

Part 2: Focus on Research

RESEARCH STUDIES

Military and Veteran Families' Well-Being: Focus on Spouse Employment

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The well-being of military personnel, veterans, and their families is strongly affected by the employment outcomes for civilian spouses of military personnel and veterans. Virginia is home to large proportions of military personnel, veterans, and their spouses. Indeed, many civilian spouses of military personnel and veterans are themselves veterans. Whether or not spouses of military personnel have served in the military, research shows that they are disadvantaged with higher unemployment rates and lower earnings than their counterparts married to civilians and lower returns to education (even when they work full-time and year round). This paper presents data compiled from the American Community Surveys and other sources for comparisons between civilian and military wives to address the following topics:

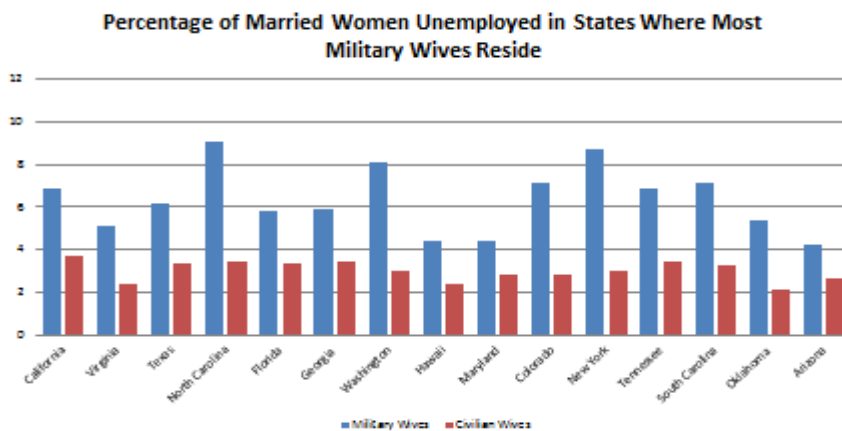
- Why Virginians should be concerned with military and veteran spouse employment
- Percent of military spouses who reside in each state, including Virginia
- Labor force participation of married women in the U.S.
- Military and civilian wives' unemployment rates (U.S. and by state, including Virginia)
- Military and civilian wives' earnings
- Effects of high military presence in local labor market on women's earnings
- Employment of civilian husbands of military women
- Negative effects of moving on military spouse employment
- Military spouse employment programs – existing and proposed

- Other recommendations

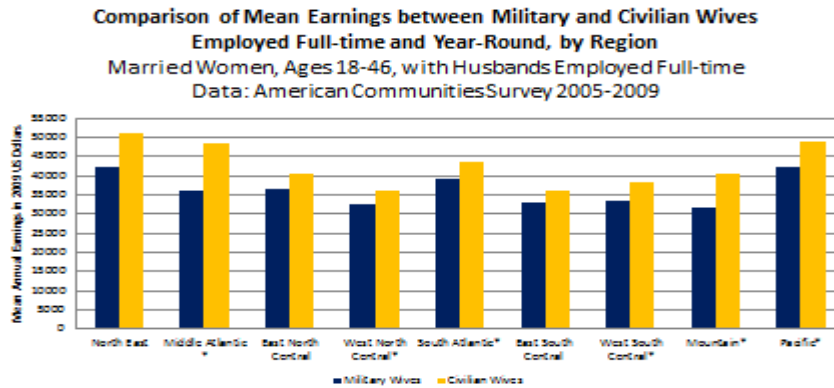
Research comparing civilian wives of military men to civilian wives of civilian men (employed full time and year round) consistently shows that the military wives are less likely to be in the labor market, more likely to be unemployed, and more likely to be employed part-time. Moreover, even for those wives employed full time and year round, military wives earn lower wages than civilian wives. Even when controlling for variables that affect earnings (such as education and years of job experience), military wives are disadvantaged. These findings apply to the U.S. as whole and individual states, including Virginia.

