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**Clinging to the Past: The Air Force's War on Dual-Career Families**

BY

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## **APPROVAL**

The undersigned certify that this thesis meets master's-level standards or research, argumentation, and expression.

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JEFFREY J. SMITH (Date)

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## **DISCLAIMER**

The conclusions and opinions expressed in this document are those of the author. They do not reflect the official position of the US Government, Department of Defense, the United States Air Force, or Air University.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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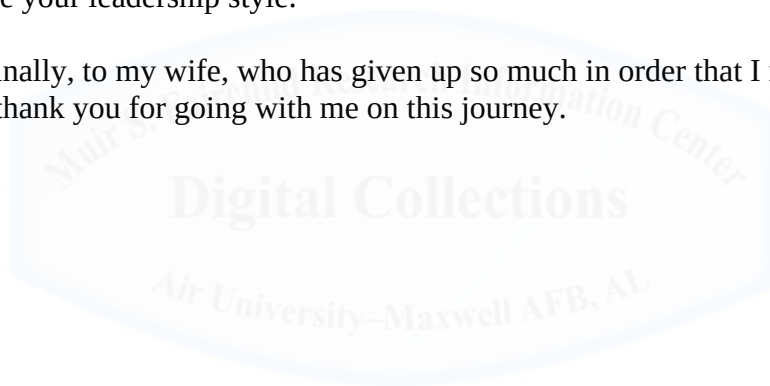
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To the spouses who set aside their dreams to allow their Airmen to pursue theirs, thank you for your selflessness and love. To the spouses who struggle against a system biased against your careers and identity, keep fighting. To the spouses who have decided to serve your country by supporting your Airmen and Air Force, we thank you and we need you. To the spouses who answer every call your Airmen and the Air Force ask of you, thank you. I sincerely hope this work helps tell your stories because you deserve to be heard. We appreciate you and your country thanks you.

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Finally, to my wife, who has given up so much in order that I may serve my country, thank you for going with me on this journey.



## ABSTRACT

This study explores the challenges faced by USAF dual-career families, by which this study means one Airman and one civilian career-minded spouse. Specifically, it investigates structural and cultural incompatibilities between the Air Force family schema (conceptions of, and practices relating to, USAF families). The study combines existing research on stress and work-family conflict with new primary research on current USAF dual-career families in the form of a case study and focus group. The research suggests that, via its organizational and social cultures, the Air Force is biased against dual-career families, a bias that negatively affects Air Force spouses, families, Airmen, and the Air Force workforce. When one combines these negative effects with the growing proportion of dual-career families and evolving gender roles, it generates a need for the Air Force to modernize its family schema. There are many existing efforts to improve the employment situation for military spouses, but as the research shows, increasing employment opportunities is only one part of improving the *career* outlook for military spouses. The author makes a number of recommendations including reducing the hypermobility of Airman, updating anachronistic (outdated) practices, and conducting further research on the scope and scale of the problem.



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## Introduction

Today's Air Force faces many challenges preparing for an uncertain future. The strategic environment lends no clear adversaries. Post-war drawdown and political maneuvering have arbitrarily slashed military spending and the constantly increasing pace of technological change is outrunning the capability of antiquated procurement processes. While hot debates wage over high-cost weapons programs whose cancellation or delay may leave the service with dangerous sunk costs and without important capabilities, Air Force leadership is striving manage its greatest resource – people. Through over a decade of war, high operations tempo, compensation reform, and an uncertain economic environment have strained the all-volunteer force. As a result, the Air Force is simultaneously struggling against force management troubles, retention problems, readiness shortcomings, post-deployment reintegration issues, and mental health concerns. The Air Force attempts to manage these issues through various Airman and family programs and processes, but the diverse and constantly evolving nature of Air Force families and their environment makes this challenging.

One area of concern for families is the career difficulty USAF spouses face. According to a 2012 survey of military spouses, approximately 72 percent of spouses had career intentions; yet 57 percent of all spouses felt the military hampered their ability to pursue a career.<sup>1</sup> The 2014 Military Spouse Employment report by the Institute for Veterans and Military Families, found that 80% of spouses had moved across state lines or abroad in the last five years and “these PCS moves can adversely affect total personal income and career advancement, as well as create tendencies for higher unemployment.”<sup>2</sup> The purpose of this study is explore the career-related experiences of Air Force spouses and their families to determine what changes, if any, the Air Force should make to support its families.

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<sup>1</sup> Vivian Greentree et al., *2012 Military Family Lifestyle Survey: Comprehensive Report* (Washington, D.C.: Office of Research and Policy, Blue Star Families, May 2012), 10, <http://webivadownton.s3.amazonaws.com/617/65/a/1110/CompReport2012.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Rosalinda Maury and Brice Stone, *Military Spouse Employment Report* (Syracuse, NY: Institute for Veterans and Military Families, February 2014), 21.

## Definitions

In order to communicate about these issues, a few definitions are in order. Although Chapter 1 will explain these definitions more in detail, these terms will provide a baseline for the reader into the mind of the researcher. The term *career*, though sometimes used as a synonym for employment, in this study means something more: “a field for or pursuit of consecutive progressive achievement especially in public, professional, or business life.”<sup>3</sup> As a corollary, the term *dual-career family* refers to a family in which the couple has two people who have, are pursuing, or desire a career and, in this study, a USAF dual-career family is an Airman and a civilian spouse. Another term is necessary to describe the situation of USAF spouses: *underemployment*. A person who is underemployed, like 90% of female respondent military spouses in the 2014 survey, is “overqualified” for their current job.<sup>4</sup> This overqualification may be a result of having greater educational qualifications or greater experience than their current job requires. These definitions alone give the reader a glimpse into the situation for USAF spouses.

## Purpose

Studying and addressing the challenges faced by USAF dual-career families is important for a number of reasons. The challenges the military creates for career-minded spouses have existed for decades with little positive change. However, the current US and DoD leadership acknowledges and is addressing the problem. Yet still, the difficulties dual-career families face have effects that may transfer back to the Air Force workforce and reduce its effectiveness, create retention problems, and increase its risk. And regardless of the scale of the problem, the USAF has a moral obligation to its families, its spouses, and the taxpayer to create a healthy environment for *all* of its families, not just the ones with the easiest mold to fill.

Evidence indicates that, despite decades of research, the employment situation of Air Force (and military) spouses is worsening, not improving. A 1981 report from the Bureau of Labor Statistics found military wives had unemployment rates about twice that

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<sup>3</sup> “Career,” *Merriam Webster*, 2011, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/career>.

<sup>4</sup> Maury and Stone, *Military Spouse Employment Report*, 52.

of their civilian counterparts.<sup>5</sup> Yet, a similar study publishing in 2014 found that military spouses faced unemployment rates almost *three times* that of their civilian counterparts.<sup>6</sup> So thirty-three years of progress for women in the workplace has *worsened* the employment situation for military spouses by fifty percent.<sup>7</sup> Demographic and fiscal trends suggest an increase in the number of spouses....

Current US, DoD, and Air Force leadership acknowledge the difficulties spouses face in maintaining careers and employment and have put forth the charge to support the nation's military families. The First Lady, Michelle Obama, and Dr. Jill Biden created an initiative in 2011 called Joining Forces, designed to support its veterans and military families, and in part, to improve employment opportunities for military spouses. Mrs. Deanie Dempsey, wife of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said

Getting a job and maintaining a career is beneficial to [military] families and communities in the long run. Research has shown over and over that steady employment leads to more confidence and life satisfaction. Dual-income families are the norm in America now, and military families are no different. A second income helps cover expenses that families must bear when they move or travel. And some military families, particularly junior-ranking families who fall among the 60%+ who live off of installations, need a second income to make ends meet.<sup>8</sup>

Mrs. Betty Welsh, wife of the Chief of Staff of the Air Force, has been a vocal advocate of Air Force families through the efforts of Joining Forces as well as independent efforts. She has revolutionized the leadership's connection with the Air Force family through outstanding outreach via Twitter™, Facebook™, and other social media outlets. And, as in many successful families, their husbands have followed these ladies' leads. President Barack Obama has given speeches, issued Executive Orders, and commissioned reports that recognize the challenges military spouses face and support efforts to improve the military spouse employment situation. Chairman Dempsey and the Joint Chiefs have also

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<sup>5</sup> Data estimated from Chart 2 in Allyson Sherman Grossman, "The Employment Situation for Military Wives," *Monthly Labor Review*, February 1981, 62, <http://stats.bls.gov/opub/mlr/1981/02/art6full.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> Maury and Stone, *Military Spouse Employment Report*.

<sup>7</sup> This study acknowledges that not all military spouses are female, but the demographic is predominantly female (95%); Maury and Stone, *Military Spouse Employment Report*, 5.

<sup>8</sup> Deanie Dempsey, "Commentary: The Importance of Spouse Careers," Text, *Military.com*, accessed April 16, 2014, <http://www.military.com/spouse/career-advancement/military-spouse-jobs/deanie-dempsey-commentary-the-importance-of-spouse-careers.html>.

put their full support behind Joining Forces and its efforts. If the leadership thinks it is important, it warrants study and consideration.

Also, as this study will attempt to show, disruptions to the careers of Air Force spouses have 2<sup>nd</sup>- and 3<sup>rd</sup>-order effects that reach far beyond the financial impact to Air Force families. In some cases, the loss of income causes anxiety and stress within the families. Financial consideration becomes increasingly important as policymakers curb military compensation and benefits. Also, with a spouse demographic that is 95% women, forcing unemployment and underemployment in women perpetuates a stubborn and undesirable American gender wage gap.<sup>9</sup> In families where income is not the primary consideration for a spouse's employment, the disruption of a career can undermine the spouse's dreams, sense of self, emotional well-being, and even physical health. These effects may cause families to argue, live apart, and even consider divorce. Stress effects can also transfer over to the Airman and a stressed Airman is a less productive, less safe Airman.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, Airmen who feel their work excessively strains their families may leave the service, causing retention problems for the Air Force. A workforce with less productive, less safe Airmen who leave earlier than they otherwise would (and take their costly experience with them) is a weaker, more expensive, and riskier workforce.

The Air Force has a moral obligation to its spouses, families, and the country. Its spouses give up their homes, their careers, and often their dreams in order that their Airmen can serve our country. Many spouses balance careers, children, and other interests. Most have watched their Airman leave for a combat zone, and many have felt the fear that their Airman might not return. All do so willingly, and most consider the Air Force lifestyle a positive experience overall. However, the Air Force has an obligation to these spouses as well. It asks its Airmen to be ready and willing to sacrifice their lives for their country, does it need to ask them to sacrifice their families as well? The Air Force also has a duty to the country to care for those who serve, to manage its taxpayer-funded workforce in the most effective and efficient way possible. If the Air Force is causing its Airmen to leave the service or underperform at work by excessively

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<sup>9</sup> Maury and Stone, *Military Spouse Employment Report*, 3.

