p. xvi)

Although Lim and Schulker (2010) stated that most military spouses believe in having a significant influence on their spouse's military career, the study could not conclude that military lifestyle causes underemployment for military spouses.

The issue of accountability for military spouses on employment could also be based on gender. Because most military spouses are female, this also implicated pay gaps related to gender. Burke and Miller (2016) stated,

Gender is an important feature of our setting as well. Because the vast majority of the civilian spouses in the data are female, our study of PCS moves on civilian spouse careers will contribute to the broader literature on the sources of gender pay differences in the US. Furthermore, because of our large sample sizes, we are also able to measure effects of PCS moves on male and female spouses separately. (p. 6)

Equity of employment between males and females has been battled for many years. Yet military spouses, of whom 90.7% of active duty spouses are female (DoD, 2020), are facing gender inequality in the workforce. A study by Mehta (2013) found that gender roles play a significant part in how military spouses feel about their careers:

Multi-layered gender roles inherent in military, marriage, and motherhood, play a subtle but powerful role in influencing how military wives think and feel about

their work-related desires. For some, these socially constructed roles act in combination to partially or even completely impede a woman's attempts to work. This finding is consistent with other research touching on gender roles (D'Amico & Weinstein, 1999; Enloe, 2000; Harrell 2000a; 2003a; Harrison & Laliberté, 1997; Jervis, 2011; Segal, 1986), but differs by suggesting that it is not one set of gender roles that a military wife must contend with, but several simultaneously.

(p. 140)

Federal Government Effort

Because of the importance of military retention and the effect that military spouse unemployment has on military retention, the government has taken steps to help alleviate military spouse unemployment. Multiple federal programs exist to employ military spouses. In addition, each service branch has its own program such as the Marine and Family Programs Career Services that helps support military spouses' employment. The DoD has researched military spouse unemployment for more than 10 years. Many studies have been conducted to help the DoD better understand the needs of military spouses in the workforce. These studies have helped influence the creation of policies, programs, and resources for military spouses (Jones, 2013).

Many of the federal government's efforts are discussed in this study; however, legislation and changes to the programs are continually happening, making it challenging to capture all of the government's actions fully. Federal government action to support military spouse unemployment have occurred at many different levels with many administrations focusing on the matter. Kamarck et al. (2020) stated,

In recognition that the transient and unpredictable nature of a career in military service can impose unique burdens on military spouses, Congress has authorized several initiatives to provide support for military spouse education, employment, and career development. These initiatives fall into three broad categories:

(1) direct monetary or in-kind support from DOD (e.g., scholarships, license fee reimbursement, career counseling); (2) outreach and partnerships with states and private businesses; and (3) federal government hiring flexibilities. (“Summary”)

In May 2010, President Obama directed the National Security Staff to employ a plan to support military families. This directive was meant to support the quality of life of the military families, which would in turn improve the long-term effectiveness of the military. In this directive, President Obama emphasized creating career and educational opportunities for military spouses. In 2011, the White House published the report *Strengthening Our Military Families: Meeting America’s Commitment* (Gonzalez et al., 2015). In this report, it set a government-wide priority to develop career and educational opportunities for military spouses by

- increasing opportunities for Federal careers;
- increasing opportunities for private-sector careers;
- increasing access to educational advancement;
- reducing barriers to employment and services due to different State policies;
- and standards; and
- by protecting the rights of service members and families. (Gonzalez et al., 2015, p. 4)

These efforts support military spouses by further enhancing their opportunities to find employment and by advancing their education.

It is important to note that while the federal government has attempted to make efforts to reduce the military spouse unemployment, several state governments have done so as well. The states of California and Virginia, which have a large population of service members and military retirees, have introduced legislation that determines military spouses as a protected class. These efforts are important because the state level can significantly impact the issues that affect military spouse employment.

Military Spouse Preference Program

In 1989, the DoD was beginning to understand the limitations of military spouse unemployment, so that year it created the Military Spouse Preference Program (MSP), recognized under public law as “Employment Opportunities for Military Spouses” (Wilson, 2010, p. 3). Since then, the MSP has evolved, yet it continues to allow military spouses to apply to federal government positions. According to the DoD (2019), “MSP applies when positions are filled using competition procedures and the spouse is determined to be among the best qualified” (para. 1). This program was initially designed to help military spouses relocating to a new area find employment in the DoD; however, in 2018, under Section 573 of the FY2019 National Defense Authorization Act, a temporary expansion was given to the program. This expansion allowed military spouses who were relocating to apply to DoD jobs under a noncompetitive appointment authority if they qualified for the program by meeting the following criteria (DoD, 2019):

To be eligible for MSP, the spouse must: (1) be married to an active duty member of the U.S. Armed Forces; (2) reside within the commuting area of the military

sponsor's permanent duty station (PDS); (3) meet all pre-employment criteria and be immediately appointable under the applicable recruitment procedures; and (4) be determined to rank among the best qualified for the position. (para. 3)

Spouses using the MSP are eligible to use it as long as they have not accepted or declined a position with the federal government in their current duty station. If the service members get orders to relocate, the spouses may apply to MSP at the new duty station as long as they continue to meet the program's criteria (DoD, 2019).

Military One Source

Military One Source is a DoD network to support the military and their families. More than an employment site, Military One Source is a one-stop shop for service members and their families. It provides military members and their families multiple resources that support the warfighter through their career and retirement. Schaefer (2015) stated,

The program provides a call center and Internet-based support, personal nonmedical counseling, help with income taxes and other financial services, spouse education and career support, educational materials, and a social media hub. Individuals can connect to consultants by phone, in person, or over the Internet. (p. 18)

Military One Source provides information and tools for military spouse education and career opportunities. It gives spouses tools to prepare them to be successful in finding employment. Because of the easiness and availability of Military One Source, many families use it whenever they encounter any issue connected to military life. The live call

center is a resource that gives immediate help regarding all topics addressed by Military One Source.

Unemployment Benefits

Military spouses are often unable to PCS with their current job, and it takes a significant amount of time to find employment on the next duty station. When a military spouse is forced to quit their job because the service member has to relocate, they might be able to collect unemployment benefits. To date, 46 states have instated laws that military spouses are eligible to collect unemployment insurance while they look for another job in their new duty station (National Military Family Association, 2018). Each state has different rules and regulations on the amount of money the military spouse will receive. Unfortunately, if a military family lives in Idaho, Louisiana, North Dakota, or Ohio, they will not qualify to collect unemployment insurance when they resign from a job. In addition, some states will not pay unemployment insurance if the service member and their family have orders to move overseas (National Military Family Association, 2018). Unemployment benefits can be of great help when income loss becomes an issue to the military family, particularly when the service member has to undertake moving costs not covered by the military. For example, when military families move to Hawaii, Alaska, or overseas, the military will only pay to ship one vehicle, even though most families have two, particularly families with dual-working couples. That expense is transferred to the service member. The same applies when they move to those same locations and they have a family pet. All expenses, which can be thousands of dollars, have to be covered by the service member. When military families incur additional costs

and civilian spouses lose their employment because of moving, unemployment benefits allow them to transition duty stations without accumulating debt.

Legislation to Hire Military Spouses

The focus that military spouses' unemployment has received in recent years has created an effect for politicians to minimize the military's impact on their careers. Many have introduced bills and acts to help alleviate the challenges faced by military spouses. This study explored the legislation that has been presented in support of reducing military spouse unemployment.

Military Spouse Employment Act of 2018. Legislations impact military spouse unemployment; some have recently been introduced and are in the process of becoming laws if approved. In 2018, Senator Tim Kaine, who at the time was a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, discussed the Fiscal Year 2019 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). Senator Kaine had previously met with military spouses to discuss the hardships faced by them in the workforce. He fought for employment provisions for military spouses, and many of his proposals were included in the NDAA. Senator Kaine (2018) stated,

Just over a year ago I started meeting with military spouses, advocates, and the business community to discuss solutions for bringing down the high unemployment rate among military spouses. With final signature of the annual defense bill, the majority of my provisions to help military spouses get jobs have been signed into law. It shows a commitment from Congress, and the executive branch that we understand the struggles military spouses and their families face in service to the nation and recognize that we can make their lives a little easier

through expanded career opportunities, improved education, increased access to affordable child care, and additional counseling resources. (para. 2)

Senator Kaine contributed to expanding information regarding military spouse unemployment by bringing to light many of the issues faced by military spouses seeking employment.

Military spouse unemployment is an issue that encompasses more than just finding a job. Other obstacles that feed the military spouse unemployment rate are education and moving after starting an educational path and, ultimately, childcare. In addition, NDAA improves the education and career opportunities for military spouses who qualify. It also assesses childcare needs for military families although it doesn't actively make childcare availability changes.

Military Spouse Hiring Act. In May 2019, Representative Antonio Delgado announced the bipartisan bill H.R. 2912, the Military Spouse Hiring Act. This legislation encourages employers to hire military spouses by incentivizing employers when they do so. Because military spouse unemployment is at a much higher rate than their civilian counterparts, this bill will help close the unemployment gap faced by military spouses. Representative Delgado (2019) stated,

Military families make immense sacrifices for our country, and yet military spouses experience an unemployment rate of nearly 30 percent. The *Military Spouse Hiring Act* seeks to close this gap by expanding the Work Opportunity Tax Credit to incentivize the hiring of military spouses. I'm pleased to see so many of my colleagues voicing their support for this important priority that will

address military spouse unemployment and benefit thousands of families in upstate New York and across the country. (para. 3)

Astonishingly, this bill has the support of 40 House members from both sides, making it a bipartisan bill. According to Representative Delgado,

Supporting our military families should never be partisan, and I am pleased to see broad support for this bill on both sides of the aisle. I will keep fighting to move the Military Spouse Hiring Act through the House to close this hiring gap for the families of our nation's servicemembers. (para. 3)

If this bill passes, it will amend the IRS Code by expanding the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC), a tax credit given to employers who hire military veterans. Employers who hire military veterans are eligible for a tax credit of up to \$9,600 (SynergiPartners, 2019). By changing the WOTC, employers, if passed, would now be eligible for a tax credit when they hire military spouses (SynergiPartners, 2019). This could encourage private companies to hire military spouses without feeling a negative economic impact at the time of their relocation or encourage them to keep them employed after they relocate when possible.

Military Spouses Employment Act. Like Representative Delgado's bill (H.R. 2912) and introduced simultaneously by Representative John Carter from TX-31, H.R. 2667 was an almost identical bill. This secondary effort to introduce a bill that would amend the Work Opportunity Tax Credit highlights the importance and momentum that military spouse unemployment is getting in Congress. Email traffic with Representative Carter's Legislative Assistant, Evan Bender, talked about Representative Carter's efforts

to help close the unemployment gap for military spouses. E. Bender (personal communication, August 7, 2020) stated,

This is an issue that Rep. Carter has championed for several years, and the bill is currently awaiting action in the House Ways & Means Committee. H.R. 2667, the Military Spouses Employment Act of 2019, would help level the playing field by expanding the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) to include military spouses. This would provide employers a tax incentive to hire qualified military spouses and help alleviate some of the long-standing obstacles to quality jobs for military spouses. H.R. 2667 allows employers to claim an income tax credit of 40 percent for the first \$6,000 in wages for qualified spouses who remain on the payroll at least 400 hours. For spouses who remain employed from 120 hours to 399 hours, employers are eligible for a tax credit of 25 percent. Qualified spouses include all active duty military spouses, as well as spouses of National Guard and Reserve members who are activated for 90 days or more.

If either H.R. 2912 or H.R. 2667 pass in Congress, this will help incentivize employers to hire military spouses by giving employers a tax break. This process is very similar to the tax credit that employers receive when hiring a veteran.

Corporate Partnerships and Collaborations

Many corporate partnerships and collaborations have been created between the government and the private sector. In their book *Collaborative Governance: Private Roles for Public Goals in Turbulent Times*, Donahue and Zeckhauser (2011) wrote about the importance of government collaboration with the private sector:

A careful review of the evidence from governments – local, state, and federal – convinces us that the performance of America’s government will often hinge on making the best use of collaborative governance. It leverages private expertise, energy, and money by strategically sharing control – over the precise goals to be pursued and the means for pursuing them – between government and private players. That discretion simultaneously motivates private collaborators to enter the public arena and empowers them to play their roles. (p. 4)

Programs such as the Military Spouse Employment Partnership (MSEP) have taken center stage in facilitating jobs for military spouses. MSEP was designed to “improve employment and career opportunities for spouses of active duty and reserve component members across each of the service branches” (Gonzalez et al., 2015, p. 9).

Military Spouse Employment Partnership

The goal of many of the partnerships referenced in this study is to advocate for the military family. In most cases, that advocacy has to do with military spouse unemployment. This is the case of the MSEP, which was created by the DoD in 2011 (Government Accountability Office, 2012). According to Gonzalez et al. (2015),

The Military Spouse Employment Partnership is a targeted recruitment and employment tool that serves military spouses and companies that are seeking to hire them. Its explicit goal is to improve employment and career opportunities for spouses of active-duty and reserve component members across each of the service branches. It does this by partnering with employers from a wide range of establishments from private, public, and nonprofit sectors that have committed to support the employment of military spouses. (p. 9)

MSEP is a platform for collaboration between military spouses and potential employers. The partnership begins with a public sector employer's commitment to hiring military spouses. To date, there are over 400 partners in the program (Military One Source, n.d.).

Although MSEP's intention is to partner with organizations for those to hire military spouses, the effectiveness of this is not clear because according to Gonzales et al (2015),

partners are not required to hire a specific number of spouses each month, they do commit to reporting to the Military Community and Family Policy office about the number of military spouses that are hired each month and from which service the spouse's sponsoring service member is in. In total, about 40 percent of employer partners provide program staff with this information. (p. 13)

This leaves military spouses with a vague understanding of the effectiveness of such partnerships. It would be helpful to make it a requirement for the organizations to report the number of military spouses hired under this program. The validity of such a program depends on the number of spouses being hired, and because those data are not available, it is challenging to determine the impact that MSEP is having.

Blue Star Families

Another similar program is Blue Star Families, which was founded in 2009 by a group of military spouses. The idea was to empower military families while their active duty service member is serving the country. According to Blue Star Families (n.d.),

With more than 150,000 members in our network, including in chapters and communities all over the world, Blue Star Families touches more than 1.5 million military family members every year. Through our research and program

partnerships, Blue Star Families ensures that wherever American military families go, they can always feel connected, supported and empowered to thrive – in every community, across the nation, and around the globe. (para. 3)

Blue Star families conducts research and brings awareness to the challenges that military families face. They help diminish the economic insecurities for military families by investing in military spouse employment opportunities and education. Blue Star Families also leads in its research and policy work by doing research projects, policy analysis, and their comprehensive report derived from the annual Military Family Lifestyle Survey (Blue Star Families, 2021). Blue Star Families is a resource that supports all aspects of military life for retired and active duty families. In addition to employment opportunities, it also provides financial resources to military families.

Hiring Our Heroes

Hiring Our Heroes is a U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation that was first introduced in March 2011. Its initiative works to connect veterans (active and transitioning) and military spouses with employment opportunities by connecting them with civilian companies that seek to hire veterans and military spouses. According to their webpage, Hiring Our Heroes (n.d.) has helped more than 617,000 veterans and military spouses find job opportunities. They work with over 2,000 companies that have committed to hiring transitioning service members and military spouses. So far, they have managed to have those companies commit to hiring 710,000 veterans and military spouses. They have a job portal that allows those seeking employment to see open opportunities targeted to veterans and military spouses. In addition, they provide best

practices in their interactive employer site. Hiring Our Heroes also leads in research related to veteran transition and military spouse unemployment (Hiring Our Heroes, n.d.).

Military Spouse Mentoring

Finding employment for military spouses can be obtainable with the right tools. Many military spouses have managed to have successful careers, and their experiences can become examples for many other spouses who struggle with career and job continuity. Military spouse mentoring can be seen as a way to help find employment for active duty military spouses using the expertise of other spouses who serve as mentors. Mentoring programs from organizations such as the American Corporate Partners (ACP) helps active duty military spouses find a professional corporate mentor, who at times are also military spouses. Mentors commit to serving for a 1-year term to the military spouse (Protégés), and they provide resources and training. The program is designed for mentors and Protégés to communicate monthly on career development topics. The ACP has placed 1,000 military spouses with mentors since its conception (ACP, n.d.).

Career Retention

An essential aspect of military spouse employment is career retention for the military spouse, which can significantly reduce military spouse unemployment. As the service member has a mobile career, military spouses could benefit from their employers' support. Constant relocation has a direct effect on the employment of the military spouses. According to Burke and Miller (2016), "Military spouses have lower earnings and employment than people with the same age, sex, and education who are married to civilians, and [. . .] having experienced more military moves in the past is associated with lower spousal earnings" (p. vi).