Many military wives live in Virginia. Virginia is home to more than 10% of all military wives in the U.S. Only California has more military wives than Virginia. We need to put this into the perspective of the relative size of the states' populations: California, with more than 38 million residents, ranks first in population, compared to Virginia's 8 million residents and 12th ranking. Thus, military wives constitute a much larger percent of Virginia's population than they do of California's.

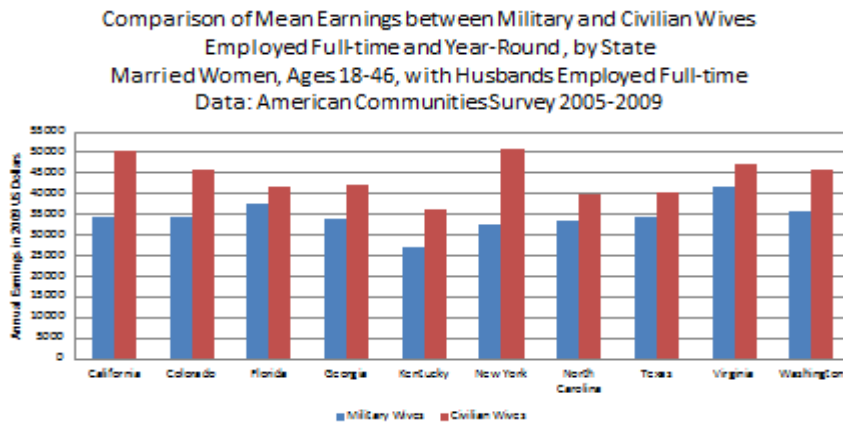
In Virginia, whereas 2.4% of women married to civilian men are unemployed (not employed and looking for work), 5.12% of women married to active duty military men are unemployed. (See chart below.)



Military wives are at a disadvantage in earnings in every region of the country. The Middle Atlantic region provides relatively high earnings for civilians' wives (3rd highest among 9 regions). However, military wives earn significantly less than the civilian wives in the region. (See chart by region below).

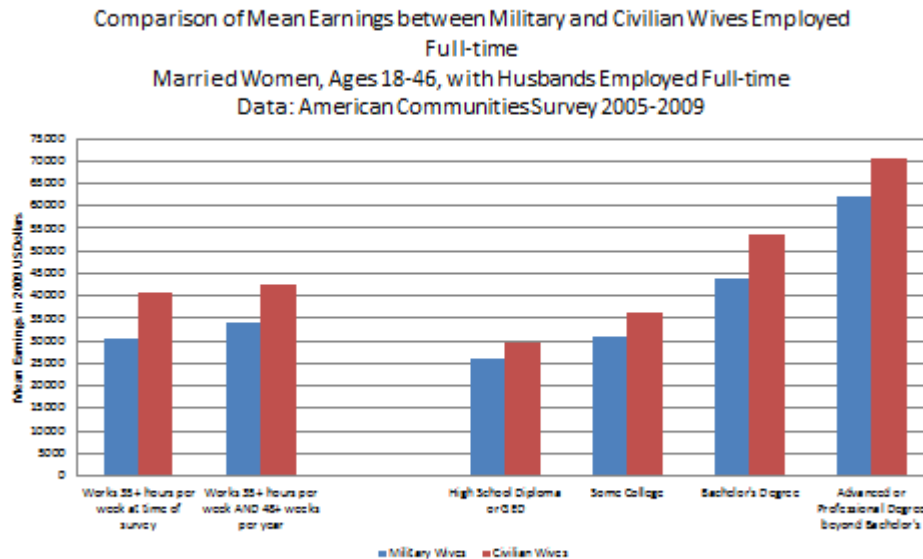


This disadvantage holds in each of the states with the highest percentages of military wives, including Virginia. (See chart by state below.)



The higher a married woman’s education, the higher her earnings are likely to be.

The disadvantage for military wives persists within each educational level. Supporting educational attainment is an effective way to increase military and veteran families’ well-being. (See chart below.)



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The overall wage gap between civilian and military wives is 42%. This gap represents both substantially lower labor force participation by military wives, and lower earnings for employment. Among households that moved during the year prior to survey, the wage gap is over 47%. Among employed wives, civilian wives earn 27% more than military wives. The overall earnings gap between civilian and military wives employed full-time is 25%.