<sup>10</sup> Mina Westman, "Stress and Strain Crossover," *Human Relations* 54, no. 6 (June 1, 2001): 717–51.

straining their spouses and families, then the service is failing its moral obligation to the taxpayer.

### **Research Design and Method**

The purpose of this research is to collect, analyze, and illuminate the experiences and challenges of USAF dual-career families. There is a growing and aged body of knowledge on the subject of military spouse employment and experiences including quantitative surveys, online blog and forum discussions, and social science theory, including that of work-family conflict. The mature field of work-family conflict studies the existence, causes, effects, and implications of conflict arising from the interaction between people's work and their families. Work-family conflict research often applies directly to USAF dual-career families, if only because much of the research studies military families who often provide the most extreme, abstract cases of work-family conflict. This study seeks to bridge the gap between the current, extensive, and relevant macro-level survey research and the outdated and unstructured qualitative data. To do this, the study provides current, micro-level data on existing USAF families that personally connects the reader with the challenges and experiences its families face in the modern-day USAF.

This study used a mixed-method approach to data collection. First, a USAF dual-career couple was interviewed as the foundation for a case study. The Airman in the study had 21 years of service and his wife is a civilian pharmacist. The case study provides an excellent story line for the reader to follow. In this case, it is dual-career family nearing the average Air Force retirement tenure so it allows a longitudinal analysis of what some consider an entire Air Force career. Second, a focus group that consisted of six mid-career couples (each including an active duty Airman and a spouse) was conducted to explore concepts found in the case study and investigate the current challenges of couples who recently made decisions to stay on active duty. This format also allowed the researcher a lateral glimpse at what portion of dual-career families face what types of problems.

This research, however, has a number of limitations. As qualitative research, this study does not provide data regarding the scale of the challenges that USAF dual-career

families face. It provides no statistical data, with the exception of secondary source references, about the USAF or military spouse population in general. The study only describes the experiences of the research participants, and relies primarily on this data to draw its conclusions. Accordingly, it is unable to provide conclusions about the experiences of the USAF dual-career family demographic at large. However, the experiences of one couple (as in the case study) indicate with certainty that a problem exists; and the experiences of a few (as in the focus group) at least suggest that similar problems exist in the greater population. In most cases, this study's research echoes conclusions drawn from quantitative data by RAND and the Institute for Veterans and Military Families, among others. Regarding the organizational processes behind the causes of the challenges to USAF dual-career families, this study makes only an exploratory look at what *may* be causing these problems. Studies with further depth are the purview of staffs and research institutes such as RAND.

Based on the researcher's initial impressions and literature review regarding the current USAF dual-career environment, it appeared that the Air Force may have an organizational culture, including processes, practices, and policies that favor traditional, over dual-career, families. Initial evidence review also led the researcher to believe the USAF's may have a similarly outdated social culture, at least in some locations and within some groups. As a result, the researcher developed the following research questions:

*Should the USAF modernize its family schema to embrace dual-career families? If so, how might it institute this change?*

Since *organizational culture* did not capture the true essence of the situation, the term *schema* is used. *Schema* has many definitions, often meaning a person's world-view, the "lens" through which they assess things. Merriam-Webster defined it as "a mental codification of experience that includes a particular organized way of perceiving cognitively and responding to a complex situation or set of stimuli."<sup>11</sup> It may also

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<sup>11</sup> "Schema," *Merriam-Webster*, accessed December 11, 2013, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/schema>.

describe an organization's filter through which it perceives something. Dictionary.com defines *schema* as "an underlying organizational pattern or structure; conceptual framework."<sup>12</sup> For the purpose of this study, the *family schema* is the overarching term that includes (1) the organizational and cultural assumptions about the characteristics of a family, (2) the resultant and associated organizational processes that affect the family, and (3) the cultural and organizational expectations of a family.<sup>13</sup>

*The research in this study supports the proposition that the USAF should modernize its family schema to embrace dual career families.* This study combines new micro-level data with existing research on military spouse employment and careers, psychological stress theories, work-family conflict, and Air Force retention. The combination of this research suggests the USAF has an anachronistic family schema that is harmful to its dual-career families, and as a result, harmful to its own workforce. To help the USAF modernize its family schema, the study yields a number of recommendations, some of which are new and others that echo the recommendations of existing research.

First, the research suggests that current efforts to improve the situation for dual-career families, by focusing on improving spouse career portability, only address half of the problem. This study's primary recommendation explores and discusses ways the Air Force may consider reducing the frequent and sometimes unpredictable relocations of Airmen that are so disruptive to their spouses' careers.

Second, existing efforts to increase spouse career portability have been successful for some, but ineffective for others. This is partly because some spouses have careers that are, by their nature or by their employer's choice, not very portable. While offering spouses a more portable (but different) career may seem effective in improving the macro situation, it does little for the spouses who rightly have no desire to give up their current career due to their Airman's change of station. Just as maintainers, aviators, and intelligence professionals love their careers, so too do spouses. Offering something

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<sup>12</sup> "Schema," *Dictionary.com*, accessed December 11, 2013, <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/schema?s=t>.

<sup>13</sup> The reason part (2) says "that affect the family" instead of "that consider the family" is because if processes exist that affect the family without consideration of the family, this fact alone is an important characteristic of the schema.



different is a worthy effort, but is rejected by some spouses as a token that does not solve their problem. As a result, this study recommends the USAF and Joining Forces work with employers to improve career continuity within the companies, whether via relocation, furlough, or transition to telework.

Third, the apparent anachronistic social and organizational culture can be detrimental to dual-career families. However, because the research is limited to the experiences of a few families, this study suggests further micro- and macro-level research is required to determine whether the USAF has an enterprise-wide problem, or simply needs to “tighten up a few cracks.”

The following chapters explore the concepts surrounding dual-career families and the challenges they face in the Air Force. Chapter 1, Background, lays the groundwork for the entire study. In it, the reader will find definitions, descriptions, and a baseline for the environment in which USAF dual-career families face the troubling difficulties they do today. Chapter 2, Research Observations, describes the experiences of seven current USAF dual-career families. In this chapter, the case study tells the emotional story of a dedicated USAF dual-career couple who has faced and adapted to the challenges faced by many other couples. The second section describes the results of a focus group in which six USAF dual-career families discussed their experiences trying to pursue two careers despite Air Force difficulties. Chapter 3, Analysis, explores trends and implications of the primary research from the case study and focus group. This analysis leads into Chapter 4, Recommendations, in which the study details suggestions for the Air Force on how it could better support its dual-career families. The beginning of that chapter also describes the important and positive efforts that currently exist to support military spouses seeking employment. The last part of the study, Conclusions, summarizes the study and poses moral and ethical questions to the Air Force about the implications of this study’s findings.

## Chapter 1: Background

To understand the concepts regarding USAF dual-career families and explain the importance of taking care of them, it is important to explore the terms, characteristics, challenges, and impacts of USAF dual-career families. This chapter will attempt to synthesize the research surrounding careers, families, stress, and the USAF to demonstrate the necessity for the study of dual-career families in the USAF. Specifically, a dual-career family is different than a traditional family in that a traditional family has one earner (who may have a job or a career) and one homemaker. In this study, the dual-career family primarily indicates an Airman with a civilian spouse who is pursuing a civilian career. The requirements and characteristics of a dual-career family are significantly different than that of a traditional family. The demands of the USAF create unique challenges for Airmen and their families, specifically frequent moves, significant time requirements, and a holistic commitment to the USAF career. Given the intensity of these requirements, Segal called the military a “greedy institution.”<sup>1</sup> However, USAF dual-career families have the added distinction of having both the “greedy” Air Force and another potentially “greedy” civilian career straining the family. Hertz said these families in fact have three careers, two careers plus the family as a career.<sup>2</sup> Although the most obvious barrier to spouses’ careers is the Airman’s frequent permanent changes of station, these spouses face other hurdles and headwinds such as licensing difficulties and outdated cultural expectations. The effects of these barriers, hurdles, and headwinds are significant. Additionally, studies show the emotional toll career disruption places on spouses. Further, work-family conflict (WFC) research demonstrates two important concepts: (1) stress can transfer between spouses and (2) WFC in either spouse can have physical, psychological, and work-related outcomes for both the Airman and the spouse. These outcomes include turnover (intent to quit), reduced work performance, substance abuse, and health problems. WFC in dual-career families can cause a negative impact on Airmen, their families, and the USAF as a whole.

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<sup>1</sup> Mady Wechsler Segal, “The Military And the Family As Greedy Institutions,” *Armed Forces & Society* 13, no. 1 (October 1, 1986): 9–38.

<sup>2</sup> Rosanna Hertz, *More Equal than Others: Women and Men in Dual-Career Marriages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 33, <http://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft7489p189;brand=ucpress>.

This chapter will use three sections to explore the dual-career family, the challenges they face as part of the USAF, and the resultant effects on the individuals, the families, and the USAF workforce. Section 1 defines terms and explores the characteristics and requirements of careers and dual-career families, providing an important foundation for readers. Section 2 describes some of the challenges faced by the career-minded spouses of Airmen. The barriers, hurdles, and headwinds in the section are aimed at the reader who is unfamiliar with the difficulties the USAF can cause for a spouse who is pursuing a career. Section 3 applies social science theory to explore the psychological effects of section 2's challenges. The section describes how conflict between work and family manifests itself in the individual and transfers between two members of a relationship. It further considers how these effects impact the USAF workforce and provides strategic rationale for this study.

### **Section 1: Careers and Dual-Career Families**

In order to understand careers and dual-career families, one must understand the terms, and the characteristics and requirements of each. The terms *career* and *job*, in both connotation and work-family literature, are distinct from each other. Research shows people view the primary purpose of a job as income, but a career is something more: personal fulfillment or even a calling.<sup>3</sup> Compared to a job, a career often requires education, training, and licensing. Some tie a career to progressive achievement or to a person's sense of self.<sup>4</sup> When two people with separate careers are married to each other, the result is a dual-career family – the focus of this study. Though this study primarily considers an Airman and a civilian spouse with a civilian career as the dual-career family, some concepts also apply to two Airmen married to each other, also called a dual-military family. This section will explore the definitions, the characteristics, and scope the concepts for the remaining research.

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<sup>3</sup> Amy Wrzesniewski et al., "Jobs, Careers, and Callings: People's Relations to Their Work," *Journal of Research in Personality* 31, no. 1 (March 1997): 21–33.

<sup>4</sup> "Career"; Stephen J. Adamson, "Career as a Vehicle for the Realization of Self," *Career Development International* 2, no. 5 (1997): 245–53.

## Careers and Jobs

This study focuses on careers, yet a career can be many things. A variety of verbiage exists to describe occupational scenarios: *career*, *job*, *work*, *occupation*, *profession*, *calling*, and *employment*. Some of these (*job*, *work*, *employment*) typically describe work one does in exchange for money. Others (*profession*, *career*, *calling*) connote a subset of work that is more enduring, fulfilling, and challenging. This subsection will define *career* and *employment* as distinct terms and describe the characteristics of a career. Also, the terms *career-oriented person* and *employee* represent the distinct respective manifestations of *career* and *employment*. This thesis will use the Merriam-Webster dictionary of *career*: “a field for or pursuit of consecutive progressive achievement especially in public, professional, or business life.”<sup>5</sup> See Figure 1 below.

