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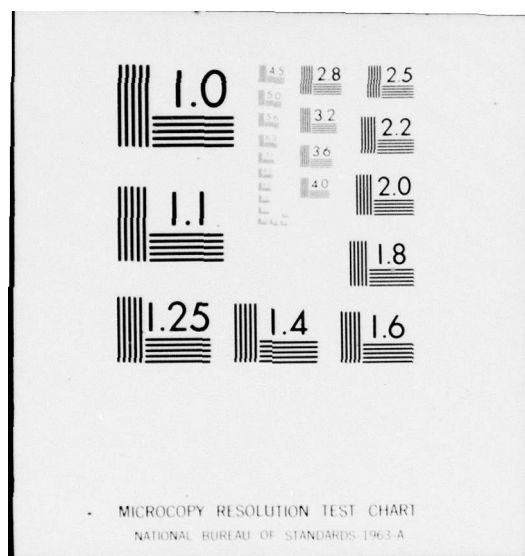
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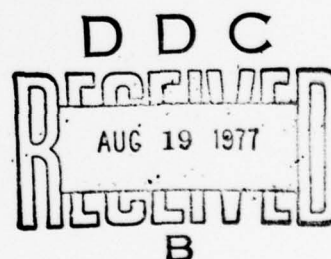
TECHNICAL REPORT NUMBER 113

THE AIR FORCE WIFE: HER KNOWLEDGE OF, AND  
ATTITUDES TOWARD THE AIR FORCE

by

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# ABSTRACT

Previous research indicates that the most significant external source of influence upon career satisfaction and the retention decision of a military man is his wife.

This study examined the attitudes and opinions of the wives of members of an Air Force missile wing. Three survey questionnaires were mailed to the wives, and participation was on a voluntary basis. The data collected was analysed by both factor analysis and discriminant function analysis.

While it was found that the average Air Force wife knows very little about the facilities, benefits, and services available to her, the study did reveal a fairly positive attitude towards life as a military dependent. There was evidence of a strong desire for more information about the Air Force and for more accessible information channels. Also indicated was a perceived need for increased participation in the system which has considerable impact on their lives.

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A major corporation gives gold charms in the shape of each new state to wives of transferred executives and it becomes status to point with pride at the number of charms acquired during a career span. A novelty? Public relations gimmick? No, rather a small part of the concerted effort in industry to make wives feel a part of their husband's career and satisfied with their place in this future. The industry motives are far from altruistic for as William Whyte stated in 1948 "as an economic lever...companies have learned that there is no stimulus quite so effective as the wife if properly handled." Much research has gone into ways to improve the recruiting and retention of civilian employees and maximize their productivity. Helfrich, (1965) concluded that "corporations are increasingly interested in the wives of their executives." In an 1971 study of business executives J.M. and R.F. Pahl typified the comments of their interviewees on the single most important factor influencing their career, "my wife, more than anything else."

It would logically follow then that the military in many ways would not only follow this pattern but demand more from wives and family. And likewise, the commitment a man makes in choosing a military career would call for support and approval from his wife and family.

As our society has become more and more mobile, the extended family of the past has been replaced by a more insular unit. No longer does a man have relatives close by or living in his home, for his many moves may take his family far from any familial ties. Without these other sources to rely on, the family tends to turn to each other and interpersonal relationships attain a higher value in assessing each individual's



satisfaction. The demands of a military life emphasizes this phenomenon.

One wife in a recent survey of military families related that her eldest child had attended 14 schools before entering college. (Entrails, 1971) How she views this style of life, the rewards it offers her and her family must be weighed against the deficiencies. And the conclusions she reaches concerning these matters will play an important role in her husband's life also. He has drawn his family into a life style unique in many aspects; a subculture of over 4 million dependents. Roger Little (1971) has remarked on this, "All military families have in common knowledge and experience in an occupational culture (or subculture) which is more distinct than that of other occupations in the larger society." Base housing, required mobility, the status in the community of the military man - these are only a few of the pressures a man choosing a military career must weigh. Add to these the similar pressures his wife and family meet and one can see either an effective cohesive unit or a point of dissention for a man trying to fulfill a role as a husband and father.