As important as it is for the service member to stay in the military, career retention for the military spouse could signify a longer retention period for the service member. Therefore, if the military spouse can retain their job after a PCS, this could influence the service member to stay in the military longer. For this, employers need to retain military spouses by having them telework or by moving them to a local office if applicable. As long as an employer sees a benefit to continue to employ military spouses after a PCS, career retention for the service member might increase. According to Linden (2010), “The most significant challenges facing our society cannot be addressed by any one organization. They all require collaboration among many organizations” (p. 9). The locality in which the service member gets stationed plays a role in the job market to which the military spouse will be subject. According to Knapp et al. (2019),

The career of an employee’s spouse can also suffer if the local labor market where that employee is assigned does not offer many job opportunities in the spouse’s career field. The geographic demands of a job, therefore, create potential retention problems for employers with employees who are married or in long-term committed relationships. (p. 1)

Although many found themselves unemployed during the COVID-19 pandemic, the opportunity to telework also presented itself to many employees. The COVID-19 pandemic showed the world that remote work is an option to many and in most cases, without affecting productivity. Bao et al. (2020) stated,

Working from home can offer some benefits to both companies and employees; for instance, when employees can work from home, they feel more trusted and are

better able to balance work and life responsibilities, which can increase employee retention and make them happier and more productive. (p. 1)

Perhaps teleworking can offer ample possibilities for the military spouse. If employers, when possible, retain military spouses by offering them the opportunity to work remotely, it could help close the gap on the military spouse unemployment rate. The narrative of expecting to see someone at an office just because the status quo is the first defense to agree to retain military spouses after a PCS. Allowing for more remote work can significantly help resolve many issues such as lack of jobs in different locations and not being hired because of the spouse's affiliation to the military.

Challenges Contributing to Military Spouse Unemployment

Relocation

Each year, one third of the military population will relocate, and so will their immediate family (Gleason & Beck, 2017). When a service member receives Permanent Change of Station (PCS) orders, which happens an average of every two to three years (Cooney et al., 2011), it usually means the military spouse will need to resign from their employment. A study by Burke and Miller (2016) on the effects of job relocation for military spouses found that “military moves cause a substantial decline in spousal earnings in the year of the move, on the order of \$2,100, or 14% of average spousal earnings. Moves also increase the likelihood that the spouse has no earnings for the year” (p. vi). When a service member is relocated because of a PCS, the timing and location is based on “the needs of the military” (Burke & Miller, 2016, p. 2). This further jeopardizes the possibility of unemployment for military spouses in their next duty

station. Burke and Miller discussed the problem that their income and career growth are also affected by continual relocation because of military moves:

After establishing a productive relationship at a specific workplace, a military spouse will lose their job-specific human capital if they leave their job to follow their husband or wife to a new duty station. The inherently disruptive nature of moving could also have negative effects on productivity, thereby lowering wages. Moreover, spouses seeking work in occupations that require state certification or licensing may face employment barriers if their credentials are not recognized at their new location. (Burke & Miller, 2016, p. 1)

Migration was a topic of discussion as early as 1978 when Mincer published a study that revealed that migration affects the labor market for the spouse and the couple deciding to move. Mincer stated that the decision should be based on earnings for the household, not just for one person's income (Burke & Miller, 2016). However, military families do not have a say on whether or not they will be relocating. Burke & Miller (2016) stated, "In Mincer, being a tied mover lowers employment outcomes because of fewer employment opportunities for spouses at the new location and because of temporary withdrawal from labor market to engage in 'nonmarket activity' related to establishing a new household" (p. 5).

Relocation can present challenges even when an employer is dedicated to hiring military spouses. It is not always beneficial for the employer to retain a military spouse, particularly if they move overseas and have tax and law issues to overcome. According to Hiring Our Heroes (2020),

Families tied to military service will remain a highly mobile population for the foreseeable future. Companies cannot guarantee jobs or job security to spouses, even when they have made a commitment to military spouse hiring initiatives. These challenges and parameters necessitate a strategy that empowers spouses and employers to work with the existing environment rather than one that dictates the need for changes that are unlikely to come to fruition. (p. 7)

Although several companies' intention to retain a military spouse is of great effort, many times is it out of their control whether or not they can retain, which puts the military spouse in search of employment yet again. According to Hiring Our Heroes (2020),

Even when military spouses are able to find jobs with contractors, they are stymied by policies that do not allow the company to take into account the reality of how the service member's military service negatively impacts their work history. (p. 17)

Relocation challenges are a given in military life; however, having tools for companies to retain military spouses during a relocation can alter military spouse unemployment by reducing the number of spouses having to quit their jobs during a PCS.

Job Availability

When moving, military members do not have a say in their location as they must move to fulfill the military's needs. Many military bases are in remote locations, which adds to military spouses' challenges in finding job opportunities. Research conducted by the Deloitte Center for Government Insights shows that location is key to successfully finding a job for military spouses. Williams et al. (2020) stated,

Well over half of all military spouses live in areas with below-average availability of work. In fact, our research indicates that of the military spouses who live on or near the largest bases, 44% live in labor markets with negative availability of jobs, that is, there are fewer jobs available than there are job seekers. (Williams et al., 2020, p. 3)

However, even when spouses find themselves in a good job market, their career path will once again change when their service members receive orders. According to Oprihory (2020), “The severity of military spouse unemployment and underemployment differs by zip code, and job droughts in communities surrounding some U.S. military bases may be making it harder for spouses to find work, even if they’re armed with college degrees” (para. 1).

In 1991 research concerning the impact of military life and how it affects the labor market was published with data from the 1985 DoD Survey of Officer and Enlisted Personnel and the DoD Survey of Military Spouses (Schwartz et al., 1991). This research was published 30 years ago, and the same issues with relocation and spouse employment continue to affect military spouses today. Schwartz et al. (1991) reported,

The results suggest that Army spouses who are located nearer to population centers are more likely to be in in the labor force and to be employed. Given that many Army locations are in relatively isolated areas where the supply of jobs for spouses may be scarce, these results are not particularly surprising. Spouses who are located near urban areas are more likely to have a wider range of employment opportunities available to them. (p. 402)

RAND Corporation published a study that listed the reasons many military spouses decide to stop looking for work:

Among spouses who were not working, some of the reasons for not looking for work included spouses' lack of necessary work experience (21 percent); spouses' lack of necessary schooling, training, or skills (21 percent); spouses' inability to find work that matches their skills (21 percent); and spouses' sense that there are no jobs in their career field where they currently live (16 percent). (Friedman et al., 2015, p. 40)

In addition to job availability, occupational job licensing for those military spouses who require a license for their employment can be costly when the process has to be readdressed with every PCS. According to Meginley (2020),

The reality many military spouses with professional licenses face, having to secure a new license in another state, makes military moves even harder. For those spouses, having to quit their job, take another licensure test, wait for the results, and then search again for employment, makes the military lifestyle too much to handle. (p. 1)

The DoD has recently taken steps to help minimize the cost of occupational licensing of military spouses, but the time required to get another license is still there: "The 2018 National Defense Authorization Act allows each service branch to reimburse spouses up to \$1,000 for relicensure and certification costs resulting from relocations or PCS moves that cross U.S. state lines – to include OCONUS to stateside moves" (Military One Source, 2020, para. 3).

The Marine Corps is the smallest military branch in the United States, followed by the Air Force, Navy, and Army, they are comprising of 180,958, 329,614, 341,996, and 481,254 service members respectively (DoD, 2020). By the nature of their mission, the Marine Corps has duty stations in locations that are not favorable for military spouse employment because their location severely impacts the job market availability.

According to the DoD demographics report, 49% of Marine Corps spouses are employed in the civilian workforce, and those numbers change to 52% for the Air Force, 53% for the Navy, and 46% for the Army (DoD, 2020). Although the Army has the fewest number of military spouses in the workforce, with 46% of them employed, they are the largest military branch and have the largest number of military spouses because 51.8% of active duty soldiers are married, compared to 40.1% of Marines (DoD, 2020). Difference between military branches also pose a variety of issues depending on which branch the service member is associated with. Factors such as the length of orders to a duty station can make a significant impact on military spouse employment. The Marine Corps does not normally issue orders longer than 36 months in one location, and new orders are required after those 36 months. The Army's order to a new duty station is usually 4 years when in the Continental United States (Powers, 2019). Having additional time in one duty station can be of benefit for some locations because it allows military spouses to gain seniority in the workforce by limiting how often they need to switch employment; however, it also has its downfalls. If military spouses are stationed in a location in which job availability is limited, they will have to endure the unfavorable conditions longer.

According to (Williams et al., 2020),

Well over half of all military spouses live in areas with below-average availability of work. In fact, our research indicates that of the military spouses who live on or near the largest bases, 44% live in labor markets with negative availability of jobs, that is, there are fewer jobs available than there are job seekers. (p. 3)

Congress also has committed to help with military spouse occupational licensing.

In March 2018, the DoD and DHS, at the request of Congress, published a report titled “Report on the Barriers to Portability of Occupational Licenses Between States”

(Meginley, 2020). The report found that

barriers to the transfer and acceptance of certifications and licenses that occur when state rules differ can have a dramatic and negative effect on the financial well-being of military families. Military spouses routinely lose 6 to 9 months of income during a military move as they try to reinstate their careers. . . .

Differences in licensure requirements across states limit advancement or deter re-entry into the workforce at a new location. Removing these barriers, creating reciprocity in licensing requirements, and facilitating placement opportunities can help a military family’s financial stability, speed the assimilation of the family into its new location, and create a desirable new employee pool for a state (especially in education and health care). (Meginley, 2020, p. 3)

Duty stations for service members and their families are temporary. The mobility required to serve in the military is one of the most significant challenges for military spouse employment. The location in which a service member gets stationed directly correlates to the availability of employment of a military spouse. Marshall (2014) stated,

The military is a highly mobile culture that moves worldwide. There are military bases near metropolitan areas, in locations around the globe, and in small towns across America. Each location has its own challenges for locating employment, especially because the duty station is often temporary. (p. 86)

Childcare

Although many military spouses face a myriad of challenges when looking for employment, childcare is a big issue affecting their employment. Military spouse unemployment is directly affected by the lack of childcare near the bases where service members are stationed. The lack of childcare availability in military bases has been an issue for several years, and it has grown as an issue now that more military families are composed of dual-working couples. In 2007, the DoD asked RAND Corporation to assess the DoD formula to estimate childcare needs. Moini et al. (2007) stated,

The DoD recognizes that high-quality child care is both a readiness and a retention issue. If parents are forced to make do with inadequate childcare arrangements or cannot find child care, they may be distracted from duty or in some instances may even fail to report for duty in order to care for their children. Inadequate child care may also affect a family's decision to remain in the military. (p. 1)

The National Military Family Association has also linked the lack of good and affordable childcare to its effect on national security. To service members, family readiness is key to their career success and particularly, to their retention. According to Hiring Our Heroes (2020),

Within the conversation surrounding military spouse unemployment, childcare is often at the forefront of the discussion. The challenge of obtaining affordable, quality, accessible childcare impacts all families, but it is felt particularly acutely in military families, who often face these challenges regularly. With each Permanent Change of Station, lack of access to quality, affordable childcare hinders the ability of military spouses to enter and/or return to the workforce. (p. 24)

Although the DoD is the largest employer-sponsored system of high-quality childcare in the United States, their efforts seem to fall short. In most military bases, Childcare Development Centers (CDC) sponsored by the DoD have long wait times, and military families could wait years to get an offer of care. Boice (2017) stated,

If staying home with children isn't an option and a spouse must work to contribute to their household income, many families have no choice but to find childcare within their budget. Typically, the Child Development Centers (CDC) aboard military installations are reasonable, in terms of pricing, as they are largely based on a sliding scale. However, depending on the location, there's often a lengthy waitlist for childcare. When this happens, military families are forced to make alternative arrangements, which doesn't always align with the quality standards they may like for their children. (para. 4)

On-base CDC are sought after by dual-working couples. The CDCs on base work on a priority system, with first priority for children of childcare providers who work at the center and second priority to dual-military couples (or single parents who are active duty). This leaves dual-working couples with spouses working in the civilian sector as

the third priority for childcare. Although the wait time for many of the CDCs on base is exceptionally long, the servicemembers and their family will receive state-of-the-art care once care is offered. According to Hiring Our Heroes (2020),

Despite the challenge of obtaining childcare, once care is secured, military families can expect some of the finest care in the nation. This is a result of the 1989 passage of the Military Child Care Act, which mandated and funded an overhaul of the childcare system. The act included significant improvements in quality through new childcare teacher training requirements, increased teacher pay, and a professional training curriculum for staff members. (p. 25)

In 2020, \$1.2 billion was allocated to military childcare programs from federal funds. On military bases, childcare is offered to children from 6 weeks to 5 years of age. However, the service is not free for military families; they also pay a portion of childcare costs (Larin, 2020). Although these services are offered, the DoD has made it clear that childcare availability is not an entitlement to service members (DoD, 2020). Even with all of these efforts and the knowledge that over 200,000 children in military installations have childcare services, quality affordable childcare continues to be an issue for service members. According to Kamarck (2020),

The Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission (MCRMC) found that in 2014 there were 10,979 total children on waiting lists for child care, with a disproportionate number of children (73%) age three and under on waiting lists. In 2019, the Navy reported 9,000 families on waiting lists, mainly concentrated in fleet areas (e.g., Norfolk, VA and San Diego, CA). The Army reported approximately 5,000 children on its wait lists – primarily infants

and toddlers. Reported wait lists for the Air Force and Marine Corps were 3,200 and 800 children, respectively. (pp. 4–5)

Fee Assistance Programs

In addition to having CDCs on base, the DoD provides fee assistance to childcare centers outside of military installations that pays a portion of the cost on selected privately owned childcare centers. This fee assistance also comes with its own set of challenges, including long waitlists to receive funds. The largest fee assistance program for the military is ChildCare Aware of America. Sponsored by the DoD, ChildCare Aware of American (2019) serves over 10,000 children yearly by providing fee assistance and respite childcare programs. The demand for fee assistance is so high that it can take a family over a year to get funding, and it is not an easy process for childcare centers to be approved by the program. The childcare center must complete a rigorous application process to get approval which often discourages them from applying.

Paradigms for Hiring Military Spouses

For many years, companies and corporations have avoided hiring military spouses because of their high turnover rates. The paradigms that follow military spouses typically focus on how expensive it is to hire them when sooner rather than later they will lose them to a move forced by the military. It is estimated that it costs employers between 33% and 2 times the annual salary of the employee to replace them (Olya, 2021). Because an employer hires a military spouse with the knowledge that they will be moving, they know that they will be incurring the cost of a replacement in the near future. This has led to many military spouses not being hired when they identified as a military spouse. Even to date, when the movement of hiring military spouses is starting to

change, many continue to choose not to self-identify as military spouses. Maximizing current programs that help military spouses find employment and creating new programs that focus on empowering employers to hire military spouses could help alleviate the unemployment gap. Hiring assistance programs that benefit employers with incentives to hire military spouses such as providing financial assistance to cover the expenses encountered because of military spouse turnovers can help encourage military spouse hiring.

Research conducted by Jones (2013) on the experiences of obtaining employment for enlisted spouses of active duty service members showed that most military spouses who participated in the research feel that being married to a service member negatively impacts their employment. Jones stated,

Many of the spouses interviewed cited relocation as a main source of difficulty.

A majority of the military spouses interviewed have experienced discrimination from employers. All of the spouses interviewed reported that the Department of Defense and the military bases do not do a good job of marketing resources and programs to help military spouses obtain employment. Finally, all ten of the participants exuded a sense of independence and self-motivation. (p. 75)

Interview Bias

Because it is applicable for the entire workforce, not only military spouses, employers are also limited to the questions they can ask during an interview. Their limitations usually come from federal acts such as the Equal Employment Opportunity Act of 1972. Unfortunately, military spouses are not a federally protected class. Therefore, not hiring a military spouse because of their affiliation to the military is not

illegal (Alwine, 2020). It is usually easy for employers to identify military spouses because their frequent moves tend to show up on the resume. This might make some businesses hesitate before hiring a military spouse.

In predominantly military towns, it is usually clear when a person applying is a military spouse. However, this does not stop employers from asking questions such as “Why did you move here?” and “How long can we count on you being here?” Although seemingly innocent, those questions can make or break the hiring of a military spouse who transitions duty stations often. As a military spouse said after being rejected from a position after informing the employer that she was a military spouse, “I felt punished and shunned for being honest about my status as a MilSpouse and had no idea that answering a question as simple as ‘what brings you to the area’ would result in the loss of an opportunity” (Dickey, 2018, p. 2). Many examples of military spouses facing interview bias that affects their hiring because of their spouse’s military status exist. Being an unprotected class contributes to the discrimination that military spouses face in the workforce.

The Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Act (USERRA) states that any person with a connection to the Armed Forces is protected from being denied employment, reemployment, retention in employment, or promotion based on their affiliation to the military (Absher, 2020). However, USERRA does not protect military spouses. Therefore, it is not considered unlawful not to hire or retain a military spouse because of their service member’s status.

Resume Gaps

Military spouses have to relocate with the active duty service members, and at times, the relocation only lasts 6 to 9 months. This leaves a gap in their resume that potential employers continuously scrutinize. Not only are short duty stations an issue that creates gaps on resumes, but being stationed in places where there is not much of a job market also creates gaps on the resumes. Many military spouses try to fill their gap by volunteering or taking jobs for which they are overqualified, usually to avoid resume gaps.

Excluded From Veteran Hiring Programs

Veterans have long qualified for multiple veteran hiring programs. Some of these programs give a tax credit to employers who hire veterans, and others prioritize veterans' hiring over civilians. Unfortunately, military spouses do not qualify for the majority of programs that focus on veteran hiring. However, some programs such as the Illinois Civil Service workforce and the U.S. Office of Personnel Management have hiring preference for surviving spouses of military members with a service-connected death or disability (Military Benefits, 2020).