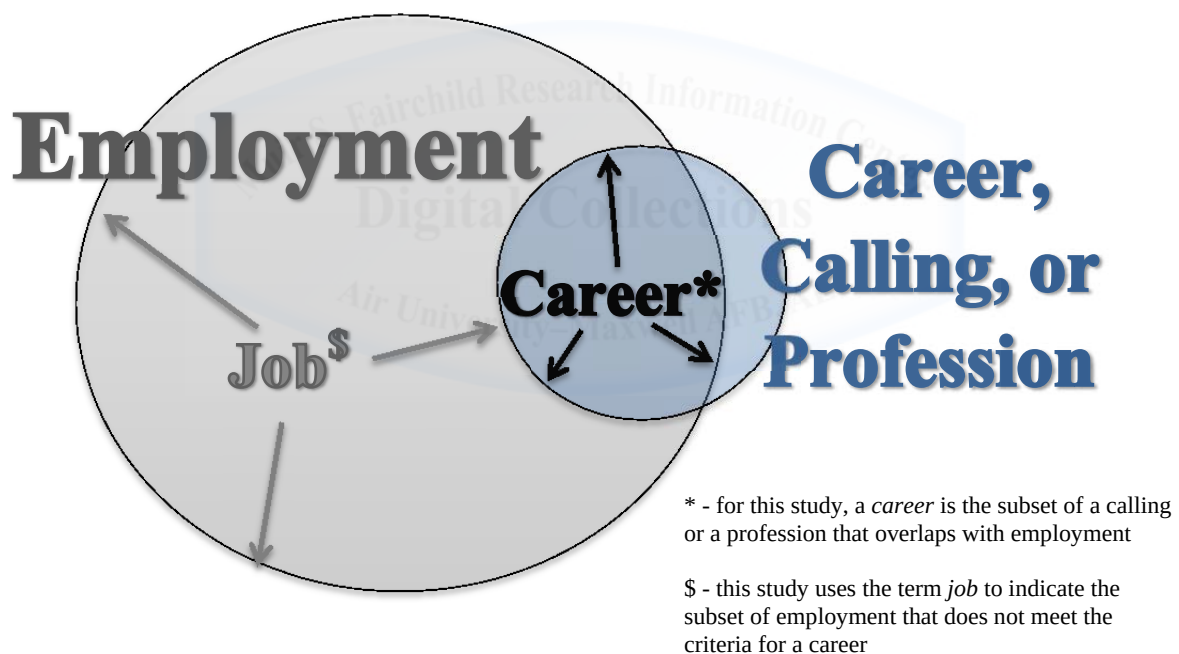


Figure 1, Careers, Employment, Jobs

Source: Author's Original Work

If the focus of a career is “progressive achievement,” the focus of a job, monetary compensation, is different. A career often involves a salary or commission, but some

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<sup>5</sup> “Career.”

careers may be volunteer work without contractual pay or may not be work at all, such as that of a musician. *Employment*, on the other hand, describes work done in exchange for monetary compensation and is often referred to as “just a job.” In *Jobs, Careers, and Callings*, Wrzesniewski, et al surveyed people in a wide range of occupations and found they considered a *job* “a boring necessity” for the purpose of bringing in money.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, their findings showed a *calling* fulfilled participants personally (someone who loves what they do – a musician, a pastor, etc), while a *career* fulfilled emotional needs for advancement and promotion, including increased responsibility and intellectual stimulation.<sup>7</sup> Hardill also tied career advancement to Bourdieu’s work on social mobility; she identified a career as both a vehicle for, and a realization of, upward social mobility.<sup>8</sup> In *Habits of the Heart*, Bellah, et al distinguish *job*, *career*, and *calling* by the level of emotional relationship people have with their work.<sup>9</sup> Based on these results, one can separate employment from a career by the person’s motivation for participating. A person is *employed* for money but pursues a *career* for intellectual stimulation and potential for advancement.

Another, wider, definition of *career* is one from the Canadian National Steering Committee for Career Development Guidelines and Standards which calls a career “a lifestyle concept that involves the sequence of work, learning and leisure activities in which one engages throughout a lifetime. Careers are unique to each person and are dynamic... Careers include how people balance their paid and unpaid work and personal life roles.”<sup>10</sup> Adamson concluded, “the career can be viewed fundamentally as a ‘vehicle’ for the continuous realization of self, or more accurately, a vehicle through which individuals may begin to construct a clearer conception of self and self in the world,” suggesting a person’s deep psychological connection with the pursuit of a career.<sup>11</sup> These varying definitions of the term *career* all serve to distinguish it from employment.

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<sup>6</sup> Wrzesniewski et al., “Jobs, Careers, and Callings,” 31.

<sup>7</sup> Wrzesniewski et al., “Jobs, Careers, and Callings,” 31.

<sup>8</sup> Irene Hardill, *Gender, Migration and the Dual Career Household* (Routledge, 2002), 3.

<sup>9</sup> Robert N Bellah, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life : With a New Preface* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

<sup>10</sup> Mary McMahon and Peter Tatham, *Career Development Understandings Informing Myfuture: More Than Just a Job* (Dulwich, SA, Australia: myfuture.edu.au, 2008), 3.

<sup>11</sup> Adamson, “Career as a Vehicle for the Realization of Self,” Page 10 of 13 in ProQuest reprint.

A career is also different from employment by the sum of its requirements. Typical requirements for career entry include higher education, specialized training, expertise, and certification – all of which require significant investment in time, effort, and money. Drawing as Hardill did from the work of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, one may classify these investments into different forms of capital: economic capital (vocational and educational qualifications), cultural capital (educational qualifications and knowledge), social capital (resources to be pulled from social networks), and political capital (connections outside one’s context).<sup>12</sup> Also, a 2010 Georgetown report on educational requirements stated, “jobs that require postsecondary [college] education or training are more likely to be career jobs.”<sup>13</sup> Unlike other forms of employment, many careers (doctor, lawyer, pilot, nurse, teacher, and accountant, among others) need specific licensing that requires costly training and a significant time investment. Career maintenance requirements, on the other hand, differ from career entry requirements in that they typically persist throughout a person’s career. These requirements are filled with varying forms of a person’s *capital* including commitment, time and physical presence, emotional capital, cognitive capital, and energy. For example, a nurse’s career requires commitment to the profession, time physically spent in the hospital, emotional capital to deal with patient stress at work (and that which a person “takes home”), cognitive capital to perform the medical work correctly, and energy to perform all of these tasks. Also, most careers require credibility to secure employment or to advance within the career field; credibility is built on long-term relationships with others in the career field and with the customer/patient base. Careers thus are different because they require greater investment of time, effort, and money than most non-career employment.

*Employment* and *career*, thus, describe different occupational scenarios. *Employment*, in this thesis, describes the broad category of work done in exchange for monetary compensation. Although career is often a type of employment, having employment does not necessarily mean one has a career. The preceding paragraphs show *career* describes a subtype of employment in which the person has invested time, money,

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<sup>12</sup> Bourdieu in Hardill, *Gender, Migration and the Dual Career Household*, 3.

<sup>13</sup> Anthony P. Carnevale, Nicole Smith, and Jeff Strohl, *Help Wanted: Projections of Jobs and Education Requirements through 2018* (Georgetown University: Center on Education and the Workforce, June 2010), 18, <http://www9.georgetown.edu/grad/gppi/hpi/cew/pdfs/fullreport.pdf>.

and effort into the pursuit of work-related fulfillment, typically in the form of post-secondary education, training, licensing, and networking. In contrast with the employee, the career-oriented person is often motivated by intellectual stimulation and/or the potential for advancement. The stark difference between *employment* and *career* manifest themselves not only in the person, but also in relationships outside the career, such as the family.

### Dual-Career Families

Work-family literature, a well-developed field of social science, has a variety of definitions to describe the occupational situation of family members.<sup>14</sup> In the military, the *dual-career family* often implies a family in which two military members are married to each other. However, this thesis will use *dual-military family* to describe the subset of dual-career families in which both members are in the military.<sup>15</sup> Another special type of dual-career family this study will explore is the *military-federal employee* family.<sup>16</sup> Other terms in the literature include *dual-earner* and *dual-employed*, but, as noted, a marked difference exists between these terms and dual-career. *Dual-earner family*, for the purposes of this thesis, indicates a family in which both members are employed, but both members do not necessarily meet the aforementioned criteria for career. In work-family literature and research, it is important to make the distinction between these different types of occupationally-engaged families.

Dual-career families are generally a subset of dual-earner families, for the same reason careers are generally a subset of employment. In contrast, Hardill defines a dual-career family as “one in which both partners are in managerial and administrative, professional and associated professional and technical occupations; the types of occupation which tend to place particular demands on the individual and emphasize commitment.”<sup>17</sup> Harvey called a dual-career family one in which “both partners [are] employed and psychologically committed to work or employed in upwardly mobile

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<sup>14</sup> To be clear, this study focuses on adult members of a couple and does not specifically address children’s careers, even though the analysis and conclusions may also apply to them.

<sup>15</sup> Other terms often used to describe dual-military families are *mil-mil*, *mil-to-mil*, *dual-mil*, and *dual-service families*. However incorrect, the terms *join-spouse* and *joint-spouse* also often refer to this same family arrangement.

<sup>16</sup> Generally this federal employee is a General Schedule (GS) employee, but does not have to be.

<sup>17</sup> Hardill, *Gender, Migration and the Dual Career Household*, 1.



jobs...”<sup>18</sup> Cron defined a dual-career family as “Each spouse in a married relationship is pursuing a career that demands a high level of personal commitment, a constant updating of knowledge, and has a component of upward mobility.”<sup>19</sup> Another researcher, Catherine Smith stated, “the term ‘dual-career’ implies that career commitment and career salience are attributes and expectations of both partners.”<sup>20</sup> To preview the challenges these couples face, Hunt and Hunt sardonically called *dual-career* and *family* “contradictory terms, due to work organizations failure to adjust to such families’ needs.”<sup>21</sup> In this study, a family in which the couple has two people who have, are pursuing, or desire a career is considered a *dual-career family*.

To help understand the complex demands on the family members of dual-career families, it is useful to create a semi-holistic representation of the dual-career family. Viewing the two careers separately fails to accurately characterize the interaction between the family members and their careers, the family members and each other, and each family member’s career with the other’s career. Figure 2, Dual-Career Strain on Family Resources shows a basic systemic representation of the dual-career family. In this diagram, the family unit is at the center, represented by a circle. Each family member has a list of the demands placed on the family member by both their respective career and the family alike. In this depiction, the demands from the family and from the career are listed as the same categories of career requirements. This list is not intended to represent a comprehensive model, but does illustrate some of the requirements dual-career families face.