In a recent survey of career attitudes among Air Force personnel, it was found that the wife had twice the influence upon her husband's career intentions as any other individual, including his immediate supervisor or any of his peers. A determinant as important as this can't be slighted or ignored. In an investigation of junior officers retention problems, Lund (1972) found that wives were the key variable in the decision to separate or remain in the army. A 1971 study emphasized that any good junior officer retention program must include efforts

aimed toward the wife. "The military family has come to be considered an essential component in personnel policy and management." (Lund, 1971)

How a man's family perceives him and his role in the community exerts tremendous impact on his own view of himself and the value of his work. This affects not only his attitude but increasingly his performance and his relationships with those around him. Much effort has gone into studying the military man as an important resource in our society today, particularly with the changes being affected now, but these studies would indicate that one of the most crucial variables in attaining full value of the individual to society has been at least qualitatively ignored.

To understand the role a military wife plays in her husband's life, one must first analyse her role in the military and then expand this to examine how her position as wife and her attitudes as a member of the military (wives in responding to questions tend to answer "when we were stationed at McConnell" or "we have been in the service 7 years") relate and exert influence within the family. This study was undertaken for just such purposes.

#### METHOD

##### Subjects

The entire sample was drawn from the wives of men assigned to the 381st Strategic Missile Wing, stationed at McConnell Air Force Base. The wing consisted of two operations squadrons, one missile maintenance squadron, a communications squadron, a security police squadron, and various support squadrons and groups. There were approximately 1600



men in the wing during the time of the study, over half of whom were married.

#### Data collection

A series of three questionnaires were administered to the subjects.

The first questionnaire (SDS-1) was developed as an exploratory instrument to investigate the basic premise that wives of Air Force personnel do, in fact, have strong opinions about their husband's military affiliation. SDS-1 contained questions from major categories: Demography; Relations with Facilities, Benefits, and Services; and General Attitudes toward Military Life. An open ended section for general comments was also included.

As a pilot study, SDS-1 was distributed to the Hospital Squadron to check on its applicability to the Air Force life style. Upon analysis, the instrument was determined to be applicable.

The first questionnaire was administered by distributing the forms to all married men in the wing, and requesting the husbands to take the instruments to their wives. Return envelopes were provided to facilitate the return of the completed forms. A total of 827 copies of SDS-1 were distributed on April 14, 15, 16, 1971. Of these, 264 completed forms were returned, creating a response rate of 31.9%.

Wives Attitude Survey II (WAS II) was generated for two major purposes. The first section was aimed at investigating, in depth, trends that were evident in the open ended response section of the first survey. The second aim was to measure more precisely the relations the wives had with the facilities, benefits, and services. Again, the instrument included a demographic section and an open response section.

A listing of all home addresses were obtained through the Consolidated Base Personnel Office. The second survey was mailed directly to the wives on March 13, 1972. Included in the mailing were stamped, self addressed return envelopes.

Wife's Attitude Survey III was created primarily to explore in more depth the relation between the wife and the facilities, services, and benefits provided by the Air Force. This investigation included further inquiry into the source of the wives' knowledge and the wives' perceived need for the Air Force to offer these items. Demographic information and general comment sections were included. The questionnaire was distributed on July 18, 1972 in the same manner as WAS II.

#### Statistical Methods Employed

Due to the disparate nature of the data, two separate techniques for analysis were used. A factor analysis was performed on variables 1-25 and 50-55 of WAS II to determine the dynamics at work in the attitudes of the wives. A discriminate function analysis was performed in a stepwise manner across pairs of ten selected groups and subgroups of the sample. These groups were operationally defined by artifacts of their husbands service in the Air Force as follows:

Missile Crew - men that are assigned to operational Combat Missile Crews.

Non Missile Crew - men that are not assigned to Combat Missile Crews.

Career - men with five years or more of time in service.

Officer - men of rank O-1 or above.

Enlisted - men of rank E-9 or below.

First Term Officer - men with four years or less of time in service with rank O-1 or above.

Career Officer - men with five years or more of time in service with rank of O-1 or above.

First Term Enlisted - men with four years or less of time in service with rank E-9 or below.

Career Enlisted - men with five years or more of time in service with rank E-9 or below.

The dyads selected for analysis to determine intergroup differences were: Missile Crew-Non Missile Crew; First Term-Career; Officer-Enlisted; First Term Officer-Career Officer; First Term Enlisted-Career Enlisted; First Term Officer-First Term Enlisted; Career Officer-Career Enlisted.

#### RESULTS

##### Factor Analysis of Wives' Attitudes

The Factor Analysis performed on sections of WAS II generated ten factors. The contributing variables and their loadings for each of the factors are shown in Appendix I. The first factor was described as passive alienation/integration. It connoted a passive role for the wives of Air Force personnel. They apparently did not feel that their participation was required or even solicited, yet neither did they feel that they were rejected or prevented from becoming involved. This dynamic displayed the disavowal of personal responsibility for integration into the Air Force lifestyle and an attitude of simply "floating along with the current."