In 2017, the unemployment rate for veterans reached an all-time low thanks to the efforts of public and private organizations. The unemployment rate for veterans reduced from 8% in 2011 to 3.7% in 2017 (Hiring Our Heroes, 2020). At the time, the focus on veteran unemployment was such that significant changes were made to policies to encourage businesses and corporations to hire veterans. Once numbers for veteran unemployment got as low as they did, the focus changed to military spouse

unemployment, but there has not been a significant change in military spouses' unemployment rates like the change for veterans.

Best Practices

Best practices of hiring military spouses is not a topic that has been studied as much as it probably should. Best practices for hiring veterans has been a topic explored in the past, and it has faced many of the same issues that affect military spouses.

Attorneys John McNichols and Ashely Anderson (2020), veterans themselves, published a journal article titled "Best Practices in Veteran Hiring: Balancing Employer Risks and Goals With Applicant Rights." In it, they stated,

Employers who wish to adopt a voluntary veterans' preference should be similarly thoughtful about how they structure inquiries into applicants' military service. Instead of simply asking all applicants whether they have military experience, an employer should consider informing all applicants of its policy and then inquiring, on an individualized basis, whether an applicant elects to invoke the preference. In this way, an applicant who may be wary of disclosing some aspect of her military service – perhaps due to the nature of a discharge or existing military obligations – could elect not to disclose the information at the outset of the hiring process. (p. 12)

Similar to the issues faced by veterans, military spouses struggle about whether to identify themselves in job applications. But unlike veteran hiring, companies have not focused on best practices to hire military spouses. Although there is an excellent effort from multiple corporations hiring military spouses, combining best practices can be beneficial to the military spouse community and corporations seeking to hire them.

In 2020, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce’s Foundation, Hiring Our Heroes, published recommendations and best practices to hire military spouses. Hiring Our Heroes suggested the following actions to hire military spouses, which were taken from their *A Collective Effort for Military Spouses* publication (Hiring Our Heroes, 2020):

- Brand your company as a military spouse-friendly employer
 - Use “military ready” rather than “veteran ready” in corporate websites, recruiting materials, etc.
 - Create web pages inclusive of spouses in content and language
 - Fund/join partnerships and coalitions to support spouse hiring (MSEP, Hiring Our Heroes, Blue Star Families’ Spouseforce, etc.)
 - Develop a comprehensive communications and education campaign for employers and military spouses. The campaign must include practical suggestions for programs and plans of action. Employers can also advocate for government incentives for employers that would facilitate spouse employment, while calling for more research and data to inform future campaigns
- Create avenues for military spouses to self-identify
 - Form Military Spouse Affinity Groups, separate from veterans’ or women’s groups following the models created at Amazon, Booz Allen Hamilton, and Capital One
 - Allow spouses to self-identify in applications and candidate tracking. Best-in-class examples include Amazon and Hilton; both organizations track the spouse status of candidates and employees

- Make the business case internally
 - Draft military spouse-friendly employer guidance (e.g., a how-to guide placed directly on company website) and share key points of contact for spouses (recruiting, HR, managers, etc.)
 - Create an internal culture campaign led by company leadership
 - Put your business case into action
 - Commit to Hiring Our Heroes' "Hiring 100,000 Military Spouses" campaign and report results
 - Incorporate verbiage in job postings inviting military spouses to apply
 - Identify, cultivate, and leverage military spouse-friendly recruiters in your company to ensure hiring managers understand this hiring initiative. Eliminate the frozen middle.
 - Build recruiter training/slick sheets with tips for interviewing spouses and messaging about why spouses are good employees
 - Develop a communications campaign to create awareness/buy-in with hiring managers
 - Use HR systems to tag military spouse candidates for preference
 - Audit positions and create more remote opportunities
 - Create military spouse hiring targets for recruiters and hiring managers.
- (p. 9)

Ties to Public Administration

Unemployment of military spouses is an issue of accountability for the DoD. To increase readiness of the force, maintain a strong force, and continue to attract quality

people to the military, the DoD has the responsibility to ensure their programs that help reduce the unemployment rate of military spouses are making a difference and to make proper changes to programs and policy to close the unemployment gap because not doing so affects military readiness, which is the ultimate goal for the DoD and its branches. Their responsibility lies on the need a of a total-voluntary force, which must have a sense of security for the entire family for it to continue to successfully attract quality service members. Wellman (2018) stated,

The efficacy of the United States military, at this juncture in history, depends on the continued voluntary service of qualified individuals. Our ability to recruit and retain such individuals is closely tied to the value our citizens attach to military service. When people place a high value on military service, it becomes much easier to recruit and retain qualified service members. While trust in the military and regard for military service remain high when compared to other American institutions, research suggests that both trust and regard are in decline. If trust and regard for military service decline too far, our ability to fill military jobs could be jeopardized. (p. 215)

To have an efficient and effective force, the quality and seniority of service members matters. The disparity for military spouses is significant, yet it is not properly tracked by the DoD. According to Wellman (2018),

Because the military spouse status is not explicitly protected by law, it is not readily tracked by employers or labor organizations. Employers are unlikely to keep data about military spouse applicants; they are merely applicants with extra baggage. Furthermore, because it is not a protected status, the EEOC does not

maintain reliable data concerning discrimination. This makes comparing ratios of acceptance rates extremely difficult. (p. 261)

Issues such as the unemployment rate for military spouses change depending on where and how the data are being collected. Jowers (2020) stated,

Each month, the Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics publishes information on the labor force status of veterans as part of its broader data set. Including similar information about military spouses would involve modifying the monthly/basic Current Population Survey questionnaire, said Andrew Blank, an economist in the BLS Office of Employment and Unemployment Statistics. He said he's not aware of any initiative to collect information on military spouses on a monthly basis. (para. 11)

The effects of unemployment have an impact on Public Administration, the economy, and society. According to Picardo (2020),

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), when workers are unemployed, their families lose wages, and the nation as a whole loses their contribution to the economy in terms of the goods or services that could have been produced. (para. 2)

For the military, loss of wages in the form of military spouse income continues to be an issue affecting military families as reported by the Blue Start Families annual survey. If spouse unemployment dissatisfaction is high, it affects readiness and causes additional stress to the military family, at which point the DoD should acknowledge the responsibility they have in these issues. In respect to the accountability by which the DoD and federal government could help military spouses, following through with its

current programs and ensuring their effectiveness could help close the unemployment gap. As of the time of this study, very little data are available regarding the success these programs have in helping spouses find work; however, the data regarding the unemployment rate continue to hold steady without a significant change over the last 12 years (DoD, 2020). The success of these programs is necessary to increase military readiness. If the DoD focuses on the results of the existing programs and becomes accountable in ensuring the military spouse employment programs are working, it might make them more efficient and ensure opportunities not only for the military family but also for the quality of the force.

Military spouses have been identified as having more degrees than their civilian counterparts, yet they struggle to find employment. The military offers the GI bill for service members; this benefit can be transferred to the spouse as long as the service member meets some stipulations such as time served. The type of employment can make a significant difference on the availability of jobs. Being too educated in locations such as Jacksonville, North Carolina can potentially be an hinderance to finding employment. Military spouses with higher levels of education not looking for entry level positions have a tougher time finding employment, and this can be exacerbated in different duty stations where the job market is limited. The DoD has an untapped resource on its hands, one that not only has much to offer in the workforce, but also contributes to the military when being part of a military unit. As cited by Lara-Cinisomo et al. (2020),

Military spouses are an important group to study because they must contend with a number of unique factors that are different from or more complex than civilian

spouses and can influence their personal and professional well-being, such as fewer work hours and lower wages compared to civilian counterparts. (p. 398)

Levels of education are related to contribution to the economy as well as society.

Therefore, the lack of participation of military spouses is an untapped financial resource much needed for the economy. According to the Council of Economic Advisers (2018),

Military spouses are also more educated than other civilian, non-institutionalized Americans of working age, suggesting that losing their contributions to the labor market is particularly detrimental for the American economy. While approximately 30 percent of the U.S. working age population has a college degree, approximately 40 percent of military spouses in this age range do. And a greater share of military spouses attended some college, even without receiving a degree, than other working age Americans: 34 and 26 percent, respectively. (p. 2).

Public Administration Pillar of Accountability and Military Spouse Unemployment

In 1977, Jefferies published the article “Public Administration and the Military,” which discusses the military and public administration link. Jefferies stated, “The armed services are public agencies as well as departments of the Executive Branch of the national government and thus fall within the milieu of public administration” (p. 322). In military spouse unemployment, the public administration pillar of accountability transcends many of the issues faced by military spouses. Still, notably it speaks to the accountability that the DoD should have in regard to military spouse unemployment. According to Stein (2019), “Accountability is the aspect of administrative responsibility through which officials are held answerable for general notions of democracy and morality as well as for specific legal mandates” (para. 2).

Compared to their civilian counterparts, military spouses face more hardships when building a career because of the insurmountable differences in lifestyle that they must endure because of the military. This knowledge is not new to the DoD, yet the efforts and capital spent on programs trying to close the unemployment gap for military spouses are not making significant impact. The DoD should be accountable for ensuring that the programs in which its efforts are being directed are making a difference to help reduce the unemployment gap for military spouses by ensuring that the policies and programs in place are of value. Perhaps focusing on new policies rather than programs can make a bigger impact. Policies that include protecting military spouses from being discriminated against by making military spouses a protected class, offering incentives to hire military spouses, or facilitating childcare for working military spouses could make a significant difference to reduce the unemployment gap.

Other agencies such as the Department of State face similar challenges to those of military families. Yet unlike the military, the State Department's Foreign Area Officers' (FAO) spouses can participate in programs in locations where military spouses are not eligible to go. In countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq, and Pakistan, FAO spouses can accompany the FAO during their tour to these locations if they are able to find employment through their Priority Staffing Post (PSP), a program only available for these locations. This program allows adult spouses to accompany the FAO to locations where they would traditionally have to go unaccompanied (Black, 2019). Just like the MSP program, to qualify for employment through the PSP, spouses of FAOs need to have all the minimum requirements for the job posting (Black, 2019). Like FAO spouses, military spouses have to face relocation and long separations from their spouses, and the

service members have to work long hours when not deployed, yet unlike FAO spouses, military spouses cannot accompany service members to locations such as Afghanistan and Iraq. When a military family relocates, it usually means they will be separated from family and friends who help support them. This means that while their service member is either deployed or on extended travel, all home and family responsibilities rely on the military spouse. This is an issue that most civilians do not have to face. It is hard to put into words the sacrifices that military families make. The following is a simple explanation of some of the challenges faced by military families:

The military family is often asked to make sacrifices well beyond any expected of their civilian counterparts. For active component family members, the military is a daily part of who they are, and the family is as much a part of the military as is the actively serving military member. Active component family members are expected to move, or PCS (Permanent Change of Station), every three to five years. While the military is attempting to lengthen the time period in which service members and their families remain at one duty location, the reality is that the needs of the services come first, and personnel change duty locations at the pleasure of the military. With each move, family members are expected to start over—a new school, new friends, a new job, a new home, a new neighborhood, and new experiences. Pets may even have to be left behind, if the next duty station is overseas or is in a location where pets are impractical or not allowed. Housing on some bases is substandard, well below what many in the civilian community would consider acceptable, though the military is working to improve post/base housing for all ranks. For some, the normal stress of a major move is

exacerbated by a parent's or a spouse's deployment soon after the PCS. In some cases spouses may move their families across the country or across the world while the service member is deployed, setting up a new home alone and without the benefit of the service member's assistance. For active service military families, the only certainty is the uncertainty they live with every day. (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration, 2010, pp. 15–16)

Military spouses face more challenges than civilians do when searching for employment. As stated previously, military spouses have higher education levels than their civilian counterparts, yet their unemployment rate continues to be 7.5 times higher (U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation, 2020). The military's culture, which has a strict hierarchy, invades all aspects of the military spouse's life. Service members do not have set working hours, and their hours are based on the needs of their Commanding Officer and Unit in which they belong. It is typical for service members to work 10-hr days and weekends, disrupting the family's schedule, particularly when they have a working spouse. Cunha and Curran (2013) stated,

As a civilian, a person's boss has authority over that person while they are at work, but in the military, a service member's boss (commander) has authority over almost all aspects of their life even when the service member has a 'day off.' Commanders in the military are responsible for their subordinates' conduct on and off duty. For example, a service member's commander may be notified if the service member gets drunk, bounces a check, has a fight with their spouse, if their children are going hungry, or if they get in trouble with the law. (p. 3)

Donahue and Zeckhauser (2011) stated that “efficiency and accountability remain bedrock criteria for public missions, but the skills required to reach those goals must mutate with the shift from direct action to collaboration” (p. 25). Military spouse employment affects many areas for service members and their families, therefore directly impacting the readiness of the force. A 2020 Congressional report on military spouse employment reported that

from the federal government’s perspective, higher employment rates among military spouses can have a positive economic impact and contribute to economic growth. When military spouses are able to build a successful career, it can also bolster a family’s financial stability during the time when a servicemember transitions out of the military into civilian employment. Spouses’ inability to find employment or job dissatisfaction can also increase family and relationship stress, lower overall satisfaction with the military, and affect retention decisions.

(Kamarck et al., 2020, “Summary”)

Employment discrimination toward military spouses is a genuine issue in which the DoD can make an impact by changing policies to benefit military spouses. According to Wellman (2018),

Military spouses are a class of people not explicitly protected from employment discrimination. This means that a prospective employer can decline to hire someone purely on the basis that he or she is married to a person serving in the military. This class of people currently encompasses more than 707,000 working-age people. That figure does not fully capture the state of the problem. New military spouses are continually rotating through the status as people constantly

join and exit the military, thus magnifying the number of lives affected.

Unfortunately, the effects to military spouses' careers remain for the rest of their lives. (p. 210)

Under federal law, there are several groups that are considered protected classes when applying for employment. Race, age, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, and genetic information are some of them (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, n.d.). For the military, the Uniformed Service Employment and Reemployment Act of 1994 protects them from being discriminated because of their service in the uniformed service (U.S. Department of Justice, 2021). However, the military spouse does not fall under a federal employment protected class; in fact, several states have taken action to add military spouse as a protected class. The state of California passed a law protecting service members that included forbidding discriminations against someone associated to a service member, to include a spouse and child (Department of Fair Employment and Housing, 2021). The state of Virginia passed a similar law in 2021. The issue with not extending federal protection rights to military spouses affects the DoD and the quality of the service members: "discrimination against military spouses discourages voluntary military service. We are defended by an all-volunteer force that protects our citizens from foreign threats. Refusing to hire military spouses discourages qualified service members from joining or remaining in the military" (Wellman, 2018, p. 215). Not extending discrimination laws to military spouses is an issue of concern for potential wages lost and career retention of the service member, which could become an issue of national security. Many classes are being protected, including protection because of race, color, gender, national origin, and so forth;

however, military spouses have different challenges because of their lifestyle, but they are not protected from discrimination because of their association to the military. This is an issue of inequality, which is directly linked to the equity pillar of public administration. Wellman (2018) stated,

Spouses are expected to take care of the family when the military member deploys or has an extended period of absence due to temporary duty. Military spouses largely give up any control of where they may live. Military spouses shoulder the stress and impact of their military member/spouse becoming wounded or killed in action. Military members have the luxury not to think about hiring discrimination while they are serving on active duty. Meanwhile, their spouses must confront it with virtually every application in the civilian sector. (p. 211)

The DoD seems to understand the impact that military spouse employment has on the retention of its troops. According to the National Military Spouse Network (NMSN), the DoD and private and public entities have spent millions of dollars in different employment initiatives that attempt to close the unemployment gap for military spouses. However, the NMSN stated that there are not enough data to show what impact these initiatives are having on reducing the unemployment rate for military spouses (Jowers, 2022). Furthermore, the unemployment rate for military spouses has not significantly changed in the last 12 years, and many of these programs were introduced 12 years ago. The NMSN suggested in their annual white paper that the DoD needs a full assessment on the employment initiatives because little change has been made on the unemployment rate of military spouses (Jowers, 2022). Such assessment could hold the DoD

accountable for the resources spent, more importantly for the impact it has made in reducing the unemployment gap for military spouses. The DoD has not been transparent on the efficiency of how the programs are working to reduce unemployment rate for military spouses. The NMSN reported that of the 11 programs that aim to close the gap on military spouse unemployment, programs used by either the DoD or another federal agency, eight of them do not report data or any kind of metrics, and the other three report limited data (Jowers, 2022). Although there seems to be an understanding of the responsibility of the DoD to facilitate employment to military spouses in order to maintain military readiness, the DoD is accountable for the way they execute the programs they get funded to implement. In 2012, the Government Accountability Office reported that “DoD is not yet able to measure the overall effectiveness of its military spouse employment programs and its performance monitoring is limited, but DOD is taking steps to improve its monitoring and evaluation” (p. 13). Yet 10 years later, information regarding their efforts continues to be difficult to find.

Chaos Theory of Careers

When searching for employment, military spouses experience constraints that have a direct correlation to the military spouse unemployment rate. Needs of the military come before the civilian spouse’s employment. Even after being settled and finding employment, the high demand on the service member with matters such as deployments, temporary duty assignment, field training exercises, and long working hours impact the employment of the civilian spouse. Pryor and Bright presented the chaos theory of careers (CTC); it “emerged as a career development theory to describe the reality of career development and account for the changing nature of work in the 21st century”

(Schlesinger & Daley, 2016, p. 86). The CTC sees careers differently; rather than as a corporate ladder, the CTC helps people view careers as a path (Garmon, 2004).