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<sup>18</sup> Michael Harvey, “Dual-Career Couples during International Relocation: The Trailing Spouse,” *The International Journal of Human Resource Management* 9, no. 2 (1998): 309.

<sup>19</sup> Elyce Cron, “Job Satisfaction in Dual-Career Women at Three Family Life Cycle Stages,” *Journal of Career Development (Springer Science & Business Media B.V.)* 28, no. 1 (Fall 2001): 21.

<sup>20</sup> Catherine R. Smith, “Trends and Directions in Dual-Career Family Research,” *Women in Management Review* 7, no. 1 (1992): 24.

<sup>21</sup> Hunt and Hunt in Smith, “Trends and Directions in Dual-Career Family Research,” 24.



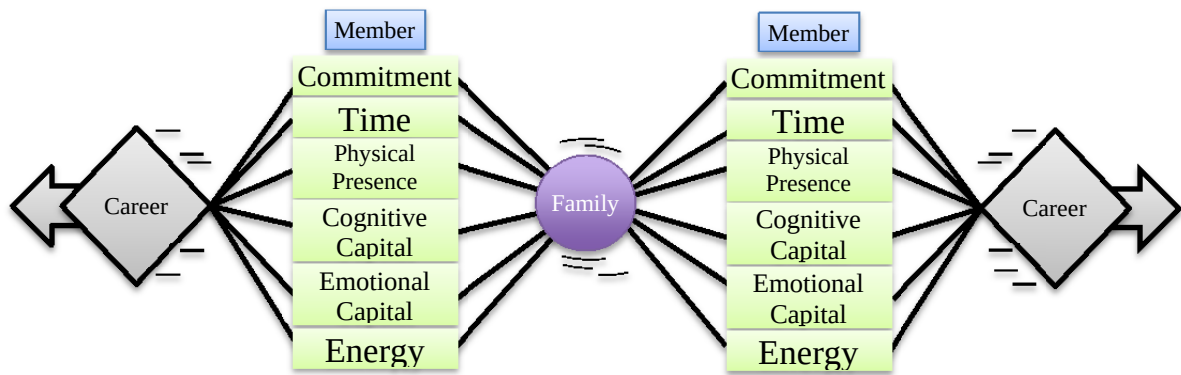


Figure 2, Dual-Career Strain on Family Resources

Source: Author's Original Work

A systemic representation such as this may be useful to analyze interactions of the actors, actions, and action-channels (paths) within a dual-career family system. Section 3 in this chapter will explain these interactions and their relation to the USAF.

Dual-career families have special requirements inherent in the requirements of their parts. From the depiction in Figure 2, the career does not place demands directly on the family, but does place demands on the family member's various forms of capital: commitment, time, etc. The family also places demands on the family member's capital and interacts indirectly with the career. Further, this diagram does not explicitly indicate whether the family member personally uses any of this capital for other institutions, like friends, clubs, or hobbies. If one assumes the member has limited capital (24 hours in a day, only so much energy, etc) it becomes evident the family and the career compete for a person's capital. Thus, the primary requirement for the existence (and continued existence) of a dual-career family is the ability to provide both the family and the career with the required capital. A further assumption is that a person must meet individual capital requirements in addition to those of the career and the family. One may notice the diagram could also represent a dual-earner family if one replaced "career" with "job." This is true, and the diagram could be used to represent either. Regarding the challenges the system creates, however, the differences between a career and employment (and thus between dual-career and dual-earner families) are greater in the scale of the requirements, and less in the scope. Thus, the tension between the two careers pulls harder on the

individuals, the family, and the “opposing” career. Dual-career families thus create a balancing act between each person’s own needs, the needs of the family, and the needs of the career.

### **Section 1 Summary**

This section described the differences between a *career* and a *job*, and also explored some unique characteristics of dual-career families. A career, research shows, is different from a job in both its structural requirements and the employee’s perception of it. A job is primarily about income. Conversely, a career provides personal fulfillment and may provide no income at all. A career may also require higher education, special training, and certifications above and beyond that of a job. A married family with two people pursuing a career is called a *dual-career family*. The military formally recognizes *dual-military families* as the subset of the families in which both people are members of the military, though the focus of this study is on the larger demographic which includes an Airman and a spouse (civilian or military, but primarily civilian) who is pursuing a career. These dual-career families, as any family, can be represented as a system. However, adding the challenges and requirements of another career to the family can create additional challenges for the family members at home and at work.

### **Section 2: Challenges: Barriers, Hurdles, and Headwinds**

The USAF is a unique institution with unique requirements. Many of its members require years of highly specialized and expensive training as well as constant training and education to keep their edge. Other organizations place significant requirements on their personnel, but few can claim to hold the existence of freedom and the safety of millions under their umbrella. As such, the USAF often requires much of its Airmen. In *The Military and the Family as Greedy Institutions*, Segal called the military a “greedy institution,” referring to the often-excessive requirements it demands from its members.<sup>22</sup> This study characterizes the challenges created by the intersection between the USAF and

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<sup>22</sup> Segal, “The Military And the Family As Greedy Institutions.”

the dual-career family by severity and into three groups: barriers, hurdles, and headwinds. A brief analysis of these challenges and existing dual-career literature will illuminate possible incompatibilities between the USAF and a dual-career family in order to inform the research in Chapter 2.

### **Barriers: Hypermobility and Discrimination**

The first category of challenges the USAF presents to dual-career families is the *barrier* – the incompatibility of a dual-career family with USAF demands. A barrier exists when the combination of demands of the USAF, the family, or the person exceeds the person’s capacity to meet those demands. One major barrier is the incompatibility between the Airman’s career and the spouse’s civilian career regarding frequent military relocation. This study uses the term *Airman* to describe the USAF officer or enlisted member and the term *spouse* to refer to the civilian (usually) spouse of a USAF member who is in a dual-career family. Dual-career literature refers to this “spouse” as the “trailing spouse” – the spouse within a relocating couple whose career was not the forcing function in the move. In addition, this study will use the term *hypermobility* to describe the Airman’s frequent requirement to move via Permanent Changes of Station (PCS). Another barrier is hiring discrimination against military spouses as a result of this frequent relocation. These two related reasons can be the most difficult challenges spouses face in pursuit of a career.

The primary and powerful barrier to the careers of military spouses is the frequent relocation – hypermobility – of their Airman. This is a fundamental incompatibility between a dual-career family and the USAF, and in the USAF, these moves are frequent. The 2006 Survey of Active Duty Spouses shows that 80% of military spouses have PCS’ed with their member in the preceding 36 months.<sup>23</sup> The Military Officers Association of America noted, “Military spouses are ten times more likely than their civilian counterparts to move across state lines.”<sup>24</sup> Although the Airman’s PCS does not

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<sup>23</sup> 2006 Survey of Active Duty Military Spouses: Administration, Datasets, and Codebook, Survey (Arlington, VA: Defense Manpower Data Center: Survey & Program Evaluation Division, March 2007), H-324.

<sup>24</sup> “Spouse Employment,” *Military Officers Association of America*, August 20, 2013, [http://www.moaa.org/Main\\_Menu/Take\\_Action/Top\\_Issues/Spouse\\_and\\_Family/Spouse\\_Employment.html?css=print](http://www.moaa.org/Main_Menu/Take_Action/Top_Issues/Spouse_and_Family/Spouse_Employment.html?css=print).

directly end the spouse's career, the strong indirect effect of Airman portability is the primary barrier to dual-career families in the USAF. A few actions combine to create the interference: (1) Airmen move often and the Airman usually has little input into the timing and location of the move, (2) the Airman and spouse typically want to keep their family physically together, so (3) if the spouse's career is unwilling or unable to relocate him or her, then the spouse's career is, at best, put on hold, or most likely, ended.<sup>25</sup>

In addition to hypermobility, hiring discrimination (against military spouses) also works against the spouse's career. This type of discrimination is likely illegal in most contexts.<sup>26</sup> However, anecdotal evidence shows many companies discriminate against military spouses anyway.<sup>27</sup> Some spouses report being asked direct questions such as "is your husband/wife in the military?" or "does your husband work at the base?" Their reluctant honesty is often followed by a perceived change in the interviewer's demeanor and a statement such as "thank you for applying, but we're looking for a long-term hire."<sup>28</sup> Other hiring managers are not so direct. Some managers in military towns find creative, but quite legal, questions to determine whether a person is a military spouse such as, "how long do you plan to live in this city?" or "why do you no longer work at your previous job?" Some may even (legally) contact a spouse's previous manager for "work-related" information and discover the reason for the move. Further, the spouse's resume may betray a geographically varied work history and show that the spouse moves

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<sup>25</sup> If the military member is not under an ADSC, then they "can" refuse the assignment – by 7 day opting – even if they do not get removed from the USAF, their action in putting family first will effectively end their career in the USAF. The results will likely be the same as for the spouse.

<sup>26</sup> "Prohibited Practices: Pre-Employment Inquiries and Marital Status or Number of Children," *U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission*, accessed January 20, 2014, [http://www.eeoc.gov/laws/practices/inquiries\\_marital\\_status.cfm](http://www.eeoc.gov/laws/practices/inquiries_marital_status.cfm); Discrimination based on marital status is likely illegal; and discriminating against a military spouse may be considered indirect illegal discrimination against the military member.

<sup>27</sup> It can be difficult to prove discrimination because one must establish that the discriminating factor (race, gender, military spouse status, etc) was the reason the person was not hired, not qualifications or merit. The widespread anecdotal evidence suggests a deeper assessment may yield methodologically useful results.

<sup>28</sup> "Locals Lead Effort to End Hiring Discrimination against Military Spouses," *News, Marysville Globe*, September 19, 2007, <http://www.marysvilleglobe.com/news/27579199.html>; Courtney Kunze, "Stunning Results of Military Spouse Discrimination in the Workforce," *Yahoo Contributor Network*, May 16, 2012, <http://voices.yahoo.com/stunning-results-military-spouse-discrimination-11340548.html>; "Guest Post: Military Families and Dealing with Discrimination," *Life Lessons of a Military Wife*, accessed January 2, 2014, <http://lifelessonsmilitarywife.com/?p=3395>; "Job Discrimination Because You're a Military Spouse," *MilitarySpouse Forums*, accessed January 2, 2014, <http://militaryspouse.com/forums/topic.aspx?topicID=136536>.

jobs at least every few years, often hinting to the employer to investigate further. Many employers check social media and Internet search engines for their prospective employees; both of these methods often reveal the spouse's military affiliation. Despite advances on in reducing other types of discrimination, military spouses seem to still face difficulties due to employers' reluctance to hire, keep, and promote military spouses.<sup>29</sup>

Military spouses in dual-career families in the USAF find constant moves and the resultant discrimination create barriers for their careers. Catherine Smith summed it up perfectly: "Geographic relocation...usually nullified or restricted the career development of the 'trailing spouse.'"<sup>30</sup> For the spouse lucky enough to navigate portability and discrimination difficulties, the dual-career family may still need to contend with other requirements, such as licensing and childcare.