Factor II was identified as a desire for information versus apathy. This continuum was between a desire for more information about how the Air Force affects her life and the apathy which is present in all walks of life. These feelings were active in that the dynamic stretches from apathy to curiosity. It also appeared that there was a recognizable solidarity of interest in what the Air Force was and did.

The dynamic at work in Factor III could aptly have been labeled familial maturity and independence from the Air Force/familial immaturity and dependence on the Air Force. The dynamic was one of growth and change in focus of attention. As the family matured, the wife became more interested in its development and less interested in her relationship to the Air Force.

Factor IV provided an insight into the wives' perception of the current societal trend of distaste for the military. The continuum traversed the area between prideful identification with her spouses' job and the couple's relationship to the Air Force to apologetic recognition and rejection of identification with the Air Force.

The description of Factor V was a facet of the wives' attitude that was not directly related to the Air Force as a functioning organization. Instead, it was an indication of group identification/disassociation among the wives of Air Force personnel. This within group bipolarity was apparently a very important reality of life in the Air Force community.

The dynamic exposed in Factor VI was difficult to interpret. Without referring to causality, it appeared that physical/psychological separation or proximity/identification attitudes were present in the sample.

Factor VII probably revealed an experiential attitude set about regulation/restriction by the Air Force. The dynamic between the wives' feelings of personal freedom of action and restriction of action was quite obvious.



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The eighth factor was interpreted as two varying perception of the adage "rank hath its privileges" (power)". It was based on the perceived transference of the husband's rank to the wife. The dynamic was primarily one of perceived power in the transference as opposed to no power. The younger, lower rank, wives felt more power was inherent in the transfer, while the older, higher ranking wives were frustrated by the erosion of their preconception with the realization of the lack of power that the husbands' rank gives to his wife.

Identification with the source of information about the Air Force was the interpretation of Factor IX. It became apparent that as the wife learned more about the system with which she is involved, she identified more closely with the source. The poles of this continuum were the Air Force itself and her spouse.

The last factor was viewed as the conscious commitment of the wife toward involvement or noninvolvement. The frustration dimension did not enter into this dynamic, as participation was directly related to the personal decision of the wife.

#### Discriminant Function Analysis of Selected Groups and Subgroups

*(Note: The nature of the data array required that separate discriminant function analysis be performed on each of the seven group dyads for each of the three instruments. The voluminous nature of the resulting analysis (21 pages of tables) precludes any but a cursory treatment of the findings here. The interested reader is referred to the tech report #103 "The Air Force Wife-A Study of Morale among Military Dependents" issued by the Center for Human Appraisal, Wichita State University for a detailed and comprehensive analysis of this data.)*

*Missile Crew-Non Missile Crew.* - The group of wives whose husbands were in Combat Missile Crews were discriminably different than the rest of the test population. The main factor underlying this difference appeared to be a lack of association between the wife and the Air Force, emphasized by a negative attitude on the part of the Missile Crew wives toward facilities, benefits, and services offered by the Air Force.

*First Term-Career.* - The many obtained differences between the First Term and Career groups could be expected because of the obvious age and time in the service differentials. The first tendency was for the First Term wives to be more immature than their older counterparts, with the differences showing up in varied perceptions of facilities and services offered to them. The Career wife, since she had more time in the service, was more familiar with the benefits that were available, and hence maintained a more positive attitude toward them.

*Officer-Enlisted.* - In comparison to the Enlisted wives, the wives of officers were basically more socially oriented and participated to a greater degree in the Air Force centered community. In conjunction with this participation, the Officer Wife was more cognizant of the benefits available on-base, and was much more selective in the use she made of Air Force offerings. These inclinations result in the observation that the Officer wife identified more with the Air Force.



*First Term Officer-Career Officer.* - In the subgroup comparison of First Term Officer wives and Career Officer wives the results were that the career wives identified more closely with the Air Force, knew more about it, and generally maintained a stronger relationship with the Air Force. The findings that the career wives were more knowledgeable was further emphasized by the fact that the First Term Officer group was more susceptible to military propaganda.

*First Term Enlisted-Career Enlisted.* - Though the First Term Enlisted and Career Enlisted wives appeared to differ in primarily the same ways as the First Term and Career Officers, the distinction was slightly different. The First Term Enlisted had a more negative opinion of the Air Force, along with the expected patterns of disassociation and lack of knowledge of the Air Force.