According to Pryor and Bright (2011),

Chaos theory characterizes change in terms of adaptation and resilience as a complex dynamical system tries to maintain its stability in the face of influences to change. However, because change can be non-linear, iterative and unpredictable (Briggs & Peat, 1989), there remains the perpetual possibility that new outcomes for the system may emerge (Laszlo, 1991; Morowitz, 2002).

(p. 28)

Stability could help military spouses have a successful career, but the military's continual changes prevent them from reaching a stable work environment. Constant change creates the need for military spouses to reinvent their careers time and time again. Although the DoD does not follow the same laws and regulations as civilians, it continues to need an efficient and effective force and one that is made up of volunteers. Yet even with meeting the requirement of the military, the DoD could implement changes that allow for reduction of transitions for military families, which would help with military spouse unemployment. This further indicates the changes in policy that the DoD could make to help reduce the unemployment gap of military spouses. The DoD is accountable to the policies it implements on lengths of tours and location of duty stations. The changes made in military spouses' career field are directly related to the opportunities available in the current duty station. Local employment opportunities will help develop the employment options for military spouses, making military spouses unique in the workforce, enabling them to blend into the local needs. CTC approaches complex career

paths such as the ones taken by military spouses because it addresses the multiple changes that the military lifestyle brings to their careers. It also addresses how those minor changes have huge impacts on military spouses' careers.

Because career development tends not to happen in isolation (Schlesinger, 2016), military spouses meet all aspects of the CTC. All aspects of their family, culture, and spouses' employment affect their career development. Change is a constant in the military family. It is impossible to predict what the military needs might be; therefore, a military family's future is always uncertain. The uncertainty and unpredictability of the military lifestyle link the CTC to military spouse unemployment. In addition, this theory is based on empowering people to continually reinvent themselves, which perfectly applies to military spouses (Pryor & Bright, 2011). Pryor and Bright (2011) stated,

We need to recognize that the most fundamental challenge that career counselors confront is to assist their clients to develop the skills of adaptation and resilience required to negotiate and use productively the fluctuating fortunes of their careers. It includes assisting clients to reinvent themselves continually, to identify opportunities, to recover from setbacks, to find meaningful work that matters to them and to others, and to capitalize on chance. (p. 11)

The CTC is about change and unpredictability, exactly what military families experience every day. If anything is certain in the military lifestyle, it is that everything is uncertain. Military spouses are limited by their location, childcare, lack of family support, and of course, the needs of the military. Military spouses' careers could be limited because "all of us are limited, and recognizing our limitations helps us develop our strengths" (Bright, 2015, 4:50).

Janicki (2019) applied the CTC to military spouse unemployment by addressing Schlesinger and Daley's 2016 framework for CTC, including four phases: Explore, Prepare, Start, and Adapt (EPSA; Janicki, 2019). Janicki applied it by explicitly addressing the four phases of the CTC framework to military spouse employment by adopting it as

Explore- In this phase, the military spouse uses tools such as mind mapping, lifelines, metaphors, and narratives to recognize patterns within his or her career development. Within this phase, the focus is on using assessments and interventions to facilitate deeper discussion and self-discovery. By truly understanding who they are, what skills and abilities they bring to the table, and where they want to contribute, military spouses can gain direction beyond just familiar job titles and become open to other options that may be available. In addition, military spouses can gain insight on factors affecting their career development process (Schlesinger & Daley, 2016).

Prepare- In this phase, the focus is on developing military spouses' ability to think in open systems. Assisting military spouses with reframing techniques to help them understand the value in failure, the possible benefits to risk, and to recognize opportunities. Tools such as The Reality Checklist, and Luck Readiness Index developed by Bright and Pryor (2011) are beneficial in this phase. Additionally, this phase focuses upon job searching, creating resumes, negotiating salaries, and interview techniques. Military spouses will need aid in learning how to adapt resumes to show transferable skills as they are often looking at switching jobs when an initial job path is unavailable.

Start- In this phase military spouses are actively job searching, engaging in further training or internships, and putting themselves in the “path of opportunity” (Schlesinger & Daley, 2016, p. 91). Spouses should be networking and developing and expanding career knowledge during this phase.

Adapt- In this stage it is important to assist military spouses in understanding the need to be flexible and adaptable within a constantly changing environment. Spouses should consider small term goals that can be adjusted as needed. One suggestion by Schlesinger and Daley (2016) is to introduce narratives from individuals whom clients admire. These narratives would showcase individuals who found success from failure and/or success through small chance events. This would be an opportunity to explore examples of other military spouses who found success through non-linear career paths and similar challenges. (Janicki, 2019, Applying the Chaos Theory of Careers section)

Continual career progression does not come easy for military spouses; their success can be at times random, as explained by Thiétart and Forgues (1995): “Chaos- i.e., an apparently random, but deterministically driven behavior-has organizing attributes. These organizing attributes result from the multiple interactions between forces of stability and forces of instability the system is subject to” (p. 19). Organizing attributes that guide the military spouses’ career even when they live a lifestyle that is sporadic and uncertain. Military spouses are pulled in many different directions, with expectations to volunteer in their spouse’s unit, to pack and unpack households every 2 to 3 years and all while needing to have a sense of belonging; they need “the contemporary need for a sense of meaning, purpose, a sense of the sacred, spiritual wholeness,

community contribution and individual fulfillment are brought into focus and linked within the chaos theoretical framework of careers” (Pryor & Bright, 2011, p. ix).

Understanding that change and transition are an unstoppable way of life might ease the impact this has not only on the military family but also on military spouse employment.

According to Bright (2005),

Chaos theory (Gleick, 1988; Stewart, 1989) presents an account of the recursive application of several nonlinear equations to system behavior, resulting in elements of both stability and susceptibility to sudden and dramatic change at the same time. Furthermore, chaotic systems display other characteristics such as a lack of predictability at the micro level, while at the same time appearing to have a degree of stability at the macro level. (para. 6)

In Garmon’s (2004) study, *Relationships Among Initial Conditions, Career Path Development, and Career Path Satisfaction*, he researched the applications of the CTC on the development and satisfaction of careers. Garmon believed that events tend to be random and haphazard enough that they do not follow any rules or laws, yet they follow an unprecedented order. Garmon quoted Hudson’s words:

As chaos theory has continued to develop, the concepts and conceptualizations of chaos theory have been applied to a variety of complex, dynamic, and nonlinear systems that do not technically qualify as representing the narrow mathematical notion of chaos. While chaotic processes are believed to take place in all major categories of systems - conservative, dissipative, and quantum - most work has focused on the occurrence of chaos in dissipative systems, of which biological and social systems are prime examples (Hudson, 2000). (Garmon, 2004, p. 32)

Yet although military spouses have random differences depending on their duty station, the outcome is the same, a nonlinear dynamic system that is based on chaos. The Marine Corps typically executes orders between July and August each year. This means that every summer, one-third of the Marine Corps will be moving to a new location, making the job market for military spouses volatile during those months. Job turnover is usually high during these months because of the PCS season, yet the jobs available are random and do not follow a specific pattern of what positions will be available at the time of applying. For those Marine Corps families who execute orders off cycle, challenges can be difficult because there is less turnover during that time and potentially fewer employment options. Therefore, in locations such as Okinawa, Japan, job availability is almost always limited, yet when off-cycle working spouses arrive to the island, they might find themselves unemployed until the next PCS season.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

With an average Permanent Change of Station (PCS) every 2 to 3 years (Cooney et al., 2011), military spouses are one of the largest groups in the United States to find themselves unemployed or underemployed (U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation, 2017). Finding employment opportunities is not an easy task when moving to a new area. Often, the job market is not favorable near military bases, and military spouses get stereotyped as transient workers, which discourages employers from hiring them because of the likelihood of a future relocation (Wilson, 2010). Compared to their civilian counterparts, military spouses not only have a higher unemployment rate, but also face significant issues that hinder their employment status; childcare, lack of support from family networks, and constant relocations affect them when they try to find employment.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to explore hiring best practices from the perspective of active duty Marine Corps spouses. Although the Marine Corps has a robust reserve component comprising over 35,000 Marines, this study only focused on active duty Marine spouses. In addition, active reserve Marine spouses were not part of this study as they are not always asked to relocate. The reasoning behind only selecting active duty Marine spouses is due to the longer time commitment required of the Marine, which means having to go through a PCS, which is one of the critical factors affecting military spouse unemployment. With a PCS comes employment turnover, and the cost of hiring military spouses is not always affordable to employers. The cost of training and hiring a replacement is roughly 33% of that person's salary (Olya, 2021). This is due to the investment that an employer must make to recruit, onboard, and train a new hire who

in this case will move when the spouse is given orders. Many factors contribute to military spouse unemployment, including limited childcare, lack of family support, and work and life balance when the service member is deployed, among many more. However, some companies have taken into account the stressors of the military spouse and still seek to hire the military spouse. This phenomenological study compared the hiring best practices from the perspective of active duty Marine Corps spouses.

Research Questions

1. What are the perceived best hiring practices experienced by active duty Marine Corps spouses?
2. What are the perceptions of active duty Marine Corps spouses regarding the contribution they make to the workforce?

Research Design

This phenomenological study explored the perceptions of Marine Corps spouses concerning hiring best practices. Examining first-hand experiences with recruitment practices will help public administrators identify and understand the best practices to hire military spouses. Creswell (2014) stated, “Qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (p. 4). For this research, the McCracken (1988) long interview research method was used. The researcher explored hiring best practices experienced by active duty Marine Corps spouses who were actively employed at the time of the study. The method implemented by McCracken helped guide the research to discover “whys and hows of human behavior” (Schreiber & Asner-Self, 2011, p. 194) therefore giving insight as to what are the best practices for hiring that Marine Corps spouses have experienced

(Creswell & Guetterman, 2018). In addition, a phenomenological research approach was used to obtain the best practices while interviewing spouses of active duty Marines.

The research was conducted through semistructured interviews with spouses of active duty Marines who were employed at the time of the interview. According to Kvale (1996),

In the interview, knowledge is created inter the points of view of the interviewer and the interviewee. The interviews with the subjects are the most engaging stage of an interview inquiry. The personal contact and the continually new insights into the subjects' lived world make the interview an exciting and enriching experience" (p.124)

As a sampling method, this research used convenience sampling. Additionally, using a qualitative phenomenological study approach allowed the study to provide a varying approach when interviewing participants to identify hiring best practices.

For this research, McCracken's (1988) long interview research method was used. The McCracken long interview allows the researcher to expand and learn more about the experience and perceptions of the individuals who are participating in the study. The McCracken long interview is broken down in four stages: review of the analytic categories and interview design, review of the cultural categories and interview design, discovery of analytic categories and analysis/write-up, and discovery of cultural categories and interview. McCracken said, "Whatever is actually said in the opening few minutes of the interview, it must be demonstrated that the interviewer is a being, accepting, curious (but not inquisitive) individual who is prepared and eager to listen to virtually any testimony with interest (p. 38).

Population

The target population for this research was active duty Marine Corps spouses who were employed at the time the study took place. Because of the sharing of the same duty stations, the researcher expected that participants would have similar employment experiences; therefore, reaching saturation would be obtainable by interviewing 32 participants. As stated by Creswell in 2006, Charmaz reiterated that a study reaches saturation when new data no longer produce newer and relevant information (Creswell, 2014).

Sample

The sample for this study was chosen using convenience sampling, allowing participants to be selected based on their availability (LaMorte, 2016). Social media, in particular Facebook, was the primary way to recruit participants, and 32 participants were recruited to participate. Facebook was chosen as the primary strategy to recruit participants because various active duty Marine Corps groups can be found on that platform. In particular, three main Facebook groups were used to find participants: USMC Officers' Spouse Group, which has about 6,000 members; Official USMC Love, with 3,300 members; and Military Spouses with Advanced Degrees, with 4,000 members.

Instrumentation

The following section identifies the instrument that guided this study. The researcher was engaged during all phases of the study to understand the perspective of the Marine Corp spouses being interviewed. After identifying participants using social media, specifically Facebook, the researcher requested email communication with active

duty Marine Corps spouses whose basic contact information was requested via Facebook. After the initial contact on Facebook, the researcher sent a letter and an informed consent (see Appendices A and B) to all participants who volunteered to take part in the research. In addition, an explanation that interviews would take place via video conferences using Zoom while being recorded and a description of the research study were included. The research study instrumentation included 10 research questions that were asked during a one-on-one recorded interview via video conference using Zoom.

The researcher developed two research questions, as identified in Chapter 1, to guide the study. The research questions focused on the perception of active duty Marine Corps spouses on hiring best practices. The sample population was selected using the convenience sampling method, which allowed the researcher to use social media and current Marine Corps spouses' groups such as the Marine Corps Officer Spouses Facebook page to find participants.

Data Collection

The data were collected through interviews. When being interviewed, the participants answered questions regarding their experiences and perceptions during their hiring process. The questions in the interviews were open-ended, and all interviewees were asked the same questions. Interviews were held via Zoom while being recorded. Demographic questions regarding the service member's rank, civilian spouse income, education, years of work experience, current duty station, and Marine's rank were asked to distinguish any trends in the research of best practices for hiring in the perception of military spouses.

To facilitate transcribing information, NVivo transcription was used to convert the video interview into text. Once data were collected, the researcher manually created codes and themes taken from the interview questions. It was essential to address bracketing as the researcher is a military spouse, specifically an active duty Marine Corps spouse. As addressed by Chan, Fung, and Chien,

Bracketing is a methodological device of phenomenological inquiry that requires deliberate putting aside one's own belief about the phenomenon under investigation or what one already knows about the subject before and throughout the phenomenological investigation (Carpenter, 2007). (p. 1)

The researcher must adopt this instrument to have a transparent study and guard against bias.

Data Analysis

This qualitative study analyzed the best practices shared by active duty Marine Corps spouses who were employed at the time of the study. The data identified the themes of personal experiences of the Marine Corps spouses being interviewed. The qualitative data approach allowed the researcher to explore the experiences of those active duty Marine Corps spouses. Interviews allowed for personal experiences to transfer to the study, which produced qualitative results. With these interviews, the researcher was able to identify the themes that existed concerning best practices for hiring military spouses. The open-ended questions encouraged participants to share their experiences when being hired as the spouse of an active duty Marine.

Limitations

The limitation of this study was finding enough Marine Corps spouses to participate in the study for a legitimate appropriate sample size. Identifying the correct number of participants could potentially have been a challenge if there had not been a viable sample size. Interviewing Marine Corps spouses was by design selected for this research because of the limited number of locations where Marines can be stationed; not interviewing spouses of other services also posed a limitation. Because the researcher is a Marine Corps officer's spouse, the limitation of accessibility to enlisted spouses was also present. In reality, social media groups tend to be inclusive of only officer or enlisted spouses.

Assumptions

- Participants were actively employed
- All participants were active duty Marine Corps spouses

Summary

Research shows that military spouses tend to have higher levels of education compared to their civilian counterparts. Therefore, the higher rate of unemployment for military spouses becomes more troublesome. The challenges that military spouses face in the workforce because the service member's career affects finding employment in a new duty station. When corporations commit to hiring military spouses, they help close the unemployment gap faced by the spouses. At the same time, hiring military spouses can potentially increase retention rates for the service member. This qualitative phenomenological study focused on best practices for hiring military spouses from the

perspective of active duty Marine Corps spouses. The study's instrumentation was interviews that were administered with open-ended questions using Zoom.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS

Overview

Chapter 4 presents the analysis of the interviews with active duty Marine Corps Spouses who were employed at the time of the interview. The data were analyzed and served to identify emerging themes based on the experiences in the hiring process of active duty Marine Corps spouses. The analysis in Chapter 4 comprises an explanation of the data analysis methods that were used and how the results were related to the research questions of the study. Chapter 4 also integrates how the questions asked provided the structure for the study. In addition, Chapter 4 addresses bracketing, the interview process, demographics, data collection, and qualitative findings.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to explore hiring best practices from the perspective of active duty Marine Corps spouses. Although the Marine Corps has a robust reserve component comprising over 35,000 Marines, this study only focused on active duty Marine spouses. In addition, active reserve Marine spouses were not part of this study. The reasoning behind only selecting active duty Marine spouses is due to the longer time commitment required of the active duty Marine, which means having to go through a Permanent Change of Station (PCS), which is one of the critical factors affecting military spouse unemployment. For years, hiring military spouses has come with the image that it will cost an employer too much money to hire military spouses by having to replace them soon after. This is due to the investment that an employer has to make to train a new hire who in this case will move when the spouse is given orders. Many factors contribute to military spouse unemployment including limited childcare,

lack of family support, and work and life balance when the service member is deployed, among many more. However, some companies have taken into account the stressors of the military spouse and still seek to hire the military spouse. This phenomenological study will study the hiring best practices from the perspective and experiences of active duty Marine Corps spouses.

Research Questions

This study included two research questions. These research questions were designed to give insight on the perception of hiring best practices as experienced by active duty Marine Corps spouses.

1. What are the perceived best hiring practices experienced by active duty Marine Corps spouses?
2. What are the perceptions of active duty Marine Corps spouses regarding the contributions they make to the workforce?

Interview Questions

To get the perspective of active duty Marine Corps spouses on hiring best practices, the following questions were asked during a 30-min interview.

1. In your perception, what do employers do well to hire military spouses?
2. In your perception, what do employers need to do better to hire military spouses?
 - a) What industry do you work for?
3. Is there an employer whom you have worked with whose hiring process for military spouses stands out as a best practice in your opinion?