### **Hurdles: Licensing, Family Care, and Career Advancement**

The second category of challenges the USAF can present to dual-career families is the *hurdle* – an impediment to the dual-career family that may be overcome with significant effort, advance planning, extra costs, and lucky timing. These hurdles are *in addition* to the aforementioned barriers, not instead of them. Examples of hurdles include state-specific licensing restrictions, childcare, and career advancement difficulties.<sup>31</sup>

Some careers such as law, teaching, and nursing have state-specific licenses an employee must attain before practicing their profession in that state. MOAA noted there are over 100,000 military spouses whose careers "require licenses or certification."<sup>32</sup> Another report quoted by Dr. Jill Biden said it was as high as 35 percent.<sup>33</sup> In general, a

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<sup>29</sup> Laura Werber Castaneda and Margaret Harrell, "Military Spouse Employment: A Grounded Theory Approach to Experiences and Perceptions," *Armed Forces & Society*, October 8, 2007, 399, <http://afs.sagepub.com/content/early/2007/10/08/0095327X07307194>.

<sup>30</sup> Catherine R. Smith, "Career Transitions of Dual-Career Couples: An Empirical Study," *Career Development International* 2, no. 5 (1997): 234.

<sup>31</sup> These examples are not all inclusive, nor does this study claim these examples provide a statistical representation of the population. The examples are simply individual cases that show what some spouses may endure.

<sup>32</sup> "Spouse Employment."

<sup>33</sup> Michelle Obama and Jill Biden, "Remarks by the First Lady and Dr. Biden On Military Spouse Licensing | The White House" (presented at the Joining Forces Initiative, Pentagon, VA, February 15,

firm does not hire a person without the appropriate license and these licenses can be difficult or costly to obtain. For example, to practice law, one must take a bar exam and, according to the National Conference of Bar Examiners and American Bar Association, the state bar exam costs between a few hundred and a few thousand dollars depending on the state.<sup>34</sup> Also, because each state exam is different, it requires many hours of study and costly preparation tests. For example, one preparation course for the California Bar Exam costs \$2,290.<sup>35</sup> Teaching exams, such as the widely-used PRAXIS™ tests, cost between \$85 and \$150 per test; multiple different subject tests are often required; and, these tests alone do not comprise the entire licensing system.<sup>36</sup> As the First Lady said in her speech regarding state license portability for military spouses, “to earn a teaching license, states ask for some combination of state and national test scores, supervised work experience, and advanced coursework.”<sup>37</sup> Nursing professionals endure similar fees and exam preparation. According to the California Board of Registered Nursing, the exam application fee and interim permit cost \$200 total.<sup>38</sup> In addition to these requirements, military spouses must navigate the differing rules that different states require regarding licensing. Even if the state for which the spouse is seeking a license offers license portability aid, finding these rules and navigating the state bureaucracy toward successful licensing can be difficult. These licensing challenges can create as much as a year-long delay at the beginning of every assignment.<sup>39</sup> Each assignment, then, creates license-related costs in time, money, effort, and career setbacks.

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2012), <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/02/15/remarks-first-lady-and-dr-biden-military-spouse-licensing>.

<sup>34</sup> Erica Moeser and Claire Huismann, eds., “Comprehensive Guide to Bar Admission Requirements 2013” (National Conference of Bar Examiners and the American Bar Association, 2013), 23, [http://www.ncbex.org/assets/media\\_files/Comp-Guide/CompGuide.pdf](http://www.ncbex.org/assets/media_files/Comp-Guide/CompGuide.pdf).

<sup>35</sup> Kaplan Bar Review, “California Complete Bar Review Course,” *California Complete Bar Review Course*, accessed December 17, 2013, <http://www.kaptest.com/Bar-Exam/Bar-Review-Courses/General-Bar-Review/complete-california-bar-review-course.html>.

<sup>36</sup> Educational Testing Service, “Test and Service Fees,” *The Praxis Series(tm)*, accessed December 17, 2013, <http://www.ets.org/praxis/about/fees/>.

<sup>37</sup> Obama and Biden, “Remarks by the First Lady and Dr. Biden On Military Spouse Licensing | The White House.”

<sup>38</sup> These amounts may not represent the national averages but are not all-inclusive. However, they do provide insight to some of the possible monetary costs associated with PCS moves; California Department of Consumer Affairs Board of Registered Nursing, “Fees,” *Fees*, accessed December 17, 2013, [http://www.rn.ca.gov/about\\_us/fees.shtml#apps](http://www.rn.ca.gov/about_us/fees.shtml#apps).

<sup>39</sup> Anonymous Airman and Spouse, Case Study Interview held at Air University, Maxwell AFB, AL, interview by John Paul F. Mintz, February 19, 2014.



Any dual-career family, military or not, can have difficulty finding and maintaining childcare or other family-care situations, but military families face special challenges that most other families do not. Airman temporary duty (TDY), deployments, the nature of the military mission, and finding care providers despite frequent moves can all cause additional burden on military families. In a survey of military spouses in “Military Spouse Employment,” RAND researchers Castaneda and Harrell found military spouses perceive special difficulty parenting with a service member.<sup>40</sup> An Airman’s TDY leaves the spouse home as a single parent – a difficult situation for a spouse also trying to manage a career. Military mission demands often leave the spouse as a *de facto* single parent even when the Airman is at home station (not deployed).<sup>41</sup> Castaneda and Harrell found a number of spouses who “referred to the ‘greediness,’ or inflexibility, of the military workplace to satisfy family demands and the unwillingness on the part of the military workplace to compromise to accommodate the small crises that are a part of parenthood.”<sup>42</sup> Finally, due to PCS moves, military family is “generally far removed from extended family who could assist” with childcare.<sup>43</sup> Last-minute searches for reliable childcare can add to already expensive childcare services. The cost of a theoretical minimum wage, 10-hour per day nanny is \$19,938 per year.<sup>44</sup> That is more than half the base pay of an E-6 with more than 8 years of service.<sup>45</sup> In reality, nannies often cost more than minimum wage – some greater than \$40,000 per year and more.<sup>46</sup> Long-term deployments, short-notice TDYs, unpredictable hours, and inflexible mission demands create a difficult challenge for all military families, especially dual-career families.

Military spouses who are fortunate enough to find employment within their chosen career and are able to navigate any childcare costs still face career advancement

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<sup>40</sup> Castaneda and Harrell, “Military Spouse Employment,” 397.

<sup>41</sup> Castaneda and Harrell, “Military Spouse Employment,” 397–398.

<sup>42</sup> Castaneda and Harrell, “Military Spouse Employment,” 398.

<sup>43</sup> Castaneda and Harrell, “Military Spouse Employment,” 397.

<sup>44</sup> Nanny childcare is required by the Fair Labor Standards Act which sets the federal minimum wage at \$7.25 per hour, with time-and-a-half for overtime over 40 hours per week. 10 hr/day \* 5 days/wk = 50 hrs/wk. 40 hrs/wk \* \$7.25 + 10 hrs/wk \* \$7.25 \* 1.5 = \$290 + \$108.75 = \$398.75. \$398.75/wk \* 50 wks/yr (- 2 wk vacation) = \$19,937.50; *The Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, as Amended, U.S.C.*, 2011, sec. 206(a)(1)(C).

<sup>45</sup> “Military Pay Table - Jan 1, 2014,” *Military Pay Tables - 1949-2014*, January 1, 2014, 1, <http://www.dfas.mil/dms/dfas/militarymembers/pdf/MilPayTable2014.pdf>.

<sup>46</sup> Christine Coh, “The Nanny Guide: Nanny Cost,” *Care.com*, accessed January 2, 2014, <http://www.care.com/child-care-nanny-cost-p1145-q83979.html>.

hurdles such as a lack of “development” time and employer promotion discrimination. With the aforementioned time burden the military places on its families, military spouses often have less available time to take on additional challenges required for career advancement such as advanced education, training business trips, and after-hours internships. Also, as one rises in “rank” in a civilian career, “24/7” and “always on-call” responsibilities increase just as they do in the military. Spouses who rise to managerial ranks “may also face covert organizational demands for personal attachment and unlimited commitment, with career development premised on unquestioned job mobility and flexibility” – the exact same condition military Airmen undoubtedly face.<sup>47</sup> Employers may also be reluctant to promote spouses if they know they are likely to move (PCS) soon. This discrimination can be on-purpose, subconscious, or indirect – i.e. as a result of the spouse’s already short tenure. If, as career psychology experts claim, upward mobility is an important factor distinguishing a career from a job, this discrimination is a severe hindrance to dual-career couples.

Military spouses face many challenges in pursuit of a career such as state-specific licensing restrictions, finding reliable family- or childcare, and limited promotion opportunity. The dual-career family may overcome these hurdles at additional costs that the USAF does not reimburse. The time, money, and effort for relicensing alone is daunting. When one adds the cost of long-term childcare, the hurdles can become insurmountable barriers. Also, without upward mobility, a career can become “just a job.” Even without these barriers and hurdles, small but consistent forces may act to make the dual-career life more difficult for USAF families.

### **Headwinds: Outdated Culture and Organizational Practices**

In addition to barriers and hurdles, spouses in USAF families may face headwinds in their pursuit of careers. These *headwinds* are different from barriers and hurdles in that they are typically surmountable challenges. They can combine with the barriers and hurdles, or they may just continually make life a little more difficult. One example is the expectation of spouses to participate in unit social events, to include volunteering time with the unit. Another is the organizational and cultural use of terms such as *dependent*,

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<sup>47</sup> Hall and Richter in Smith, “Career Transitions of Dual-Career Couples,” 230.



which may insult the spouse who contributes as much to the family as the Airman. These expectations and cultural terms seem reminiscent of the 1950's. They are anachronisms – “something or someone that is not in its correct historical or chronological time, especially a thing or person that belongs to an earlier time.”<sup>48</sup> Anachronistic cultural expectations and organizational insensitivity create headwinds for dual-career couples.

Squadron functions, command and senior enlisted spouse responsibilities, and even the organizational terms used to describe spouses can weigh on career-minded spouses. Spouses are often expected to attend unit functions in support of their Airman, although pressure to attend can create conflict if the function coincides with the spouse's career. If the spouse chooses not to attend, the spouse may face social ostracism or the Airman may face negative career impact. Although this is illegal within the Department of Defense, some spouses have been told they need to participate or their Airman's career will suffer.<sup>49</sup> One military spouse with a PhD used the word “voluntold” to describe what she felt as “immense pressure to volunteer with the unit and participate in social events.”<sup>50</sup> Another aptly noted, “[my husband] will never be required to go to a unit function with my company, and if a manager even implied that it would create an issue for me, HR would end that manager's career right away.”<sup>51</sup> Most of the time, this pressure is unwritten or unspoken, but in the case of command and senior enlisted spouses, evidence shows mixed results. Castaneda and Harrell's work found some senior member's spouses who felt pressure to volunteer interfered with their career aspirations.<sup>52</sup> On the other hand, LtCol Smith, in *Commanding and Air Force Squadron in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, acknowledged that many spouses today have professional careers and

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<sup>48</sup> “Anachronism,” *Dictionary.com*, accessed January 21, 2014, <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/anachronism?s=t>.