*First Term Officer-First Term Enlisted.* - The differentiation shown between the First Term Officer and the First Term Enlisted drew along the same lines as the overall rank differential. The Officers' wives were more associated with the Air Force, though there was still a significant thread of disinterest in the discrimination. Again, greater maturity was noticeable in the wives of the First Term Officers, as well as greater self perception of independence.

*Career Officer-Career Enlisted.* - Again, the difference between the Career Officer's wife and the Career Enlisted Wife appears to have been one of rank. The Officer wife felt more socially interested in the Air Force, and was generally more associated with the Air Force. Further, the Officer wife appeared to make more conscious decisions about which facilities, benefits, and services were beneficial to her, and did not appear positively inclined toward something merely because it was 'Air Force.'

### DISCUSSION

Although numerous complaints were voiced, the wives for the most part had a favorable attitude toward the military lifestyle and their participation in it. In fact, most of the wives expressed a desire for more information about the Air Force. The study indicated the average Air Force wife knows very little about the facilities, benefits, and services available to her.

Nevertheless, the dependent briefings, designed to offer this type of information, seemed to be an irritant to some wives, especially the younger group. A fairly common complaint about the dependent briefings was the "impersonal" manner in which the wives were treated. Many also disliked the term "briefing". The term seemed to accentuate the military atmosphere of the meetings. Because of this attitude, many of the wives said they did not attend the dependent briefings regularly, which forced them to look for an alternate information source.

This alternate source usually was the husband. But he too was often an insufficient source for information. For one thing, the husband doesn't know the kinds of things his wife wants and needs to know and doesn't appear to be interested enough in these areas to find out.

The information factor should be of major importance to Air Force officials as the survey also indicated the wives, as a group, tend to identify and form attitudes about the Air Force based on the information they received. However, the survey also indicated that coercion would NOT be a good means of attaining the desired goals. That is, requiring wives to attend dependent briefings undoubtedly would have a very

negative effect.

As might be expected, the wives of men with long term associations with the AF tended to have a prideful identification with the Air Force. Some of the younger wives, however, seemed apologetic about their husband's military affiliation. This may be due to the recent negative societal view of the military among some young people.

The survey indicated that the wives identified with the Air Force lifestyle tended to live close to the base, and those least interested in that lifestyle lived further from the base. However, it is not possible from this study to determine which is the cause or which is the result of this phenomenon.

It was also found that wives with no children tended to depend on the military to give structure to their lives. However, as children came into the family unit, the wife changed her viewpoint and became more involved with her family and less involved with the military.

An interesting phenomenon revealed by the survey was the concept some of the wives had about rank transference. It appeared that wives of lower ranking men perceived a great deal of power transferred to the wives of higher ranking men (both officer and enlisted.) However, when the men rose into the higher ranks, the wives realized there was very little real power transferred to themselves. The frustration seemed to increase as the husband's rank increased and the realization that she had no real power became more evident.

The various group comparisons made in the study revealed that the feelings and attitudes of the wives tended to be group specific.

For example, the group of wives with husbands in missile crews had the most negative feelings about the Air Force and its benefits and facilities. This was not surprising, however, as our previous Career Attitude Survey showed missile crew members to be among the least satisfied men in the Air Force.

One factor that may have contributed to the poor attitude of the "missileer's" wife was the fact that her husband's duty required him to be separated from her overnight several nights a week. This factor may be compounded by the fact that most missile crew members were first-termers and were relatively young. The wife's younger age may have tended to make her less understanding about her husband's reoccurring absence.

Wives of the career group men were more familiar with the benefits available to them and had a more positive attitude toward them than the first-term wives.

In comparison to the enlisted wives, the wives of officers were basically more socially oriented and participated to a greater degree in the Air Force centered community.

The career officer wives identified more closely with the Air Force, knew more about it, and generally had a stronger relationship with the Air Force than the first-term officer wives. The first-term officer group also seemed to be more readily influenced by military propaganda. The difference between the career officer wife and the career enlisted wife appeared to be one of rank. The career officer wife felt more socially interested in the Air Force and generally was more associated with the Air Force. Also, the officer wife did not appear to approve of a program or benefit merely because it was 'Air Force.'



By dividing the wives into four groups it was possible to rank them according to their feelings about the Air Force. The career officer wife was the most favorably inclined toward the Air Force, followed by the career enlisted, first-term officer, and first-term enlisted wife.

#### IMPLICATIONS

Overall, it would appear that because of her obvious effect on the husband, the Air Force wife's somewhat positive feelings about the Air Force and her desire for more information are desirable effects.