4. On average, how long does it take you to get hired after a Permanent Change of Station (PCS)?
5. How often have you been able to retain your job when executing Permanent Change of Station (PCS) orders?
6. In your perspective, what are the challenges of hiring an active duty Marine Corps spouse?
7. Please describe how your employer seeks to hire military spouses if they do so.
8. In your perception, what are some of the characteristics that military spouses bring to the workforce?
9. Please describe what you perceive to hinder the hiring of military spouses
10. Would you like to add any more comments?

Demographic Questions

1. What is your Marine's rank?
2. What is your highest level of education?
3. How many years of work experience do you have?
4. What is your income bracket?
 - a) 0 – 24k
 - b) 25k – 49k
 - c) 50k – 74k
 - d) 75k – 99k
 - e) 100k – 149K
 - f) 150k+

5. Current Duty Station
6. Time with current employer?

Research Methods and Data Collection Procedures

A qualitative approach was used for this study because this method directly assesses the perspective of active duty Marine Corps spouses who were employed at the time of the interview. The use of open-ended questions allowed the participants to share as much or as little as they desired about their experiences. It also provided a larger understanding of how the participants view hiring best practices for military spouses. Analyzing the data collected from interviews allowed the researcher to find meaning and understanding by collecting recurring words, themes, and issues that arise during the hiring process. This allowed the researcher to understand what the participants perceive to be best hiring practices for military spouses. Making this study as a phenomenological design allowed the researcher to explore psychological concepts such as the way that the participants felt during interviews and the emotional impact of being the working spouse of an active duty Marine, as phenomenological research uses the analysis of impactful statements (Creswell, 2014).

The objective of this research was to identify hiring best practices as experienced by active duty Marine Corps spouses. The research allowed for participants to discuss their experiences in the hiring process as active duty spouses. This study will also contribute to the understanding of how employers may take initiative to close the unemployment gap faced by military spouses. The goal was to explore the characteristics that military spouses can bring to the workforce and what best practices they have experienced during the hiring process.

Bracketing Process

With the nature of a phenomenological study comes the need for the bracketing process. Bracketing is the method used during phenomenological studies to deliberately put the researcher's own beliefs about the topic, as well as their knowledge, aside (Carpenter, 2007). The researcher had the following assumptions, personal experiences, and knowledge regarding the topic:

- **Assumptions.** The researcher approached the study assuming that (a) active duty Marine Corps spouses face challenges to get hired, (b) active duty Marine Corps spouses would want to share their experiences regarding their hiring experiences, (c) the hiring process for military spouses needs to improve, (d) military spouses face different difficulties in the workforce than their civilian counterparts because of the service member's commitment to the military.
- **Personal experiences.** The researcher is an active duty Marine Corps spouse who (a) has had difficulty finding employment in different locations where her active duty spouse has been stationed, (b) has been underemployed because of lack of job availability in certain duty stations, and (c) has applied to hundreds of job postings during different permanent changes of station.
- **Interest.** The researcher is interested in improving employment for military spouses by (a) giving active duty Marine Corps spouses the opportunity to share their experiences, (b) highlighting the unique skills that military spouses can bring to the workforce, (c) informing employers that military spouses can be a great asset for them even if they are there for a short period of time.

The researcher was able to identify and set aside any assumptions that she had based on her experiences and interests. In addition, the researcher was mindful not to allow for personal experiences to influence the data and research finding.

Description of the Sample

For this research, 32 active duty Marine Corps spouses were interviewed, and all the participants were employed at the time of the interview. Unfortunately, the researcher was unable to find any male spouses to participate; therefore, all participants were female spouses, which was expected considering that 90.7% of military spouses are female, and in the Marine Corps that number goes up to 96.5% of spouses being female (Department of Defense [DoD], 2020). To recruit participants, requests on social media were cross-posted on different platforms. Facebook was used as the main platform to find participants, but the participation was also requested on LinkedIn, where the study was advertised. Convenience sampling was key to finding participants as the majority of those interested were found through Marine Corps spouse-specific Facebook groups. After the post was shared, interested participants shared their email address with the researcher. It is important to mention that all participants except participant P18 were recruited using convenience sampling. Participant P18 was found with snowball sampling, because the researcher's original post was shared by another participant. Subsequently, 85 spouses were emailed from those who said they were interested in participating in the study. After the prospective participants sent their email address to the researcher, the researcher sent an email with the participant informed consent, further instructions to participate in the study, and a schedule for the interviews. Of the 85 emails sent, 39 participants agreed to participate in the study, 35 dialed in at their

scheduled interview time (four participants were considered a no-show at the time of their interview). Unfortunately, three interviews did not record (P7, P33, and P35); therefore, their responses were removed from the study. At the end, 32 interviews were used for this study after removing the three unrecorded interviews. That made the final population for this study 32 participants.

Interviews took place via video conference using Zoom. The interviews were recorded and transcribed to text. At the time of coding, both the transcriptions and the videos were used to ensure accuracy of the responses.

Because of the by-product of the COVID-19 pandemic, Zoom meetings and videos have been normalized over the last 2 years. This was of great benefit to this study because participants felt comfortable using the videoconference option for the interviews and were able to engage with the researcher as much as an in-person interview would have allowed.

Of the 32 participants, 11 were enlisted spouses, and 21 were officer spouses. Although every attempt was made to solicit junior enlisted spouses under the rank of E-6 (E-1-E5) to participate in the study, none volunteered to participate. Junior enlisted Marines between the rank of E1 to E6 have a 31.9% marriage rate compared to Marines E7 and above among whom 74.2% are married (DoD, 2020). Although E6 is not considered junior enlisted, the DoD does not breakout their data individually; they have it in brackets in which E5 and E6 are combined. This could be an indication of why it was more difficult to recruit junior spouses because the married population of Marines is significantly smaller in those ranks.

Because the researcher is the spouse of an active duty Marine Corps officer, her connections to officer spouses were established in the Facebook groups where participants were being requested. This could potentially be the reason that more officer spouses participated in the study. However, the researcher advertised the study in other Facebook groups where the presence of enlisted spouses is heavier than officer spouses; this is how the participation of 12 enlisted spouses came about. In addition, word of mouth helped the researcher find other participants because the post requesting participants was shared six times; however, only one participant was recruited from those shares, Participant P18, which made this a snowball sampling effect for this particular participant. None of the participants interviewed for this study disclosed whether they had any prior military experience themselves, and that was not asked during interviews by the researcher.

Demographics of the Sample

Service Members' Rank

The service member's rank is the rank of the Marine the participant is married to. The majority of participants in this research were officers' spouses, yet a good representation of senior enlisted spouses also participated in the research. This allowed for a good mix of experiences by participants because the researcher was able to get experiences from both enlisted and officer spouses (see Figure 2).

Service Members' Duty Station

The location of the service member's duty station was recorded for reference and for potential trends in the research. Two participants stated they do not currently live

where their Marine is stationed because of employment issues; they have chosen to live apart in order for the military spouse to be employed (see Figure 3).

Figure 2

Service Members' Rank

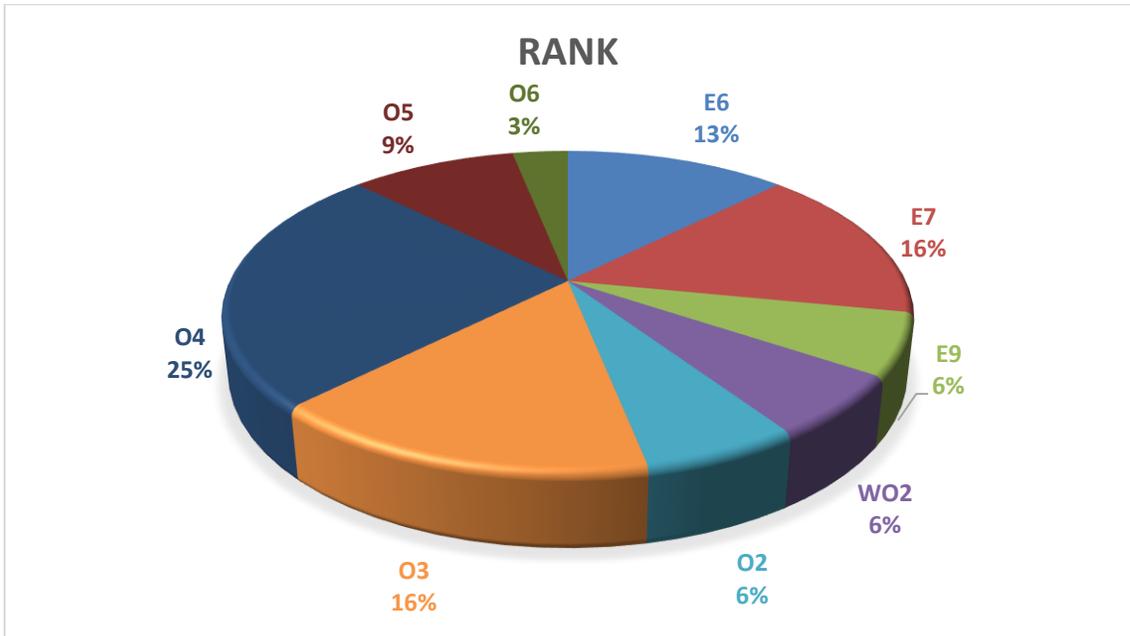
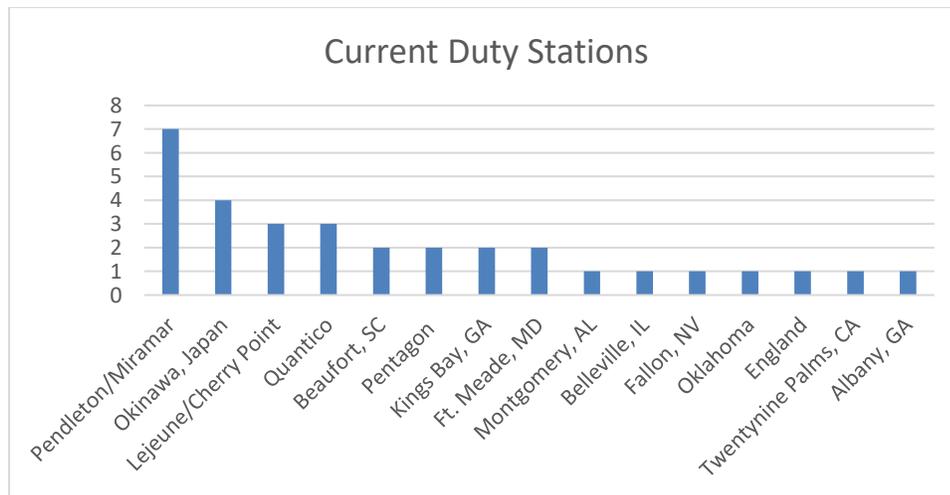


Figure 3

Location of Members' Duty Station

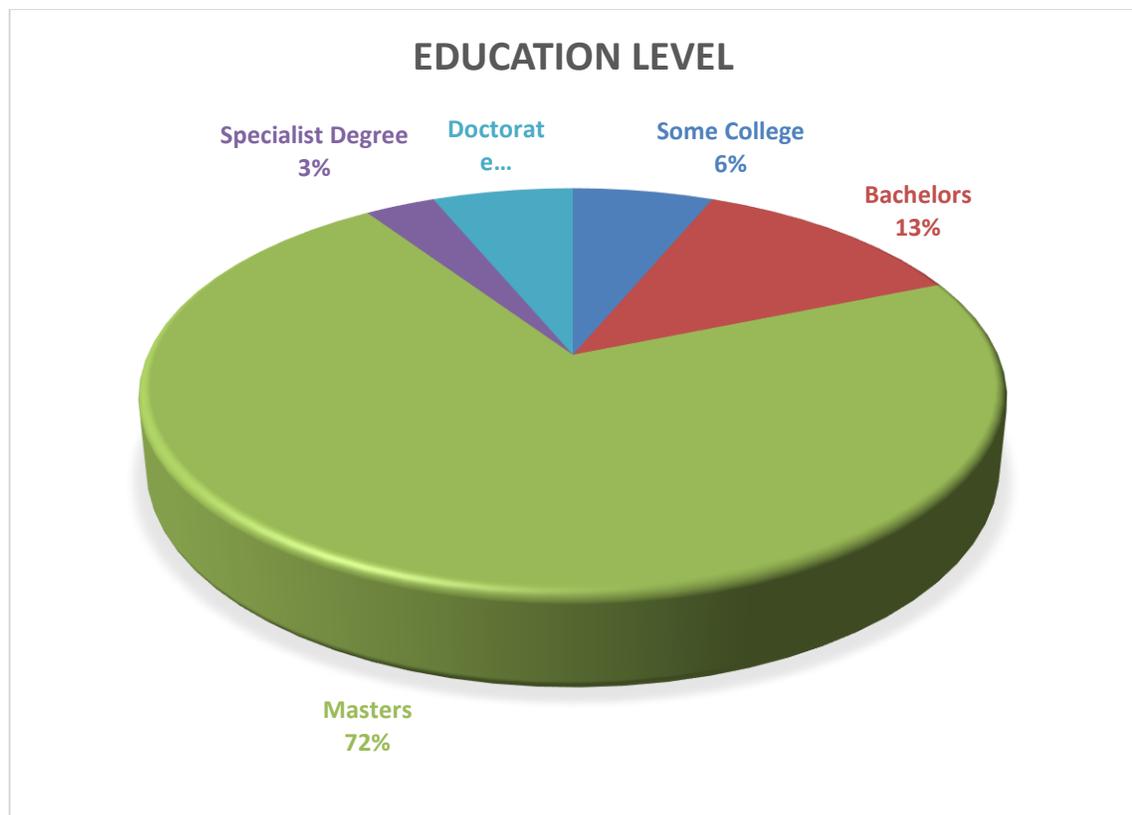


Education

Education levels are an important indicator when establishing whether a person is underemployed; it also establishes a baseline of qualifications that an employer might be looking for. Of the 32 spouses interviewed, 72% (23 participants) had a master's degree, and only 6%, (two participants) had "some college," the same number of participants who had doctoral degrees. This means a total of 81% of participants had a master's degree or above (see Figure 4).

Figure 4

Participants' Education Level



Participants' Years of Work Experience

Years of work experience could be related to the age group who participated in the study. The majority of spouses have more than 10 years of experience in the workforce with only 13% (four participants) with 4 years or less of work experience (see Figure 5). Age is usually related to rank in the military because certain requirements need to be met. For example, officers are unable to join the military until they have completed a college degree; therefore, they are typically expected to be older when they join. However, enlisted personnel need a high school diploma or a GDE to join, which means they are eligible to enlist in the military earlier in their lives.

Figure 5

Participants' Years of Work Experience

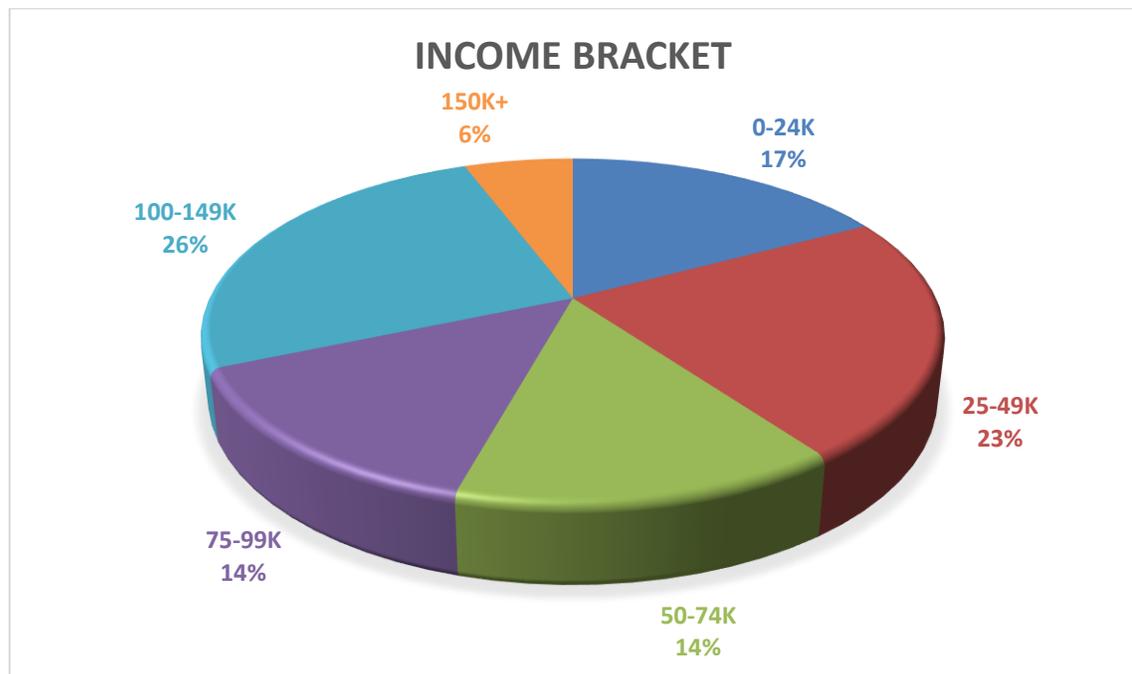


Annual Income

The annual income stated in the study represents the income specific to the military spouses, and it is not combined with the service member's income. The responses of this demographic question varied from \$0-\$25,000 annually to more than \$150,000 (see Figure 6). The most significant trend with this question is the unemployment rate of the participants interviewed. Even though 81% of respondents have a master's degree or higher, 41% of respondents make \$50,000 or less in annual income. Of those, 19% make less than \$24,000 annually, an amount that is grossly under minimum wage in some states such as California.