<sup>49</sup> Margaret C. Harrell, “Army Officers' Spouses: Have the White Gloves Been Mothballed?,” *Armed Forces & Society* (0095327X) 28, no. 1 (Fall 2001): 56; Anonymous Spouse, Interview with Anonymous Spouse, interview by John Paul F. Mintz, January 26, 2014; Department of Defense, “DoD Instruction 1100.21, VOLUNTARY SERVICES IN THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE,” December 26, 2002, <http://www.dtic.mil/whs/directives/corres/pdf/110021p.pdf>.

<sup>50</sup> Jaime Gassmann, “Career-Isolated Military Spouses: Why Would the DOD Want It Any Other Way?,” *The Best Defense: Tom Ricks's Daily Take on National Security*, June 6, 2013, [http://ricks.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2013/06/06/career\\_isolated\\_military\\_spouses\\_why\\_would\\_the\\_dod\\_want\\_it\\_any\\_other\\_way?wp\\_login\\_redirect=0](http://ricks.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2013/06/06/career_isolated_military_spouses_why_would_the_dod_want_it_any_other_way?wp_login_redirect=0;); This expectation presumably arises from a USAF cultural assumption that the spouse has the same legal and ethical commitment as the Airman, which they do not.

<sup>51</sup> Anonymous Spouse, Interview with Anonymous Spouse.

<sup>52</sup> Castaneda and Harrell, “Military Spouse Employment,” 400.

neither the time nor the energy to manage “spouses clubs.”<sup>53</sup> This area certainly deserves a closer look and will drive some of the questions in the forthcoming case study and focus group.

Less overbearing, but still outdated and sometimes offensive, is the term the USAF uses to identify spouses – *dependents*. Although this term is widely used in the U.S. Government to describe the unemployed spouse of a wage-earner, some career-minded spouses may feel this is a condescending, outdated term because they are not financially *dependent* on their Airman, they are part of a family team: “...children are dependent, I am not! I make more money than you do!” said more than one career-minded spouse.<sup>54</sup> This disdain is not new, this spouse’s concern echoes almost *verbatim* a 1984 report on a survey of Air Force spouses that said, “the word *dependent* was viewed as irritating: many wives are not dependent, and some make more money than their husbands.”<sup>55</sup> Although some may say this is a problem of oversensitivity and not a real problem, this term creates a psychological mismatch between internal self-identity and external identification of a person and may cause varying levels of stress. When combined with similarly paternalistic bureaucratic difficulties such as needing a power of attorney to get Cable TV connected or renew the car tags, this term can become troublesome.<sup>56</sup> Further, some people stereotype the widely varied demographic of the military spouse, further exacerbating this tension. This study will explore these types of tensions in Section Three of this chapter. In addition to these cultural challenges, a spouse can face additional difficulties when searching for or trying to further a career.

In the USAF, anachronistic cultural expectations and organizational terminology place physical and emotional taxes on the career-minded spouse. From unit functions to “volunteer” pressure, USAF cultural expectations do not always fit the modern woman, much less the career-minded spouse. Outdated organizational practices follow the same

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<sup>53</sup> Jeffry F. Smith, *Commanding An Air Force Squadron In The 21st Century: A Practical Guide Of Tips And Techniques For Today’s Squadron Commander* (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University, April 2002), 89.

<sup>54</sup> Anonymous Airman and Spouse, Case Study Interview held at Air University, Maxwell AFB, AL.

<sup>55</sup> Mark M. Warner, “The Air Force Wife—Her Perspective” May-June 1984, *Air University Review* (n.d.), <http://www.airpower.maxwell.af.mil/airchronicles/aureview/1984/may-jun/warner.html>.

<sup>56</sup> Both of these actions – cable TV and car licensing – require power of attorney in some overseas locations.

mold, as the term *dependent* no longer accurately describes a large number of military spouses.

## **Section 2 Summary**

Many challenges exist for career-minded military spouses, some in the form of insurmountable barriers, others as hurdles requiring extra time and money to overcome, and even outdated cultural and organizational headwinds that drag on the spouse on a daily basis. The obvious barriers of frequent PCS moves and resultant hiring discrimination against career-minded spouses can prevent them from maintaining a career, despite any amount of effort. Less obvious hurdles such as state licensing requirements, the search for adequate family- and childcare, and intentional or unintentional career advancement discrimination make a career a difficult prospect for career-minded spouses. Finally, cultural anachronisms can weigh heavily on career-minded spouses who do not fit the cultural mold of their grandparents. These examples simply show the structural impediments to dual-career families in the USAF without addressing the effects and implications of these challenges. The effects and interplay of these difficulties can strain the person, the family, and the career. If the incompatibility of the USAF and dual-career families seems present at the micro-level, the incompatibility may have effects on the person, the family, and the organization at the macro (strategic) level. Section 3 will investigate these effects and their implications.

## **Section 3: Work-Family Conflict**

These barriers, hurdles, and headwinds have wide-ranging negatively impacts to the USAF and its people. Work-family conflict research (WFC) provides insight into the effects regarding the intersection of work and family. Work-family conflict, “a form of interrole conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect” is a widely studied and budding area of social science, especially as companies recognize changing demographics and the importance of

the family in employee well-being.<sup>57</sup> Amstad, et al noted work-family conflict exists in two vectors: Work interfering with Family (WIF) and Family interfering with Work (FIW).<sup>58</sup>

### **Work-Family Conflict and Effects on the Spouse**

Three micro-level work-family conflict models show how the career disruptions caused by barriers, hurdles, and headwinds can create emotional trauma to USAF spouses, thus creating work-family conflict. Identity theory indicates career troubles can cause emotional trauma for the spouse via an identity disruption.<sup>59</sup> Also, the application of the Conservation of Resources (COR) model predicts stress for spouses when they lose the “resources” associated with their careers.<sup>60</sup> Finally, the application of the Relative Deprivation model suggests that a depressed comparison between one’s situation and one’s expected capabilities may harm a spouse’s well-being and overall health.<sup>61</sup> The application of identity theory, the COR model, and the Relative Deprivation model show how USAF-based career disruption may create emotional distress in USAF spouses.

First, identity-based theories and research indicate career disruptions can be very emotionally harmful to career-minded spouses because they can assault a person’s sense of identity. “In addition to risking potential loss of income and career momentum,” Shanasarian added, “the relocating spouse quite often loses a network of professional contacts, experiences a shift in job status, and often suffers a loss of personal identity and an erosion in self-confidence.”<sup>62</sup> Further, when expected to perform “wifely duties” at home or to show support for the Airman’s career, spouses may feel as though their identity is under assault. In *Career as a Vehicle for the Realization of Self*, Adamson

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<sup>57</sup> Jeffrey H. Greenhaus and Nicholas J. Beutell, “Sources of Conflict Between Work and Family Roles,” *Academy of Management Review* 10, no. 1 (January 1985): 77; Jennifer L. Glass and Sarah Beth Estes, “The Family Responsive Workplace,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 23, no. 1 (1997): 289–290.

<sup>58</sup> Fabienne T. Amstad et al., “A Meta-Analysis of Work–Family Conflict and Various Outcomes With a Special Emphasis on Cross-Domain Versus Matching-Domain Relations,” *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology* 16, no. 2 (2011): 151.

<sup>59</sup> Peggy A. Thoits, “On Merging Identity Theory and Stress Research,” *Social Psychology Quarterly* 54, no. 2 (June 1, 1991): 101–12.

<sup>60</sup> Stevan E. Hobfoll, “Conservation of Resources: A New Attempt at Conceptualizing Stress,” *American Psychologist* 44, no. 3 (1989): 513–24.

<sup>61</sup> Bram P Buunk and Peter P. M Janssen, “Relative Deprivation, Career Issues, and Mental Health among Men in Midlife,” *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 40, no. 3 (June 1992): 338–50.

<sup>62</sup> Catalyst in Michael Shanasarian, “Job Relocation and the Trailing Spouse,” *Journal of Career Development (Springer Science & Business Media B.V.)* 17, no. 3 (Spring 1991): 180.

illustrated the link between a person's career and the "affirmation of capability, development of confidence, and the cultivation of high self-esteem" – a personal identity.<sup>63</sup> And, in *On Merging Identity Theory and Stress Research*, Thoits argued that negative "identity-relative experiences," such as career disruption, are "powerful predictors of psychological distress."<sup>64</sup> The argument of these social theories and research predicts significant strain on USAF career-minded spouses. Chapter 2 will explore these concepts in USAF spouses. The family, and thus the Airman, is also likely affected by this stress. In addition to one's identity, strain on one's time, energy, and other resources can cause stress as well.

Second, a model of stress called Conservation of Resources predicts USAF career-minded spouses will face both acute and chronic stress throughout their Airman's career. The Conservation of Resources model claims stress is produced as people try to conserve four types of resources: "object resources, conditions, personal characteristics, and energies."<sup>65</sup> *Object* resources can include physical objects such as homes and cars, but also less tangible objects such as certifications and licenses that are effectively lost during each PCS.<sup>66</sup> *Conditions* such as "tenure and seniority," promotion potential, and a familiar work environment are either stripped from a spouse during a PCS or are never presented at all.<sup>67</sup> *Personal characteristics*, another way of saying 'positive outlook,' means seeing situations and "events as predictable and generally occurring in one's best interest," an outlook the barriers, hurdles, and headwinds at least do not support, if not compete with.<sup>68</sup> *Energies* include "time, money, and knowledge."<sup>69</sup> The obvious loss of money from the loss of a career during a PCS is not the only *energy* resource lost, however. The loss of knowledge (of one's previous company, its processes, people, and benefits) adds to the time lost trying to find a new company, train for new licenses, and interview for new jobs. The loss of resources under the Conservation of Resources model predicts both short-term and long-term stress for career-minded USAF spouses.

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<sup>63</sup> Adamson, "Career as a Vehicle for the Realization of Self," 10 of 13 in ProQuest reprint.

<sup>64</sup> Thoits, "On Merging Identity Theory and Stress Research," 106.

<sup>65</sup> Hobfoll, "Conservation of Resources," 517.

<sup>66</sup> Hobfoll, "Conservation of Resources," 517.

<sup>67</sup> Hobfoll, "Conservation of Resources," 517.

<sup>68</sup> Hobfoll, "Conservation of Resources," 517.

<sup>69</sup> Hobfoll, "Conservation of Resources," 517.