A high military presence in local areas depresses all women’s employment and earnings. The greater the percentage of people in a local labor market who are active duty military, the lower the earnings of women in the area (Booth 2003). This result holds even controlling for other characteristics of women, including age, education, race, years of job experience, and numbers and ages of children. Women married to military men earn less than women married to full-time employed civilian men.

Most research on military spouses is on civilian wives of military men, who comprise more than 85% of civilian spouses of military personnel. Some research has compared civilian husbands of military women to civilian wives of military men. Male military spouses (civilian husbands of military women) earn more than their female counterparts, but these husbands are more dissatisfied with their employment than are civilian wives of military men (Cooney, De Angelis, and Segal 2011).

Geographic mobility decreases labor force participation and earnings from employment through difficulty finding employment in the new location and decreased job tenure. Measures of geographic mobility include the number of moves the spouse has made, the time between moves, and the time at the current location. Each of these has effects on spouse employment, though the effects vary for different categories of military spouses (such as by race/ethnicity and gender).

For example, Cooney, De Angelis, and Segal (2011) found that 28.5% of spouses were dissatisfied and 17.2% were very dissatisfied with employment opportunities (for a total of 45.7% dissatisfied). Black spouses were 42.2% more likely than Whites to be dissatisfied. Enlisted spouses of all rank categories were significantly more likely to be dissatisfied with their employment opportunities than spouses of senior officers (and this was controlling for education and other variables known to be associated with employment outcomes). For each additional year at the current location, the likelihood of being dissatisfied with employment opportunities decreased by 5.6%, but the effect was stronger for minorities than for Whites. It seems that it takes African American and Asian military spouses a longer time to find satisfactory employment than Whites.

With regard to income, research shows substantial and significant differences by gender and race/ethnicity. For example, Cooney De Angelis, and Segal (2011) found that Black men did not differ significantly from White men, Black women earned 28.4% more than White women, White women earned 23% less than White men, and Black men did not differ significantly from Black women. (These results control for many other variables associated with income, such as education.)

Various programs have been developed to help military spouses in their quest for employment. Early efforts at the federal level focused on teaching the spouses how to write résumés, how to dress for job interviews, and how to behave at job interviews. While these programs helped some spouses, they are not effective if there are not enough jobs in the area, the jobs that are available do not match the skills of the spouse, and/or state licensing requirements hinder employment (especially after moving).

Recommendations

There are many actions that are likely to help ameliorate the negative effects on military spouse employment. Some of these can benefit military veterans and military children of working age. One general approach is the development of partnerships between the public and private sectors to create jobs. For example, the government can erect (or rent) buildings on installations for use by private employers in exchange for training and/or hiring veterans and military family members.

Some states have created tax incentives for employers to train and hire veterans. Similar legislation would also be helpful if aimed at hiring military and veteran family members. States could also use state property to erect buildings (or offer low rent for building on state property) for employers who hire/train veterans and military/veteran family members.

Education plays a vital role in improving quality of life, directly as well as indirectly through greater employment satisfaction and income. Offering in-state tuition for veteran and military family members can be an effective way to improve families' quality of life and increase the human capital in the state.

More research is needed to determine the needs of military personnel, veterans, and their families. Such research can help to determine what kinds of programs are likely to fulfill those needs. All program plans should have evaluations built into the design to measure the effectiveness of the program.

It is critical to measure the awareness of existing programs on the part of veterans and military/veteran family members, especially spouses. Research has often found that the target populations for such programs do not know about the programs (e.g., Booth et al. 2007).

In determining program needs and evaluation, it is important to analyze differences by education, race, age, gender, time at current location, etc. Programs that are effective in meeting the needs of some people may not be effective for all people. Studying what is predictive of success for different people can help planners to design and market more targeted programs to improve quality of life outcomes.

References and Additional Resources

American Community Surveys. These surveys are one of the best sources of data to compare military and civilian spouses' employment outcomes.

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