Figure 6

Participants' Income Bracket

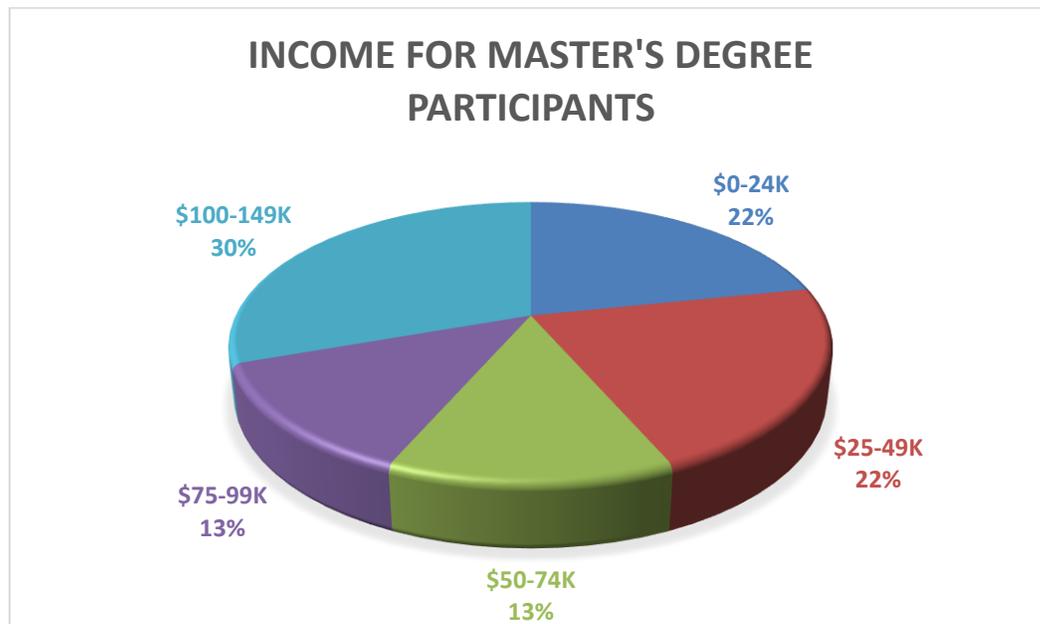


Note. Income not including service members' income.

Because of the high level of education that was reported by the participants, the researcher considered it important to break down the income bracket of those participants with a master's degree because they made up 81% of the population being studied. Of those participants with a master's degree, 54% make \$74,000 annually or less while the national average of those with a master's degree is \$77,844 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020b; see Figure 7). Although there is value to higher education, some duty stations make it hard for military spouses to develop careers instead of just holding jobs. More education does not always guarantee employment, in particular in locations in which the job market is not developed enough for upper level jobs. Being overeducated could mean that military spouses might face the predicament of being overqualified for employment at certain duty stations, which makes it harder for them to find jobs.

Figure 7

Income for Participants With a Master's Degree



Presentation and Analysis of Data

After potential participants shared their email address with the researcher, they were sent a letter requesting their participation in the research via email (Appendix A). The email also included an attachment with the participant informed consent (Appendix B), which participants emailed to the researcher as a signed copy indicating their desire to participate.

The study's main research focused on best practices for hiring in the perception of Marine Corps spouses. The interviews were held via Zoom while being recorded. The recordings were transcribed to text using NVivo Transcription. Coding and themes found on the study were done manually to increase accuracy. To have a significant impact of the responses, themes were created when 6% or more participants had the same response. When responses were less than 6%, they did not create a theme significant enough to bring value to the study; therefore, they were left out. Because of this and the fact that some respondents had more than one answer, the percentage of responses does not always equal 100%.

Interview Question 1

In your perception, what do employers do well to hire military spouses? This interview question addresses Research Question 1: What are the perceived best hiring practices experienced by active duty Marine Corps spouses?

Thirty-eight percent of participants responded to interview question one by saying that employers do not do anything well to hire military spouses (see Table 1). Another 34% of respondents stated that the federal government's Military Spouse Preference (MSP) program is one of the main best practices that employers do well to hire military

spouses. Respondents were acknowledging the federal government’s effort to hire military spouses with the MSP program. The MSP program applies to military spouses who are seeking jobs within the federal government, and it gives them a noncompetitive advantage against others applying to the position as long as they meet all the requirements for the position.

Table 1

Themes for Interview Question 1

Interview Question 1 themes	No. of participants	Percentage of participants	Participants
Nothing	12	38%	P1, P2, P10, P13, P15, P20, P24, P25, P28, P29, P30, P34
Military Spouse Preference Program/Offer military spouse preference	11	34%	P1, P2, P11, P13, P14, P18, P19, P21, P23, P27, P32
Target military spouses for employment	7	22%	P4, P18, P19, P21, P26, P31, P32
Offer flexible schedule	6	19%	P5, P11, P16, P18, P27, P31

Targeting military spouses and offering flexible schedules were also significant findings to Interview Question 1. Flexibility is a key requirement for military spouses because of the service member’s unpredictable schedule; therefore, having employers acknowledge that they are willing to hire military spouses knowing that they will need flexibility increases the appeal of job postings.

Interview Question 2

In your perception, what do employers need to do better to hire military spouses?

This interview question addresses Research Question 1: What are the perceived best hiring practices experienced by active duty Marine Corps spouses?

The lack of understanding of the military lifestyle and the military spouse's capabilities and value was the most reoccurring theme for Interview Question 2 (see Table 2). Moving to a new duty station every 2 to 3 years removes military families from extended family and friends who tend to be their support when working, raising children, and taking care of the home front. Add to this the complication of deployments while having a military spouses have a career creates high demands for the military spouse. Therefore, understanding the military lifestyle is imperative for employers; it allows for them to understand why military spouses need more flexibility as well to have them realize that even though there are gaps on their resume or clear underemployment experiences in their resumes, that this does not mean they are not capable of doing the work required, or that they should be underpaid for it.

Flexibility and telework options were also a predominant answer to this question. As stated, the service member's schedule takes priority above the military spouses. The flexibility that military spouses seek is not something that the service member can also request of the military as their time is dictated by the need of their respective service and in this case, the need of the Marine Corps. Advertising to military spouses is also important according to the research participants. This is perhaps because it is assumed that if employers advertise to military spouses, they know and understand the additional stressors that they face and are willing to hire them despite the challenges that they may

Table 2*Themes for Interview Question 2*

Interview Question 2 themes	No. of participants	Percentage of participants	Participants
Employers are challenged in being understanding of the military lifestyle and the spouses' capabilities and values	10	31%	P3, P4, P6, P8, P13, P19, P26, P28, P30, P32
Employers should be flexible with schedule and work arrangements/offer telework options or option transfer job to new duty station	9	28%	P10, P11, P12, P15, P16, P18, P20, P21, P27
Employers should advertise and reach out to military spouses	7	22%	P2, P14, P17, P18, P19, P25, P26
Don't focus on the time a military spouse will be there	6	19%	P6, P12, P14, P15, P24, P31
Streamline licensing and credentials for military spouses	5	16%	P1, P5, P22, P29, P30
Allow to identify as military spouse during application process/offer preference for military spouses	5	16%	P5, P18, P19, P23, P25
Turnover for civilian counterpart is comparable to military spouses	4	13%	P12, P24, P30, P31
Offer better benefits for military spouses	3	9%	P2, P26, P29

bring to the workforce. In addition, 16% of participants also stated that employers should allow for job applicants to identify themselves as military spouses when they apply for employment. This could feed into a military spouse preference category that would allow for military spouses to be prioritized when selecting a candidate for the position.

Military spouse turnover is a secondary effect of the military because of the service member moving, which is one of the hesitancies that employers have when hiring military spouses. An employer tends to want to hire long term to minimize turnover and cost associated with it. However, not focusing on how long a military spouse would be there was identified as a theme during the study. Thirteen percent of participants stated the civilian counterparts in the workforce also have high turnover rates that are not associated with the military. In fact, the average retention for employees is 4.2 years, and since 2010 the turnover rate has increased by 88% (Vuleta, 2021). These data are a national statistic that show that military spouses are not the only employees with high turnover rates.

Many military spouses are faced with the difficulty of having to reapply for licensing and certifications required by their professions in different duty stations. Having to apply for licensing and certifications with every move becomes expensive for the military spouse. The Marine Corps has a program in which licensing and certifications fees are reimbursable, but few participants interviewed have taken advantage of that program. Participants who need to apply for licensing and certification mostly stated that the process to get reimbursed is too complicated and not worth the effort.

Having a high rate of turnover affects the military spouse's benefits. Many companies have a vesting period for their retirement account, and the constant move of military spouses makes it difficult for them to get vested in their retirement account. There are other benefits offered to employees that are only accessible with length of employment. Education coverage is another viable example. Many employers offer to

cover education if the employee commits a certain number of years with them. This is something that military spouses cannot do; therefore, moving hinders access to benefits offered by employers.

Interview Question 2a

What industry do you work for?

Participants were asked a subsequent question regarding what industry they worked for (see Table 3). The predominant answer was working for the federal government or consulting. The tendency to work for the government could potentially be derived from the proximity to military bases on which Marine Corps spouses find themselves. In addition, the MSP programs give military spouses priority when they apply for a federal job, making it a predominant career for military spouses. Working for the federal government also promotes career growth, something that military spouses tend to have difficulty with when moving as often as they do.

Table 3

Themes for Interview Question 2a

Interview Question 2a themes	No. of participants	Percentage of participants	Participants
Federal government/consulting	9	28%	P2, P3, P11, P12, P14, P21, P23, P24, P26
Healthcare	8	25%	P4, P6, P8, P10, P17, P18, P22, P30
Education	6	19%	P1, P5, P13, P15, P19, P29
Legal	3	9%	P28, P31, P32
Architecture	2	6%	P20, P27
Nonprofit	1	3%	P25
Real estate	1	3%	P34
Arts	1	3%	P9
Technology	1	3%	P16

Interview Question 3

Is there an employer that you have worked with whose hiring process for military spouses stands out as a best practice in your opinion? This interview question addresses Research Question 1: What are the perceived best hiring practices experienced by active duty Marine Corps spouses? (see Tables 4 and 5).

When asked about experiences with hiring best practices, 56% of participants said that they have experienced an employer with hiring best practices. Because of the confidentiality of this study, specific employers mentioned by participants are not shared. However, 16% of respondents acknowledged that the federal government's MSP program is a best practice to hire military spouses. In addition, 13% said that being hired by military veterans and/or military spouses has opened doors for them when looking for employment because they understand the lifestyle of the military family. It is possible that the sensitivity of the employer on what additional hardships of military life bring can make them more likely to hire military spouses. Knowing the implications of the service member's lack of dependability and other challenges that surround military life gives them an advantage of expectations of what military spouses can bring to the workforce, and it makes them empathetic to their situation.

On a different perspective, 44% of participants said they had not experienced an employer who has a positive best practice when being hired as a military spouse. In addition, some participants shared that being a military spouse has hindered their hiring at different times. A participant in the education field gave specific examples of two times she was not selected for a position because of her association with the military. After one interview at a private school, she was told she would not be getting the job because they

were looking for a long-term employee. The same situation happened to that participant a few years down the road with a position in higher education. In the same way, other participants shared their experiences of not being hired because of their association with the Marine Corps, which is potentially why 44% of participants have not experienced any best practices when being hired.

Table 4

Themes for Interview Question 3

Interview Question 3 themes	No. of participants	Percentage of participants	Participants
Yes	18	56%	P2, P4, P5, P9, P10, P11, P13, P14, P16, P21, P22, P23, P24, P26, P28, P29, P31, P34
No	14	44%	P1, P3, P6, P8, P12, P15, P17, P18, P19, P20, P25, P27, P30, P32

Table 5

Additional Commentary for Interview Question 3

Interview Question 3 themes	No. of participants	Percentage of participants	Participants
Hired by veterans, military spouses, or employer who works with military members	8	25%	P9, P10, P11, P22, P23, P24, P26, P34
Military Spouse Preference Program	5	16%	P2, P11, P13, P14, P21

Interview Question 4

On average, how long does it take you to get hired after a Permanent Change of Station (PCS)? This interview question addresses Research Question 2: What are the

perceptions of active duty Marine Corps spouses regarding the contributions they make to the workforce?

Getting hired after a PCS is one of the most challenging parts of moving with the military. Depending on the field, participants experienced different timeframes to get hired, with the most common response being 3 to 6 months (see Table 6). However, 34% of spouses interviewed find employment in less than 2 months.

Table 6

Themes for Interview Question 4

Interview Question 4 themes	No. of participants	Percentage of participants	Participants
3-6 months	10	31%	P4, P6, P10, P11, P15, P17, P18, P24, P27, P32
1-2 months	5	16%	P5, P9, P12, P22, P31
Less than 1 month	4	13%	P1, P3, P13, P29
7-9 months	3	9%	P14, P16, P21
12-17 months	3	9%	P23, P30, P34
Before moving	2	6%	P19, P20
18+ months	2	6%	P2, P28
Not Applicable	2	6%	P8, P25
Hasn't moved	1	3%	P26

Finding employment also varies by location; the Marine Corps is known for having duty stations in which employment options for spouses are mediocre. Participants mentioned the lack of opportunity in locations such as Jacksonville, North Carolina, the home of Camp Lejeune. Figure 1 (in Chapter 1), “Labor Markets Near Military Installations,” shows that net jobs available in the area of Jacksonville, North Carolina in 2019 were -140. This mean that there were fewer jobs available than spouses searching for employment (Williams et al., 2020). Therefore, the location of the new duty station is

key to finding employment. Therefore, participants who were interviewed for this study who were living abroad had created additional hardships in finding employment because living overseas creates a new set of problems for the military spouse seeking employment. When getting stationed overseas, military spouses find that employment opportunities vary depending on the country the Marine is station. Some countries such as Japan do not allow for military spouses to work on the local economy unless they find a local employer to sponsor them for employment, a process that is very difficult. One participant mentioned long processing times to get hired overseas even after a job offer has been extended and even when that job is with the federal government.

Interview Question 5

How often have you been able to retain your job when executing Permanent Change of Station (PCS) orders? This interview question addresses Research Question 2: What are the perceptions of active duty Marine Corps spouses regarding the contributions they make to the workforce?

When it comes to job retention, a majority of participants, 63%, said they have never been able to retain a job when executing PCS orders. Of the 22% (seven participants) of participants who responded they have been able to keep their job one time when executing orders, two of those participants stated they were only able to keep their job that time because of the COVID-19 pandemic changing their employer's telework policy. One of those seven respondents said the job they were able to retain was a secondary job as a soccer coach with an organization owned by a Marine Corps spouse (see Table 7).

Table 7*Themes for Interview Question 5*

Interview Question 5 themes	No. of participants	Percentage of participants	Participants
Never	20	63%	P1, P2, P3, P4, P6, P9, P10, P11, P12, P13, P14, P16, P19, P21, P22, P27, P28, P30, P32, P34
1 time	7	22%	P15, P17, P18, P23, P24, P29, P31
3 times	2	6%	P5, P8
4 times	1	3%	P25
2 times	1	3%	P20
Hasn't moved	1	3%	P26

In addition, five participants were remote workers prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, and they have been able to move with their job (P5, P8, P20, P25, P29). One participant, P32, made the decision to leave San Diego, California and moved to Yuma, Arizona with her child to find employment as a probations officer. She now works full time while taking care of her infant without spousal support for childcare and other household responsibilities. They also now need to maintain two households for her to be employed.

Job retention is difficult when one is a military spouse, yet the option for flexibility would not be that far off if telework were an option for employers. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, companies that allowed telework were in the minority, yet if COVID has taught anything, it is that telework is a viable option for employers and that teleworking does not necessarily mean lack of productivity. Changing the perception of telework was a secondary effect of the pandemic to the point that the federal government started advertising positions that are fully remote. This was practically unheard of prior

to the sudden telework policy during the COVID-19 pandemic. In fact, the Office of Personnel Management is now encouraging agencies to continue to expand telework opportunities to federal employees.

Interview Question 6

In your perspective, what are the challenges of hiring an active duty Marine Corps spouse? This interview question addresses Research Question 2: What are the perceptions of active duty Marine Corps spouses regarding the contributions they make to the workforce?

Flexibility in schedule continues to be a top requirement for military spouses in the workforce. The unique situation of military spouses, when responsibilities and stressors are added to their lives in addition to careers, requires flexibility. Military spouses take leadership roles in the Marine's unit. Specifically speaking of the Marine Corps, each unit has a Family Readiness Group that is mostly led by the spouses of Marines in that unit. Unit events, pre- and postdeployment briefs, deployments, redeployments, and other unit specific events take effort and time of the military spouse. This social responsibility taken by the spouses helps with unit morale, and it also supports junior single and married Marines. Therefore, 53% of participants said the need for flexibility hinders the hiring of military spouses. The need for time off is a detriment for the working military spouse, and it is something that employers acknowledge and could be the reason they hesitate to hire military spouses (see Table 8).

Childcare and household responsibility are also a hinderance for military spouse employments. This is due to the service member's lack of dependability when it comes to household and childcare needs, and 38% of respondents being affected by this.

According to 34% of participants, moving hinders the hiring of military spouses. Employers don't always want to hire an employee knowing that they will be leaving within a short period of time. Turnover is an issue for military spouses, and they are seen as transient workers, yet this is something they cannot change because they are tied to the military.