A third model, Relative Deprivation, predicts psychological stress for those who see others' situations as better than theirs.<sup>70</sup> Relative deprivation is the divergence of a person's *value expectations* (what they believe they should have) above and away from the person's *value capabilities* (what they perceive they can have).<sup>71</sup> For example, people compare themselves against people similar in age, social status, and educational attainment such as former classmates. For career-minded spouses, then, an assessment of college or grad-school peers who are successfully pursuing a career will likely lead to the value expectation of being able to have a career and its resultant social status, salary, benefits, and emotional fulfillment.<sup>72</sup> However, the spouse's reduced value capabilities (inability to maintain a career, lower salary, etc) compared to their value expectations (peer's successful career, higher salary, etc) create relative deprivation. Further, the inflated value expectations caused by the artificially positive social media façade can exacerbate relative deprivation.<sup>73</sup> According to Buunk and Janssen, relative deprivation is negatively correlated with both psychological and physical well-being.<sup>74</sup> The stress caused through the comparison of one's actual self with one's expected situation is another stress pathway through which the barriers, hurdles, and headwinds are harmful to USAF spouses.

These three models demonstrate how disruption of a spouse's career is detrimental to well-being. The spouse's career disruptions, *caused by the USAF*, and the resulting psychological impacts cause work-family conflict. In a meta-analysis of 98 studies, Amstad, et al found the consequences of work-family conflict are related to "life satisfaction, psychological strain...depression, and substance use and abuse."<sup>75</sup> Also, Amstad, et al said the work-family conflict may affect a spouse's work effectiveness, further degrading their civilian career.<sup>76</sup> Finally, work-family conflict, by definition, creates conflict within the family and is related to "marital satisfaction, family

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<sup>70</sup> Gurr used the model to predict the causes for anti-government rebellion, and although no one expects spouses to rebel against the government, it shows the extreme emotion relative deprivation can generate.

<sup>71</sup> Ted R. Gurr, *Why Men Rebel* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970), 13.

<sup>72</sup> Hardill, *Gender, Migration and the Dual Career Household*, 37–45.

<sup>73</sup> David Kelley, "Stanford 2013 Roundtable Panelists Demystify the Secrets of Happiness," Roundtable, *Stanford University*, October 18, 2013, <http://www.stanford.edu/roundtable/webcast/>.

<sup>74</sup> Buunk and Janssen, "Relative Deprivation, Career Issues, and Mental Health among Men in Midlife."

<sup>75</sup> Amstad et al., "A Meta-Analysis of Work-Family Conflict," 152.

<sup>76</sup> Amstad et al., "A Meta-Analysis of Work-Family Conflict," 152.



satisfaction, and family-related strain,” all of which are important considerations for the USAF in taking care of its families.<sup>77</sup> Because of the interrelationship within the family, the work-family conflict impacts the Airman as well.

### **The Airman: Crossover and Feedback Systems**

Work-family conflict theory also indicates stress may transfer across domains and across people. Crossover theory, an inter-personal model connecting stress to stress outcomes, links the spouse’s stress to the Airman’s well-being. Westman, one of the theory’s pioneers, explains crossover: “stress experienced in the workplace by the individual leads to stress being experienced by the individual’s spouse at home.”<sup>78</sup> Westman also claimed crossover is bi-directional – family stress can create work stress outcomes.<sup>79</sup> Thus, spouse’s stress translates to stress in the Airman (or an Airman’s stress translates to stress in the spouse). In another study of military officers and their professional spouses, Westman and Etzion found crossover can cause stress outcomes to skip over domains – a spouse’s *work* stress causes an Airman’s *work-domain* stress outcomes, and vice versa.<sup>80</sup> Spillover theory may explain this cause, as it predicts the intra-personal (vs inter-personal) transfer of work-family conflict-related stress. Westman said spillover predicts “stress experienced in one domain of life results in stress in the other domain for the same individual”<sup>81</sup> So, not only does work-family conflict-stress in one person cause stress outcomes in the other, but work-family conflict causes work-domain stress in one person to become family-domain stress in both partners.

The application of crossover theory in USAF dual-career couples indicates an interaction, a feedback system, in which the Airman’s USAF career conflicts with the spouse’s career creating work-family conflict in the spouse and stress outcomes for the spouse (at home and thus at work) via the family. These outcomes, in turn, create stress outcomes for the Airman (at home and at work) and work-family conflict stress for the Airman, which can translate to family- and work-domain stress outcomes in the spouse –

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<sup>77</sup> Amstad et al., “A Meta-Analysis of Work-Family Conflict,” 152.

<sup>78</sup> Westman, “Stress and Strain Crossover,” 717.

<sup>79</sup> Westman, “Stress and Strain Crossover,” 717–718; Mina Westman and Dalia Etzion, “Crossover of Stress, Strain and Resources from One Spouse to Another,” *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 16, no. 2 (March 1995): 169–81.

<sup>80</sup> Westman and Etzion, “Crossover of Stress, Strain and Resources from One Spouse to Another.”

<sup>81</sup> Westman, “Stress and Strain Crossover,” 717.

the cycle continues. The interaction of the two careers, the family, the spouse, and the Airman create work-family conflict while crossover and spillover amplify the effects in both the Airman and the spouse.

Work-family conflict can create negative stress outcomes across multiple domains.<sup>82</sup> As indicated in Amstad, et al, Bellavia and Frone's meta-analysis of work-family conflict consequences lists the negative impacts on the individual (the airman or the spouse), the family, and the work domain (the USAF).<sup>83</sup> On the individual, work-family conflict is correlated with both mental health (well-being, cigarette use, drinking problems, mood disorders, substance dependence, clinical anxiety, and emotional exhaustion) and physical health (hypertension, obesity, high cholesterol, and poor diet).<sup>84</sup> Work-family conflict can also affect marital satisfaction, family absenteeism, and marital strain, all of which can lead to divorce.<sup>85</sup> Finally, work-family conflict can have a negative impact on the workforce. Bellavia and Frone list "job satisfaction, effectiveness, turnover," and increased family needs as work outcomes.<sup>86</sup> Huffman, et al, also found work-family conflict increased turnover intentions.<sup>87</sup> The negative outcomes of work-family conflict span the Airman, the spouse, the family unit, and both the spouse's workplace and the USAF workforce.

### **Implications of WFC on the USAF**

In addition to the stress outcomes' obvious negative impacts on the Airman and family, the aggregate impact of turnover, work performance, mental and physical health, and substance abuse on the USAF workforce is what makes work-family conflict a strategically important subject. Turnover, for example, costs the USAF time, money, and resources to recruit and train replacements. Although the USAF is currently conducting force reduction efforts, it is offering retention incentives to some career fields – some of the same career fields in which Stahl found "family stability" as a primary concern in

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<sup>82</sup> Amstad et al., "A Meta-Analysis of Work-Family Conflict," 152.

<sup>83</sup> Michael R. Frone and Gina M. Bellavia, "Work-Family Conflict," in *Handbook of Work Stress*, ed. Julian Barling and E. Kevin Kelloway (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2005), 127–129.

<sup>84</sup> Frone and Bellavia, "Work-Family Conflict," 127–128.

<sup>85</sup> Frone and Bellavia, "Work-Family Conflict," 128–129.

<sup>86</sup> Frone and Bellavia, "Work-Family Conflict," 129.

<sup>87</sup> Ann H. Huffman, Wendy J. Casper, and Stephanie C. Payne, "How Does Spouse Career Support Relate to Employee Turnover? Work Interfering with Family and Job Satisfaction as Mediators," *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 2013, n/a–n/a.



retention problems.<sup>88</sup> Reduced work performance of Airmen can have disastrous consequences such as death, aircraft destruction, or tactical mistakes with operational and strategic consequences. Mental and physical health problems cost the USAF in readiness, medical costs, lost man-hours, and reduced capability. The resulting substance abuse (alcohol in particular) problems can increase health costs and command challenges. Moreover, studies have found alcohol abuse to be a factor in a high percentage sexual assault and misconduct cases.<sup>89</sup> These negative impacts on the USAF workforce individually and combined make the study of work-family conflict in the USAF important.

Crossover theory, feedback systems, and the stress outcomes of work-family conflict combine to create negative impact on the USAF workforce. Crossover theory showed how work-family conflict in the spouse can transfer to the Airman, and vice versa. In a dual-career family, crossover pathways create a feedback system that can amplify the stress for both members. More important, the stress outcomes of work-family conflict have negative impacts in the individual, the family, and the workplace. These concepts combine to create retention (turnover) problems, health concerns, and performance and behavior issues for the USAF workforce.

### Section 3 Summary

The effects of conflict in the form of barriers, hurdles, and headwinds between the Airman's USAF career and the spouse's career may affect the Airman, the spouse, the USAF workforce, and ultimately USAF capability. Identity theory, the Conservation of Resources model, and the model of Relative Deprivation show a number of reasons why a disruption in a career creates work-family conflict and stress. Crossover theory explains how this work-family conflict stress transfers between spouses and, in dual-career families, is amplified by the resulting feedback loop. This amplified work-family conflict produces a number of negative stress outcomes in multiple domains – the family, the Airman, the spouse, and the USAF workforce. The impacts of these stress outcomes

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<sup>88</sup> Brian T. Stahl, "Blunting the Spear: Why Good People Get Out" (Air University, 2013), 152.

<sup>89</sup> Antonia Abbey et al., "Alcohol and Sexual Assault," *Alcohol Research and Health* 25, no. 1 (2001): 44.; "Depending on the sample studied and the measures used, the estimates for alcohol use among perpetrators have ranged from 34 to 74 percent...Similarly, approximately one-half of all sexual assault victims report that they were drinking alcohol at the time of the assault, with estimates ranging from 30 to 79 percent."

create both short- and long-term personnel issues and may have negative strategic implications.

### **Chapter 1 Conclusion**

This chapter explored career characteristics, dual-career families, challenges for career-minded spouses, and work-family conflict in the USAF. One finds a career is distinct from a job in its definitions, its requirements, and its relationship to the person's well-being. The characteristics of a career seem to imply that dual-career families have different challenges than both dual-earner and traditional families. The USAF, by its nature, places a significant burden on dual-career families, mainly by disrupting the spouse's career. The career-minded spouse faces significant challenges managing a family, a career, and the demands of being a USAF spouse. Varying levels of incompatibility between the USAF and the spouse's career exist in the form of barriers, hurdles, and headwinds. The most fundamental of these troubles stems from the Airman's periodic relocations forcing a spouse to either break up the family or give up a career. The effects of this forced mobility are both tangible (relicensing difficulty, costs, re-interviewing, loss of tenure, and promotion difficulties) and intangible (assaulted sense of self, reduced self-confidence, hiring discrimination, and more). Additionally, anachronistic cultural assumptions and social expectations further frustrate the spouse's career-mindedness. Each of these effects manifests itself differently in each spouse, but the effects are real. At least three models, identity theory, Conservation of Resources, and Relative Deprivation help explain the way in which these barriers, hurdles, and headwinds affect the spouse. The application of work-family conflict research to USAF dual-career families shows the stress on the spouse has two important findings: (1) it can cause family problems, work-related problems, and cause physical and mental health problems, and (2) it can transfer across family members to the Airman. This USAF-caused career disruption to military spouses may have serious effects on its spouses. Also, this disruption may affect the USAF workforce via retention problems, work-performance problems, alcohol abuse, and physical and mental health problems. These problems are serious enough to warrant further research to determine both the scope and the scale of the problem for the USAF.

