



MFRI
Military Family Research Institute
Purdue University

RESEARCH BRIEF

JOB-SEEKING SELF-EFFICACY AMONG MILITARY SPOUSES

Relocation is a major challenge facing military families. One of the effects of relocation is disruption of the non-member's civilian career. As a result on this recurring disruption, military spouses need good job-seeking skills and the confidence to use them.

Job-seeking self-efficacy (JSSE) is a measure of a person's confidence that that he/she can successfully seek and find a job. JSSE has been relatively under-explored, particularly the relationship between JSSE and work-family issues, such as relocation due to a military transfer. Existing research shows that higher self-efficacy is associated with increased motivation, more persistence at a task, more resilience in the face of failure, and higher self-esteem. In this study, we examine the relationship between employment status, family characteristics, child care conflict, and job search training on the JSSE in a national sample of 3,013 spouses of enlisted military personnel.

THE PREMISE OF OUR RESEARCH

The concept of JSSE is a broad topic, and many facets of JSSE have historically gone unexamined. This study is unique because it looks at what factors contribute to or affect a person's JSSE, while most existing research pays little attention to how JSSE is shaped or developed.

We proposed three hypotheses for this project. We expected the following:

1. Spouse's current employment situations would be related to their JSSE.
2. Factors such as the spouse's education level, the number of children in the family, the family financial situation, and the spouse's perceived levels of child care conflict would be associated with spousal JSSE.
3. The availability and use of job search training would be linked to the JSSE of military spouses.

The goal of our study was to learn more about what factors aid or hinder JSSE. We also wanted to learn more about what types of employment assistance programs seem most effective in improving the JSSE of military spouses with civilian careers.

TRENDS SURFACED DURING OUR RESEARCH

Simply **being employed is not sufficient for spouses of enlisted members**. Both unemployment and underemployment have a negative relationship with spousal JSSE. Spouses recognize when they are underemployed, and when they are, they feel less confident that they can seek and find a new job. This demonstrates the implications of accepting a job simply for the sake of having a job.

Surprisingly, **no direct relationship existed between children in the home and spousal JSSE**. The study evaluated two age categories of children in the home – those younger than 5 and those between the ages of 6 and 18. According to these findings, spousal JSSE is not directly related to the presence of more young children, nor was it related to the presence of children 6-18 years old in the home. However, there may be an indirect relationship between young children in the home and spousal JSSE; if a child care conflict does exist, having more young children may intensify this effect.

A positive relationship exists between annual income and spousal JSSE. Reported annual income was positively associated with JSSE, and our research demonstrated that spouses who reported higher levels of annual income also displayed higher levels of JSSE. Similarly, military spouses who viewed their financial condition more positively also reported higher levels of JSSE.

As predicted, **a person's level of education was positively related to his or her level of JSSE**. Results indicate that military spouses with higher levels of education exhibited higher levels of JSSE.

Our analysis revealed that there is a **significant negative relationship between child care conflict and JSSE**. People who reported more difficulty in finding acceptable childcare and greater conflicts between work and parental or family responsibilities in general also reported lower levels of JSSE.

As demonstrated by the data in Table 1, **many of the services provided by the military to help spouses search for jobs are positively related to JSSE**. According to our results military spouses could improve their JSSE through job skill training.

Results indicated that for 9 of the 12 employment assistance services commonly available to military spouses, **those who used the services displayed higher levels of JSSE than those who did not use the services.** Programs aimed directly at job searching skills and opportunities appear most positively related, while support groups and discussions about type of work one might pursue seemed to be less closely related.

IMPLICATIONS OF THIS STUDY

The purpose of this study was to examine factors related to the JSSE of military spouses. We examined the relationship between the spouse's employment status, family characteristics, child care conflict and spousal JSSE, as well as whether the use of employment assistance programs could improve spousal JSSE even if other issues had a negative relationship.

An encouraging finding is that in the face of so many negative associations with JSSE, the use of employment assistance programs was associated with higher levels of JSSE despite the presence of other negative factors. It appears that programs aimed directly at job searching skills and opportunities are most strongly associated with JSSE. While still beneficial, services such as support groups and discussions about type of work one might pursue seemed to be less closely related.

One limitation of this study was the single data source. Common method variance could have inflated the relations among variables. While we cannot rule this out, this issue is lessened because many of our items are not opinion or attitude based; they are more objective in nature thus reducing the impact of the self-report data. Another limitation of this study was that effect sizes were not exceptionally large. However, they do demonstrate systematic relationships between JSSE and the employment and family issues studied here.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This study provides a number of contributions and suggestions for future research. First, because of the large

FOR MORE INFORMATION

The Military Family Research Institute is an interdisciplinary research program housed at Purdue University and funded by the Department of Defense, Office of Military Community and Family Policy. The institute conducts original research, both basic and applied, that affects military families at various levels.

The mission of MFRI is to conduct multilevel research that provides insight into the impact of quality of life factors on military members and their families. Of particular interest are satisfaction, retention, readiness, and performance. The goal of MFRI is to use this research to enhance military policies and practices focused on improving military quality of life.

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MEAN SELF-EFFICACY

EMPLOYMENT SERVICES	SERVICE NOT USED	SERVICE USED	T-VALUE
Orientation on job-searching skills/services	3.72	3.84	2.04 *
One-on-one assistance with job search	3.73	3.90	3.07 **
Help deciding what kind of work to do	3.78	3.75	0.43
How to write a resume	3.73	3.88	2.88 **
How to interview for a job	3.75	3.90	2.27 *
Job search support group	3.77	3.83	0.51
Referrals to "temp" agencies	3.74	3.89	2.18 *
Advice on how to dress for job interviews	3.77	3.84	1.16
Announcements of job openings	3.59	3.88	4.74 **
Job fairs	3.74	3.87	2.11 *
Help in completing job applications	3.75	3.89	2.19 *
Use of word processing equipment for preparing job search materials	3.69	3.94	4.28 **

* $p < .05$ / ** $p < .01$

size and diversity of the sample, these results have a level of generalizability that previous studies in this literature stream may lack.

Furthermore, the findings of this study indicate that there are numerous factors that are associated with a person's JSSE and future research is needed to consider each of the variables in this study in more detail. For example, work is needed to further explore the relationship between underemployment and JSSE, as well as how employment assistance programs may be modified to account for this relationship.

Additionally, future research should more closely examine the role that various family characteristics play, not only on JSSE, but also other job-search behaviors such as the use of employment assistance programs, and intensity of job search.

Finally, longitudinal work examining spouses' JSSE across time and over one or more relocations or job changes is also necessary.