Table 8

Themes for Interview Question 6

Interview Question 6 themes	No. of participants	Percentage of participants	Participants
Need flexibility because of schedule conflicts because of moving, deployments, or unit time off/employers do not want to hire and invest in military spouses because of retention and longevity	17	53%	P1, P4, P8, P11, P12, P13, P14, P15, P17, P18, P19, P20, P26, P27, P28, P29, P32
Childcare and household responsibilities are on the military spouse because of service member's lack of dependability because of military requirements	12	38%	P1, P3, P5, P6, P8, P10, P13, P14, P15, P28, P29, P32
Moving	11	34%	P4, P6, P15, P17, P18, P19, P22, P23, P26, P27, P31
Certifications and residency issues	4	13%	P9, P20, P30, P34
Resume gaps/hiring based on resume	4	13%	P4, P21, P24, P25
Geographic location not favorable for employment	3	9%	P8, P9, P34
Lack of support from extended family because of living far away	3	9%	P5, P10, P29
They don't become experts in their field or have seniority because of moving often	2	6%	P2, P17

Unlike civilian spouses, military spouses have most of the responsibility of the home and children. The volatile schedule of the service member does not allow for consistent participation in the household, making the military the priority. Service members can neither set their own hours nor have much flexibility in their work schedule. Deployments and temporary duty assignments make it a challenge for military spouses to be employed.

Interview Question 7

Please describe how your employer seeks to hire military spouses if they do so.

This interview question addresses Research Question 1: What are the perceived best hiring practices experienced by active duty Marine Corps spouses?

The majority of the employers whom participants work for do not seek to hire military spouses, as 56% of respondents said (see Table 9). The MSP program executed by the federal government continues to trend as a hiring best practice with the participants. Although the federal government does not go out of its way to hire military spouses, it does provide active duty spouses with military spouse priority preference, which streamlines the hiring of military spouses by giving them a noncompetitive advantage over other applicants. Considering that seven of the respondents work for the federal government, it is a good indication that the MSP program is making an impact by employing military spouses. Yet two participants mentioned that the program itself does come with challenges. Those participants stated that the MSP program faces challenges when the hiring managers become resentful because they are required to hire military spouses without interviewing them. Participant P11 stated that hiring managers aim to flex the rules for the MSP program to be the ones who select the final candidate.

Participant P23 also stated that the MSP is good in theory but not in practice. This is mostly due to the stigma that hiring managers place on military spouses.

Table 9

Themes for Interview Question 7

Interview Question 7 themes	No. of participants	Percentage of participants	Participants
They don't	18	56%	P1, P3, P4, P5, P6, P8, P9, P13, P15, P16, P17, P18, P20, P27, P28, P30, P31, P32
Military Spouse Preference Program	8	25%	P2, P11, P12, P19, P21, P22, P23, P24
Word of mouth	4	13%	P10, P14, P29, P31
Advertise targeting military spouses/hiring events	3	9%	P14, P25, P26

Interview Question 8

In your perception, what are some of the characteristics that military spouses bring to the workforce? This interview question addresses Research Question 2: What are the perceptions of active duty Marine Corps spouses regarding the contributions they make to the workforce?

Military spouses come from all backgrounds; however, they seem to have many of the same characteristics (see Table 10). Flexibility and adaptability were said by 66% of participants to be characteristics that military spouses bring to the workforce. Living the military lifestyle gives one no choice but to be flexible. When people are married to service members, much of their life depends on the military's needs, and they have little control over their life. Therefore, being flexible and adaptable is a key characteristic of military spouses that, when brought to the workforce, becomes an asset as one of their

capabilities. Being resilient and being a problem solver are also characteristics that the military lifestyle has imposed on military spouses.

Because the military is made up of different backgrounds, the same is true about military spouses; 28% of participants said that having diverse backgrounds is one of the characteristics that military spouses bring to the workforce. Just like service members, military spouses not only come from every state, but many are also foreign nationals. Considering that there are more family members (54.1%) than active duty members (45.9%; DoD, 2020) that make up active duty families, one can expect the background of military spouses to be diverse. This diversity gives them attributes that are essential for the workforce.

Table 10

Themes for Interview Question 8

Interview Question 8 themes	No. of participants	Percentage of participants	Participants
Flexibility/adaptability	21	66%	P1, P2, P5, P8, P10, P11, P14, P15, P16, P17, P19, P20, P21, P22, P23, P26, P27, P29, P30, P31, P34
Resiliency/problem solvers	12	38%	P1, P4, P6, P9, P11, P15, P19, P20, P21, P27, P30, P34
Diversity	9	28%	P2, P8, P10, P13, P14, P18, P28, P30, P32
Works well under stress	5	16%	P4, P17, P21, P23, P32
Hard working	4	13%	P5, P14, P18, P27
Able to incorporate best practices	3	9%	P8, P13, P15

Moving to different locations every 2 to 3 years has also made military spouses gain experiences that the local civilian employer might possibly lack. Being able to

implement best practices learned from their diverse backgrounds is an asset to any employer. This not only entails cultural diversity, but because of the nature of their lives, military spouses move so much that they change employment often. Best practices learned from other duty stations can be applied in their current position, giving them an advantage over other civilian employees. Diversity for military spouses is not limited to where they come from, their race, age, and education; these are just a few things that highlight their diversity, and they bring experiences that are unique to each one of them. Their uniqueness makes military spouses stand out as an asset to the workforce. On a 2017 survey by the DoD, data showed that 61% of military spouses were non-Hispanic White, 15% were Hispanic, and 11% were non-Hispanic Black (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2019). These demographics show the general representation of military spouses around the globe.

Interview Question 9

Please describe what you perceive to hinder the hiring of military spouses. This interview question addresses Research Question 1: What are the perceived best hiring practices experienced by active duty Marine Corps spouses?

Participants attributed moving as the biggest hinderance for hiring military spouses, with 59% of participants responding so (see Table 11). Moving often was attributed to stagnant growth in their careers by 13% of respondents, meaning that participants felt they did not have enough time to become experts in their position; therefore, being able to grow and get promoted before they are required to execute PCS orders is difficult. Having to move in 2 to 3 years, makes it a hinderance for promotion

as it sometimes takes that long to get promoted. Promotion and job availability are also affected by the geographic location in which the service member is stationed.

Table 11

Themes for Interview Question 9

Interview Question 9 themes	No. of participants	Percentage of participants	Participants
Moving	19	59%	P1, P4, P5, P6, P8, P11, P13, P14, P16, P17, P19, P20, P22, P26, P28, P29, P32, P34
Childcare and household responsibilities are on the military spouse because of service member's lack of dependability because of military requirements	5	16%	P3, P11, P22, P23, P26
Resume gaps/job changes	5	16%	P13, P16, P24, P25, P28
The stigma/perception of military spouses	4	13%	P9, P10, P29, P31
They don't become experts in their field or have seniority because of moving often	4	13%	P1, P18, P20, P34
Uncertainty of length of employment	3	9%	P4, P14, P27
Lack of flexibility/remote work	3	9%	P12, P14, P17
Geographic location not favorable for employment	3	9%	P2, P9, P17
Turnover for civilian counterpart is comparable to military spouses	3	9%	P4, P8, P11
Certifications/licensing in each state	2	6%	P2, P5

Once more, participants stated that childcare and household responsibilities are mostly the in the hands of the military spouse because of the service member's lack of

dependability enforced by their military requirements. The lack of flexibility of the service members makes the military spouse the primary caregiver as a military member is not usually able to leave work to take children to doctor's appointments and any other need they might have.

The stigma and perception associated with military spouses also hinder their hiring, particularly when the gaps and constant change of employment becomes obvious on their resumes. When this happens, employers are hesitant to hire military spouses not only because of their need for flexibility but also because they are expected to move in a relatively short time. Yet employers have not made the association that civilian employees without any connection to the military also leave their jobs in a relatively short time. Employers need to start understanding that regardless of whom they choose to hire, they cannot guarantee any employee will stay for a specific length of time.

Interview Question 10

Would you like to add any more comments? This interview question addresses Research Question 2: What are the perceptions of active duty Marine Corps spouses regarding the contributions they make to the workforce? (see Table 12).

Licensing and reimbursement were a common theme that participants wanted to discuss during this study. There are 34% of military spouses who require occupational licensing for their employment (Maucione, 2021), which is why occupational licensing is such a significant problem for military spouses. Each state has its own regulations when it comes to licensing and certifications, and military spouses are required to change their licensing and certifications every time they move to a different location. Although there have been efforts to streamline this process for military spouses, not all states prioritize

the issuance of military spouse licensing. In addition, the cost associated with licensing and certifications is a detriment for employment of military spouses. Although the Marine Corps has a program to reimburse for licensing fees, one participant, P27, stated she first paid for her licensing fee in October 2019, and she received reimbursement about 45 days later. However, she first paid for the fee in May 2019, but it took a lengthy amount of leg work to understand how the reimbursement worked and how to submit for it.

Table 12

Themes for Interview Question 10

Interview Question 10 themes	No. of participants	Percentage of participants	Participants
No	20	63%	P3, P5, P6, P8, P9, P10, P12, P13, P14, P16, P18, P19, P22, P23, P26, P28, P29, P30, P31, P32
Licensing reimbursement is a complicated process	3	9%	P4, P27, P34
Marine Corps could expand their employment assistance programs	2	6%	P24, P34

There were 6% of participants who mentioned that the Marine Corps could do a better job helping spouses find employment. Although the Marine Corps has the Family Member Assistance Program, respondents did not believe that they were doing enough to help find employment, particularly for those spouses who are not looking for entry-level positions.

Summary

Chapter 4 presented the results of 32 interviews with active duty Marine Corps spouses who were employed at the time of the interview. Data saturation was met early in the study because of the similarity of their responses during the interviews. Although the majority of participants were officers' spouses, it did not make a difference in the frustrations that participants shared with the researcher. All interviewees were open and direct about their experiences, giving validity to the issue of military spouse unemployment. Many of the participants have lived in the same locations at some point of their lives, but during these interviews, five participants were located overseas.

Each interview was transcribed and broken into themes, which were developed by understanding the meaning of the participant's experiences. The themes outlined the best practices for hiring in the perception of Marine Corps spouses. Chapter 5 provides the findings, conclusion, and recommendations.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The military spouse unemployment rate has traditionally been significantly higher than their civilian counterpart; usually is it sustained around 25% (Williams et al., 2020). The well-being of military families is related to military recruitment, performance, readiness, and retention (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2019). If military spouses are not satisfied with their lifestyle, then military spouse unemployment can be a key factor that discourages military families from staying in the service. Finding the right tools to minimize military spouse unemployment is key for retention of the service member. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore hiring best practices from the perspective of active duty Marine Corps spouses. This phenomenological study explored the perceptions and experiences that Marine Corps spouses have had at the time of being hired. Learning about their challenges gives employers a greater understanding of what hinders the hiring of military spouses.

Hiring military spouses has come with the image that it would cost an employer too much money to hire them and then have to find a replacement soon after. This is due to the investment that an employer must make to train a new hire who will move when the spouse is given orders. Many factors contribute to military spouse unemployment, including limited childcare, lack of family support, and work and life balance because of the service member's complicated schedule. However, some companies have considered the stressors of the military spouse and still seek to hire the military spouse. This phenomenological study researched the best practices in the hiring processes from the perspective of active duty Marine Corps spouses.

Two research questions were explored during the study:

1. What are the perceived best hiring practices experienced by active duty Marine Corps spouses?
2. What are the perceptions of active duty Marine Corps spouses regarding the contributions they make to the workforce?

Interviews were conducted with 35 active duty Marine Corps spouses located in and outside the Continental United States. Participants were found via social media utilizing active Marine spouse-related social media groups. An email was sent to those interested in participating with a final participant count of 35. All of the participants were female, and 12 out of the 35 were enlisted spouses, leaving 27 participants to be officer spouses.

Major Findings

The results indicated themes that are valuable for military spouse unemployment, and the researcher was able to clearly perceive the frustrations that all Marine Corps spouses interviewed have had regarding employment challenges. Major themes in this study were brought to light after interviewing 35 active duty Marine Corps spouses during a 30-min interview via Zoom. After asking 10 interview questions to all participants, the research showed major themes that are further explored in this section.

Theme 1

Spouses did not have positive experiences when being hired.

When asked what employers do well to hire military spouses, 38% of participants said employers do not do anything well to hire military spouses. Many of the respondents said they have not had positive experiences when the employer knew they

are military spouses at the time of being hired. Having resume gaps and jobs in multiple locations tend to be indications that the applicant is a military spouse, which in some cases becomes a red flag for the employer. Employers continue to have a stigma that hiring military spouses will be a disservice to them because of the military spouse moving, but what employers seem to forget is that military spouses have a vast variety of experience. They come from diverse backgrounds, and changing jobs often can be a benefit to the employer; this is due to the military spouse being able to apply best practices they have learned from different positions. In addition, some of the characteristics that participants attributed to military spouses would be of great benefit to almost any employer. Participants described military spouses as flexible, dependable, hardworking, and other characteristics that would normally be sought after when employers are seeking to hire. Being able to understand that losing military spouses to a PCS is not indicative of the work ethic of a military spouse is key to break the barrier of military spouse stigma.

This theme supports Research Question 1, What are the perceived best hiring practices experienced by active duty Marine Corps spouses? This shows that in general, participants do not believe that best practices are being applied to the hiring of military spouses. This is particularly interesting because it is hard to hide on a resume that the applicant is a military spouse. This is important because military spouses are affected in the workforce because of their spouse's commitment to the military.

Theme 2

Military Spouse Preference Program is an example of what employers do well.

A total of 34% of participants stated that the federal government's Military Spouse Preference (MSP) program or similar programs bring benefit to the military spouse when applying for employment. Of the respondents, two did not work for the federal government but have seen companies offer military spouse preference. For those who do apply for positions with the federal government, the MSP allows military spouses to apply as a noncompetitive applicant, and they are given priority in federal jobs. However, to get the noncompetitive advantage, the spouse must be qualified for the position. Many of the spouses interviewed were federal employees who used the MSP to get hired; in fact, seven respondents worked for the federal government at the time of the interviews. This program has undergone multiple changes since its conception and the latest went into effect during the COVID-19 pandemic. Since October 2021, military spouses no longer need to be stationed with their service member to qualify for MSP. This allows for MSP to be an option for telework opportunities and for time in which the military family chooses to become geographically separated.

Theme 2 supports Research Question 1. Participants believed that the federal government is making progress in hiring best practices for military spouses. This response is important to note because even though much still needs to be done to alleviate military spouse unemployment, it seems the federal government has a good start to help military spouses as the noncompetitive advantage helps them get hired regardless of their association with the military.

Theme 3

Employers are challenged in being understanding of the military lifestyle and the spouses' capabilities and values.

Military families have different challenges than their civilian counterparts; relocation, deployment, lack of extended family at the duty station, and the challenges of creating meaningful bonds in each duty station are some of the problems faced by military families. The study showed 31% of participants stated that employers are challenged in being understanding about the military lifestyle. To be biased against anyone, people have to know what they are biased about; therefore, employers need to have some concept or knowledge regarding the lifestyle of military spouses. Hazlitt (2008) stated,

The art of economics consists in looking not merely at the immediate but at the longer effects of any act or policy; it consists in tracing the consequences of that policy not merely for one group but for all groups. (p. 5)

This further solidifies the hinderance that constant moving puts on the employment of the military spouse.

The need for flexibility because of the service member's schedule is an undeniable stressor that affects military spouses, particularly for those with a career. Thorough the interviews, 50% of participants (P1, P3, P5, P6, P8, P10, P11, P13, P14, P15, P22, P23, P26, P28, P29, and P32) said that responsibilities for childcare and the household tend to be on the military spouse because of the service member's lack of dependable schedule because of military requirements. Although these respondents were part of a dual-working couple, they are the primary parent responsible for doctor's appointments, school requirements, and any other need that is related to children and the home. In addition, military spouses also become responsible for taking care of household

needs, such as having to take time off when a repair needs to be done to the home, setting up utilities with every move, and looking for homes during a PCS.

This theme leads back to Research Question 2, What are the perceptions of active duty Marine Corps spouses regarding the contributions they make to the workforce?

Military spouses have much to offer; other than having a higher education rate than their civilian counterparts, military spouses come from diverse backgrounds. The unique capabilities and values brought to the workforce by military spouses should not be overshadowed by the length of time they will be at a location prior to having to relocate.

As one participant stated,

I could be here 2 years. I could be here 5 years, or I could decide I don't like you after 2 weeks and leave. So that's the risk you take. And you take that with any employee. (P12)

The contributions that military spouses bring to the workforce are significant regardless of the length of their employment.

Theme 4

What are the best practices for hiring military spouses?

When responding to their experiences of best practices when being hired, 56% of participants responded to have experienced a best practice while being hired. Of the 56% who stated they have experienced best practices, 16% said the best practice they experienced was with the MSP program. That leaves 40% of respondents saying they have experienced best practices with civilian employers. This theme reiterates the satisfaction of military spouses with the MSP program because they describe it as a best practice for hiring military spouses. In addition, 25% of respondents indicated that their

employer hired them because the employer was a military veteran, military spouse, or an employer who works with military members. This could potentially be related to the understanding that those employers have of the military lifestyle and the difficulty for military spouses to find employment.