Her apparent desire to become more of a part of the military centered community seems to be blocked because of a lack of an easy avenue to do so. The results seemed to indicate that both she and the Air Force lacked the real initiative to draw her into the community.

The apparent failure of the dependent briefings in providing information to the wives should be given some attention. It seems that a more "feministic" approach is desired by the wives.

In conclusion, it seems evident that the Air Force, as well as the other services, is ignoring a segment of its community that is an extremely powerful factor in retention and possibly an equally powerful influence on job performance and morale among the men.

APPENDIX 1



Factor I: Passive alienation/integration

Variable Number	Variable Description	Factor Loading
4.	The Air Force doesn't care what the wife's of its personnel think.	-0.889
13.	The Air Force doesn't care what I think.	-0.884
7.	There are no procedures for me to express my feelings about Air Force policies.	-0.788
10.	Civilians don't respect military personnel.	-0.570
19.	The Air Force keeps the wives of its personnel well informed.	0.559
24.	Life as an Air Force wife provides me many opportunities to get involved.	0.402
5.	Air Force wives should be kept better informed of base activities.	-0.369

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Factor II: Curiosity/apathy

Variable Number	Variable Description	Factor Loading
15.	If I understood it more, I think the Air Force would be interesting.	0.739
14.	I would like to be invited to attend my husbands reenlistment interviews.	0.707
9.	I don't want to know more about my husband's job than I already know.	-0.701
8.	Base activities have a direct affect on me.	0.526
5.	Air Force wives should be kept better informed of base activities.	0.374
11.	Most wives think they have their husband's rank.	0.322

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Factor III: Familial maturity/immaturity

Variable Number	Variable Description	Factor Loading
51.	How long have you been in the service (4-8yrs. :5)	0.860
53.	How many children do you have? (1.2)	0.788
52.	Do you expect your husband to make the Air Force a career (probably)	-0.727
22.	The Air Force should not be a 24-hour a day job.	0.590
24.	Life as an Air Force wife provided me many opportunities to get involved.	-0.480
1.	Wives of Air Force personnel should be involved in formulating Air Force policy.	0.360
11.	Most wives think they have their husband's rank.	0.305

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Factor IV: Prideful/apologetic identification

Variable Number	Variable Description	Factor Loading
20.	A wife should be proud of her husband's prof- ession.	-0.889
25.	The Air Force should not be just another job.	-0.553
5.	Air Force wives should be kept better informed of base activities.	-0.413
11.	Most wives think they have their husband's rank.	-0.340

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Factor V: Within subculture identification/disassociation

Variable Number	Variable Description	Factor Loading
18.	Air Force wives have a lot in common.	0.825
12.	Air Force wives have a number of similiar problems.	0.722
17.	I often feel I am a member of the Air Force.	0.702
2.	I enjoy associating with other Air Force wives.	0.565
21.	I know the wives of members of my husband's unit fairly well.	0.540
24.	Life as an Air Force wife provides me many opportunities to get involved.	0.474

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Factor VI: Physical & psychological proximity/separation

Variable Number	Variable Description	Factor Loading
54.	How far do you live from base? (3-5mi)	0.885
1.	Wives of Air Force personnel should be included in formulating Air Force policy.	-0.370

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Factor VII: External restriction/freedom

Variable Number	Variable Description	Factor Loading
6.	Wives of Air Force personnel are free to do what they want.	0.790
3.	Many of my personal activities are regulated by Air Force policies.	-0.498

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Factor VIII: Rank transference aspiration/frustration

Variable Number	Variable Description	Factor Loading
55.	What is your husband's rank.	0.832
24.	Life as an Air Force wife provides me many opportunities to get involved.	-0.296
11.	Most wives think they have their husband's rank.	0.367

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Factor IX: Identification with information source

Variable Number	Variable Description	Factor Loading
26.	Where did you learn the most about the Air Force.	0.888
1.	Wives of Air Force personnel should be involved in formulating Air Force policy.	0.270
14.	I would like to be invited to attend my husband's reenlistment interview.	0.268
17.	I often feel I am a member of the Air Force.	-0.250

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Factor X: Personal latitude for involvement/non-involvement

Variable Number	Variable Description	Factor Loading
23.	Air Force benefits do not interest me a great deal.	0.684
16.	I don't care about Air Force policy except as it affects me.	0.581
5.	Air Force should be kept better informed of base activities.	-0.442
1.	Wives of Air Force personnel should be involved in formulating Air Force policy.	-0.392

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