These responses link back to Research Question 1 by corroborating the perceived best hiring practices experienced by active duty Marine Corps spouses. Some respondents stated that they believe civilian employees should allow for military spouses to identify as such during the initial hiring process. Identifying as a military spouse for civilian jobs could potentially lead to a similar program for civilians in which military spouse preference is giving to those who qualify. If the two House bills identified in Chapter 2 come into effect, incentivizing the hiring of military spouses could be more effective if they are allowed to self-identify at the time of applying.

Theme 5

On average, military spouses experience longer hiring times.

On average, it takes 3 to 6 months to get hired according to 31% of participants. If a military spouse is in one duty station for 3 years and it takes 6 months to be hired, that means that they spend almost 17% of the time unemployed. That is of course if they can find work in less than 6 months. Other participants, 25% of them, reported that it takes them more than 6 months to find employment after a PCS. Research Question 1 addresses the perceived best hiring practices experienced by active duty Marine Corps spouses, yet if spouses continue to have trouble finding employment, best practices for hiring become hard to find. However, 66% of spouses interviewed find employment in less than 6 months.

Theme 6

What is the impact of job retention for military spouses?

In the age of COVID and mass teleworking during the last 2 years, society has entered a new era of employment, one where some companies have decided to fully close their physical locations and allow their employees to telework permanently. In fact, during these interviews, two participants stated they were able to retain their job for the first time ever because of the new COVID policies from their employer (P15 and P17). Yet 60% of respondents have never been able to retain their job when executing PCS orders. This is a significant impact and an area where employers could start making a difference for military spouses. Although the telework policies have changed because of the COVID-19 pandemic, each employer has different expectations and telework policies. During the pandemic, the DoD implemented a Maximum Telework Policy, yet the rule differentiates per each command, and it was based on its needs, such as needing access to classified networks and spaces. For the most part, the DoD required that its employees not leave their local area for more than 2 weeks. This requirement can be traced to the locality pay that both military and civilian employers receive. For example, new positions being advertised for the federal government that are fully remote positions are still subject to a locality pay depending on where the employee will be working from.

Research Question 1 sought to reveal best hiring practices experienced by active duty Marine Corps spouses. Although allowing remote work was not established as a best practice in this study, it could potentially make a future difference in military spouse unemployment rates. If military spouses are able to bring all of their strengths to the workforce and they are able to keep long-term employment even when executing PCS

orders, the possibilities are endless for the reduction of the unemployment rate for military spouses.

Theme 7

Challenges affect the hiring of military spouses.

Flexibility and schedule conflicts because of demand of the military life is the most predominant response that participants gave when asked about the challenges of hiring military spouses, with 53% of respondents saying so. Although this is a challenge when hiring active duty spouses, the benefits and positive effects they bring to their employer outweigh the need for schedule flexibility. The responses to Research Question 2, What are the perceptions of active duty Marine Corps spouses regarding the contributions they make to the workforce? reiterates that allowing for flexibility will allow the military spouse to make significant contributions to the workforce.

Moving was also identified as a challenge to hiring military spouses by 34% of respondents. Moving creates resume gaps and job switching that are apparent in the resume of a military spouse. Adding to the complication of moving, 38% of respondents stated that childcare and household responsibilities are mostly on the military spouses, which further complicates their search for employment.

Theme 8

Employers seek to hire military spouses.

When asked how their current employer seeks to hire military spouses, 60% of respondents said their employer does not actively seek to hire military spouses. This goes back to Research Question 1 and the perceived best hiring practices experienced by active duty Marine Corps spouses. It is hard to say that employers have a best practice to

hire military spouses when they do not actively seek to hire them. However, the MSP program continues to be a significant factor in the hiring of military spouses; 23% of the respondents said the MSP seeks to hire military spouses because applicants are able to apply using preference as a military spouse. The experiences of spouses using MSP have been favorable for active duty Marine Corps spouses.

Theme 9

What are the characteristics that military spouses bring to the workforce?

Research Question 2 asked, What are the perceptions of active duty Marine Corps spouses regarding the contributions they make to the workforce? The characteristics described by participants in this study established that military spouses bring positive features to the workforce, and 69% of the respondents stated that flexibility and adaptability are characteristics that a military spouse brings to the workforce. Resiliency and problem solving was the second most common response given by 37% or participants. Military spouses were perceived as being resilient, flexible, and adaptable. These characteristics could be positive traits in the workforce and might potentially increase productivity and efficiency of the employee.

Theme 10

What hinders the hiring of military spouses?

A total of 57% of participants stated that moving hinders the hiring of military spouses. Because the typical length of orders for service members is 2 to 3 years in each location, moving makes it difficult for the military spouses to stay employed and to progress in their career. In addition, 17% or respondents stated that childcare and household responsibilities also hinder the military spouse's employment. The lack of

dependency that military spouses can have of the service member impacts their level of responsibility in the home. Service members neither have work flexibility nor get to make their own hours. Therefore, the military spouse has the weight of the family whether she is employed or not. This leads back to Research Question 1, What are the perceived best hiring practices experienced by active duty Marine Corps spouses? If military spouses have a predisposition to the life, they live to be supporting their service member; some of the hiring best practices should be to acknowledge that military spouses have different personal requirements than civilians. The military has to take precedence for the service member, and for them flexibility is not an option; therefore, military spouses need to pick up all of the responsibilities not being taken care of by the service member.

Unexpected Findings

Most of the responses given by participants were expected and backed up in Chapter 2 with the Literature Review. However, there was one unexpected finding that did not resonate with the researcher prior to the study being conducted.

Civilian Employees Transfer as Much as Military Spouses

Military spouses face the stigma that they will have to move when being hired, yet no one talks about the time civilian employees stay in their positions. Millennials and Generation Z employees move jobs far more often than the Baby Boomers ever did. According to the IBM Institute for Business Value, “Of the one in five workers who switched jobs last year, 33% identified as Gen Z and 25% as millennial” (Subin, 2021, para. 2). If civilian employees are leaving jobs as often as they are, why is it that hiring military spouses for a potential short period of time hinders their employment? The

answer might be simple, but it is possible that any other employee could potentially stay long term, but military spouses have an expiration date at the duty station. Alwine (2020) stated,

The Bureau of Labor Statistics reported last year that Americans held an average of 7.8 jobs by the time they turned 30. If military spouses move and change jobs every three years—and the average age of a military spouse is 31.5, according to the 2015 Department of Defense Demographics — then they would change jobs less than the average American. (para. 8)

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, employee tenure is 4.3 years for men and for women it is 4.0 years (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020a).

Education Level of Participants

Another unexpected finding was related to the education level of participants who were interviewed. A total of 80% of respondents had a master's degree or above. Although it was known that the education level of military spouses is higher than their civilian counterparts, the researcher did not expect to have such a high number of participants with master's degrees or above. Sometimes, with the lack of job opportunity, military spouses seek higher education in the hopes that this will help them be more marketable for employment. Although this is not backed up by this study, it would be interesting and significant to understand why military spouses seek higher degrees. Some of the job markets in places such as Jacksonville, North Carolina need employees with entry-level experience, such as for the restaurant business. It is possible that in duty stations in which spouses can't find jobs, they might use that as an opportunity to seek additional degrees using existing programs such as MyCAA or transferring the GI Bill.

Conclusions

Military spouses face difficulties in the labor market that civilians will never face, such as deployments, temporary duty assignments, and moving every 2 to 3 years. According to a report by the White House, on average, military spouses earn 26.8% less than their civilian counterparts, which entails more the \$10,000 annually in loss of income (Bogen, 2019). From Research Question 1, it was discussed that participants do not think employers do anything well to hire military spouses with the exception of being hired by veterans, military spouses, or employers who support the military. In addition, the federal government's MSP program was used as a best practice by 16% of respondents. Employers seem to hesitate when hiring military spouses, and this could be because the employer is challenged in being understanding of the military lifestyle. Having 56% of participants respond that their current employer does not actively seek to hire military spouses could be the reason that there is a lack of best practices by employers when hiring them. Of the participants, 22% worked for the federal government, which in turn was perceived as a best practice for hiring military spouses.

Responses to Research Question 2 show that the perceptions of active duty Marine Corps spouses are incredibly favorable to the workforce. Even though military spouses must face so many challenges in the workforce, they continue to be resilient and push through. Their flexibility, adaptability, resiliency, and problem-solving skills are of incredible benefit to any employer they might consider.

The chaos theory of careers (CTC) helps to support the phenomenon of the careers of military spouses. Military spouses have to reinvent themselves with every move, and they need to be adaptable to whatever opportunities they can find in the new

duty station. The CTC sees employment as a path instead of a ladder. Military spouses have to navigate the employment path more than having the opportunity to go up a ladder; these impacts are caused by their constant moves and lifestyle. Yet military spouses continue to acquire skills in each job that could make them more marketable during their next search for employment, potentially giving them an advantage over other applicants who have not switched fields. Switching jobs allows them to learn new skills and apply best practices, and they can become more sought after in the job market because of their diverse background, which in turn supports the CTC.

Military readiness is affected by the impact that military spouse unemployment has on the economic well-being of the military family. Military families continue to rate financial stress as one of the largest issues that affects their time in the service, making it an issue of high importance for retention. To increase force readiness, the military family needs to be solid and efficient to lessen the stressors of the service member and to increase retention rates. Readiness and the military family come together; they strengthen each other to make a more successful military family as well as a more successful force. Although many programs exist to close the unemployment gap, their impact on military spouse unemployment rate has not been significant. The DoD and other federal programs that seek to reduce the unemployment rate for military families need to be held accountable for their efforts and the taxpayer dollars spent on them.

Implications for Action

Many programs are meant to close the gap of military spouse unemployment, but there is no evidence that any of these programs are making a difference. This study has shown that 44% have not experienced any hiring best practices when it comes to hiring

active duty Marine Corps spouses. Of the 56% of participants who responded that they have experienced a best practice when being hired, 16% indicated the best practice experienced was the MSP program by the federal government. However, participants also shared their concerns with this program, which mostly leads to the stigma and perception that hiring managers have of the military spouse applying with preference. The question arises, if there are so many programs out there to help hire military spouses, why is this not trickling down to the individuals applying? Employers need to understand that the lifestyle of military spouses does not mean they will be unreliable in the workforce; moreover, having a good employee for a short period of time is more valuable than a bad employee for long term. It is said that employee turnover costs employers money, yet the cost of unproductive employees is much greater.

The collective action of military spouses to close the unemployment gap is critical to make a change. The millions of dollars spent on multiple programs that are intended to address unemployment for military spouses are not making a significant impact; therefore, military spouses must gather their collective knowledge, expertise, and sheer will to make an impact. Programs and associations such as the National Military Spouse Network (NMSN) work with military spouses worldwide to empower them in their career. They provide mentoring, networking, and professional development classes to military spouses. It is a from-military-spouse-to-military-spouse approach that helps military spouses find personal and professional growth. Military spouses have network and resources to make an impact, but this must be a collective effort to hold the Department of Defense (DoD) accountable for the quality of life issues faced by many military families. Regardless of the impact that unemployment has on military families,

military spouses have a preconception of what the military lifestyle is before they marry their service member or before the service member joins the service. Therefore, military spouses know that they have the ethical duty to embrace the lifestyle although it might bring many hardships.

Recommendations for Further Research

To a military family, their lifestyle becomes second nature; every 2 to 3 years they get ready to move, leaving friends, schools, and a community behind each time. What has become second nature to them is a foreign concept to civilians. Civilian employees have a hard time understanding the lifestyle that military families live; therefore, they have a preconception of the kind of employee a military spouse will be. Additional research concerning preconceptions of military spouses would be of great benefit to be able to break the barriers faced by military spouses when applying for employment. Understanding what civilian employers see when receiving a military spouse resume can guide employers into changing the way military spouses apply for employment.

The MSP program was brought up multiple times by participants of this study. However, when the researcher attempted to find data regarding how many military spouses have been hired through this program, there were no data available to support their impact. The researcher suggests that more studies be done on the benefits of MSP and on actual quantitative data of what the program has done for military spouses. It is important to know how many spouses are being hired through the MSP and what the perceptions of the hiring managers of those employees are. The study should include

perceptions of hiring managers who are required to hire a military spouse because of MSP regulations.

The COVID-19 pandemic changed many things, but the greatest effect for military spouses is the mass telework experienced during the pandemic. Further research to explore the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and how or whether moving to a telework era can help reduce military spouse unemployment. The pandemic has taught that being in the office is not necessary to have high productivity; therefore, expanding telework options can be a game changer for military spouses.

This study focused on Marine Corps spouses, therefore not exploring experiences of other branches of the military. Additional research regarding perspective of military spouses would be beneficial, particularly because each branch has its own challenges. For the Marine Corps, the biggest challenge is the recurrence of deployments as well as their having shorter orders in each duty station. Job seeking probably looks different for every branch of the military because much of it is based on the locations of the duty stations. Research comparing spouses from different branches would help understand their individual challenges.

Concluding Remarks and Reflections

The Marine Corps spouses interviewed for this research had much passion for this subject. Every single one had a story to tell and wanted their voice and frustrations to be heard. Perhaps one of the most satisfying questions to ask participants was “In your perception, what are some of the characteristics that military spouses bring to the workforce”? When asked this, many participants visibly expressed their admiration for military spouses. All participants said positive remarks about their fellow military

spouses and the unique skill they perceived identified them. It is obvious that the military spouse community cheers and supports each other. The women interviewed are resilient, independent, and do not give up even when everything else is telling them to. The collective effort of military spouses is imperative to the employment issues they face. No one, except for military spouses themselves, has a clear understanding of what the lifestyle and the challenges that being a military family bring to their career. Yet as described by participants of this study, military spouses are determined, and they are problem solvers, which is why they as a group are the most likely individuals that can successfully advocate for change.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Letter to Participants

I appreciate your interest in participating in my research! My name is Ana Kukowski, and I'm a Doctoral Candidate at California Baptist University. I am conducting research for the completion of my Doctoral degree in Public Administration. The title of my research is *Military Spouse Unemployment: Perspective of Marine Corps Spouses on Hiring Best Practices*.

Attached you will find the Participant Informed Consent, which will further explain the upcoming steps to the research. If you choose to participate, please sign the attached consent (it may be signed electronically) and return it to me at your earliest convenience. To schedule your interview, please select one of the time slots below, which are filled as first come first served (please note Pacific Standard Time). If those times are not convenient for you, I would be happy to accommodate to your schedule; just let me know when it would be a good time. The interview should not take longer than 30 minutes. I will send you a Zoom link for the interview a minimum of 24 hours prior to our scheduled time.

Again, thank you so much for your time.

Warmly,

Ana

Ana B. Kukowski, MPA, PMP
Doctoral Candidate
California Baptist University
xxxxx@xxxxx.xxx

APPENDIX B

Participant Informed Consent

California Baptist University

Study Title: Military Spouse Unemployment: Perspective of Marine Corps Spouses on Hiring Best Practices

Researcher: Ana B. Kukowski

Dear Potential Participant,

You are being invited to participate in a research study conducted by Ana Kukowski, Doctoral Candidate at California Baptist University Online and Professional Studies, Doctorate of Public Administration program. This study is to identify perspectives and experiences of hiring best practices that active duty Marine Corps spouses have experienced.

Below are the steps that will follow if you choose to participate in this study

- A video conference interview is required to participate in the study. The intention of the interview is to collect hiring best practices as experienced by active duty Marine Corps spouses.
 - A Zoom link will be emailed to you a minimum of 24 hours before your scheduled interview time.
 - The interview will take a maximum of 30 minutes.
- Participation is voluntary.
 - It is your decision to participate in this study.
 - If you chose to participate, it would be on an entirely voluntary basis. If at any time you no longer desire to participate, you may stop doing so.
 - You may skip any questions you do not feel comfortable answering.
 - You may choose to stop participating in the study at any given time. If you choose to no longer participate in the study, any data previously collected will be destroyed.
- Your privacy and confidentiality will be protected using rigorous methods.
- Any response you give will not be connected to you or your employer

- In the final research, any response provided by you will be in alphanumerical coding form to hide your identity.
- For accuracy, all video conferences will be recorded.
 - Recordings will be downloaded and saved using the alphanumerical coding system and a password protected file
- Only the Researcher will be able to cross-reference the alphanumerical coding with the Participant's identity. Furthermore, this information will not be made public.
- All electronic and paper files will be destroyed five years after the research has been published. The interviews will be destroyed by deleting the files, while any notes will be shredded.

There are no potential risks linked to this study; however, if risk or uneasiness is to be experienced by the research participant, you may contact the CBU Counseling Center at (951) 689-1120 or <https://www.calbaptist.edu/counseling-center/>

Although the Researcher cannot guarantee any benefits for participating, this research can potentially contribute to close the gap on military spouse unemployment since military spouses have a higher unemployment rate than their civilian counterparts.

The researcher is Ana B. Kukowski and the Chair supervising this research is Dr. Elaine Ahumada. Either person can be contacted with any questions, concerns, grievances, or any other issues. The Researcher may be contacted by email at xxxxx@xxxxx.xxx and the Chair, Dr. Ahumada, can be contacted via email at xxxxx@xxxxx.xxx . In addition, the Institutional Review Board can be contacted via email at irb@calbaptist.edu for any additional questions.

Steps following your agreeance to participate in this study:

- A Statement of Consent needs to be signed by the Participant. This will confirm that the Researcher has explained the study, its purpose, and envisioned outcome.
- The Participant understands that questions regarding military spouse hiring best practices will be asked during the interview.
- The Participant agrees to participate in a video conference interview and that all interviews **WILL BE RECORDED** and used for research purposes only.