## **Chapter 2: Research Observations**

Gathering current data on dual-career families in the USAF is difficult. Most existing information on the subject is either in unstructured, uncontrolled formats such as blog posts or in highly structured surveys that do not directly address the required questions for this study. Some detailed micro-level research exists, but much of it is outdated. The research in this chapter provides both current and relevant data on the topic of USAF dual-career families and their experiences, adding both detail and depth to the growing body of research on military spouse employment. Most important, it connects the reader with the real-life experiences of current USAF dual-career families in hopes of encouraging a more critical look at the subject and perhaps informing future policy changes.

### **Research Methods**

To obtain the data, this study used a mixed-method, qualitative approach through a case study and a focus group. In this method, the theoretical, hypothetical, and anecdotal conditions in Chapter 1 informed the Case Study research which, in turn, informed the Focus Group research. Although a survey may have provided macro-level data on this subject, the researcher chose qualitative, micro-level research instead. The mixed-method case study-focus group approach creates primary source data on the experiences of current USAF dual-career families without the inherent filter of quantitative methods. The resulting data yields detail to the body of knowledge that is dominated by surveys which sometimes dilute and over-homogenize the diverse demographic of career and employment seeking military spouses.

Due to the small sample size of the case study and focus group, this study makes only limited claims to the scalability of its results; that is, the experiences of the research participants may or may not be a statistically significant representation of the overall USAF population and this study makes no claims as such. This is a task for quantitative methods such as future surveys. Also, case study and focus group methods have inherent limitations and limitations specific to this study's data collection (including the participants and the researcher). A discussion of these case study and focus group limitations exist in their respective sections.

## **Case Study**

### **Overview and Method**

This case study addresses the experiences of a USAF dual-career family that consists of an Air Force officer with 21 years of service and a civilian spouse with a career as a pharmacist. Based on informal discussions with the researcher, their experiences likely mirrored at least some of the conditions found in both anecdotal evidence and the literature review. The research demonstrated the couple did, in fact, experience many of the challenges found in Chapter 1, although they did not display all of the effects that chapter predicted.

The data on the couple was obtained via a combination of in-person and telephonic interviews. The interview was conducted with the officer in-person and the spouse on speakerphone because the couple is currently a geographically separated commuter family. During the interview, exploratory questions about the couple's career-related timeline were asked in order to gain an overall understanding of their experience, followed by specific questions about the couple's experience as it related to Chapter 1's findings. Finally, the couple responded with general observations and recommendations for the Air Force.

### **Limitations of the Case Study**

This case study has limitations both inherent in the method and specific to this case research. First, the sample size of one means it may not be accurate to generalize the findings. In some instances, the existence of a concept in the case study proves that the concept exists, but does not claim existence in the overall population. In other instances, the lack of a concept in the case study demonstrates that the concept does not apply to the entire population, but it does not rule out the possibility that it exists in many, or even all, other cases. Second, the couple may not be demographically representative of the very diverse Air Force population. The Air Force has couples with varying levels of education, age, race, financial background, and many other factors. One cannot generalize results based on a demographic that may not be representative of the population. Finally, the interviewer is also the researcher, which may have allowed bias to transfer from the interviewer to the participants, thus affecting their responses.

Therefore, the primary method by which this study reduces bias is by limiting the scope of its claims. By acknowledging that the findings are not generalizable to the whole population, the study increases in utility. Also, because one purpose of the study is to demonstrate the mere existence of certain concepts, not their scope or their scale, valid conclusions exist which may inform future research.

### **Background of Case Study Participants**

Dave and his wife Sarah are an Air Force dual-career couple who have been married for part of Dave's Air Force career and all of Sarah's pharmacy career.<sup>1</sup> Sarah is a pharmacist with an R.Ph (Registered Pharmacist). She is licensed as a Pharmacist in three states, and is currently working on a fourth state license. Dave is an Air Force officer with two Master's Degrees, a Doctorate in Political Science, nearly ten years of experience flying jet aircraft, has commanded a 450-person squadron, and is currently serving as an Instructor at Air University. The couple is an excellent case to demonstrate the difficulties faced by USAF dual-career families.

The couple met when Dave was at the Air Force Academy and Sarah was in college in Colorado. They dated for approximately seven years, three of which were together in the same state and four were long-distance due to Dave's military PCS moves. In 1996, the same year Sarah earned her Degree in Pharmacy, the two were married. Since then, the couple has attempted to balance the needs of their two careers and their family. This is their story.

### **Observations – Case Study**

As the interview began, Sarah talked about how she selected her career as a Pharmacist and said her relationship with Dave and his Air Force career affected her choice. Sarah originally wanted to be a doctor, but before the two were married, Sarah gave up her desire to go to medical school because she knew being a doctor was incompatible with being an Air Force spouse. Ultimately, she chose pharmacy as a

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<sup>1</sup> The names have been changed to protect the anonymity of the research participants; Anonymous Airman and Spouse, Case Study Interview held at Air University, Maxwell AFB, AL.

compromise because she could still work in the medical field and also move around with Dave.

Since their marriage, the couple has used various methods to manage competing geographical demands of career and family. During some assignments, they were able to live together and both be employed within their career (dual-career collocated). At other times they chose to be geographically separated while maintaining their respective careers (commuter couple). They also had occasions when they were together, but Sarah was not employed within her career. Finally, there were times when they were geographically separated, but Sarah was not working within her career. Table 1 below shows a timeline of the couple's situation since Dave's career began.

Table 1, Case Study Couple's Assignment / Career Timeline

| <b>Years</b> | <b>Dave's Location</b> | <b>Sarah's Location</b> | <b>Dual-Career Situation</b> |
|--------------|------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|
| 88-92        | Colorado               | Colorado                |                              |
| 93           | Texas                  | Colorado                |                              |
| 94-96        | Illinois               | Colorado                | Married 1996                 |
| 96-97        | Illinois               | Illinois                | Dual-Career Collocated       |
| 97-00        | South Carolina         | South Carolina          | Dual-Career Collocated       |
| 00-03        | Colorado               | Colorado                | Dual-Career Collocated       |
| 03-07        | DC                     | Colorado                | Commuter Couple              |
| 07-08        | DC                     | DC (work in VA)         | Dual-Career Collocated       |
| 08-11        | Europe                 | Europe                  | Unemployed                   |
| 11-12        | Deployed               | Colorado                | Commuter Couple              |
| 12-14        | Alabama                | Colorado                | Commuter Couple              |

*Source: Author's Original Work*

The couple found challenges relocating Sarah's pharmacy career following Dave's relocations. These difficulties came in the form of re-licensing and employment hardships as well as liability and safety concerns under varying state laws.

Every time the couple moved, Sarah faced licensing challenges. If the move was within the US, she would need to go through the lengthy, tedious process of re-licensing. Dave described this experience:

Pharmacy laws vary state-to-state. So for every move, she has to get re-licensed. And, re-licensing means taking a test to show knowledge of that state's pharmacy laws. There's probably a good 6 months in there required to get the materials to study the law, to take the test, to go through the bureaucratic process of scoring the test, relicensing, all of that. So there's always a lag, every time we move...And then, to actually look for a job, apply for a job, and so forth. We always knew for the first better part of a year, we would be single-income.

Outside the US, however, it was more than just difficult. When the couple was assigned to Europe, they had to make a choice: "it was either 'you stay in the states or you're gonna have to take a break from work.'" They decided to stay together, but Sarah was unable to continue her career. "The only option we had," Dave said, "was [for her] to drive to Bitburg and work there...[which was a] part-time job, and that was two and a half hours away....So, she really had to take three years off from her career, or [we had to] not live together." Sarah said "it's just been really challenging" because she had to "grow accustomed to the fact...that maybe it was better for a little while to just not go back to work." Regarding the couple's "commuter couple" situation at the time of the interview, she said she was not working because "it's labor intensive to try to take a new exam" for every move and she was "taxed out" with preparing for, taking, and paying for new exams. When they lived in DC, Sarah had to get licensed in Virginia because it was tougher to find employment in Washington, DC. However, the extra distance added multiple hours to her commute every day. She said she often would not be home until very late, sometimes as late as 9:30 PM, even with a job that is normally 9 to 5. However, Sarah described their relationship as being better than before because at least they were living together after being a long-distance commuter couple.

The condition of being a commuter couple can have additional effects on the Airman and the family because commuter couples face challenges having children. As Sarah described: "All the separation incrementally just really added up. Time for us wasn't like time for other people, it just flew by." She described how this affected both

of them but observed, “the Air Force just doesn’t really care.” Difficulties having children can have wide-ranging and deep effects on any couple. Sarah said this was something they both still remain “very sore” about.

Sarah also described the danger to the public and liability for her family inherent in practicing pharmacy under different laws. “It’s a little dangerous when you move...to a state where the laws are different...State law can be vastly different, especially with controlled substances...[such as] morphine, codeine, ADHD drugs...” She also added, “our family could never afford a lawsuit,” so they asked themselves if it was even worth the trouble because of the significant time and effort required to learn new laws. “It decreased our income by \$100K per year,” she said, “but it was better, because a lawsuit could be much, much more.” In addition to new laws, different states had different cultures that created trouble for Sarah. “The culture of pharmacy from state to state is different,” she said. As a result, she was sometimes afraid she would lose her job if she did not adapt quickly enough.

The interview with the couple showed how their dual-career status affects their family and decision-making process for whether Dave will stay in the Air Force or not. Dave said they looked at the decisions about where to go and whether to stay in the Air Force in a context that included Sarah’s career. “With every assignment [decision], we ended up having a conversation...the pharmacy aspect of that was always part of the conversation.” Regarding the tension between the family, the Air Force, and the spouse’s career, “people may leave the armed forces...or it’s gonna cause a lot of stress on the family and they’ll break up...they need to look at those things because they are real things, they are real pressures. Depending on the couple involved, sometimes it does not take [more than the inability for a spouse to maintain a career] to break them up.” Dave also lamented the effects of the inflexible Air Force assignment process on Sarah.

The sad thing is, [in the past] it was always Sarah who had to be the one to sacrifice....in other words, ‘it looks like I’m going here, how can you adjust in order to make this work?’ So it was very one-sided that way, which is unfair to her....She’s the one who had to do all the sacrificing.



Dave admitted he felt guilty about the situation. However, he also said he felt “admiration” for what [Sarah] has given for me...she could have gone to med school, but she purposefully sacrificed to go to pharmacy school.”

In one assignment, however, Dave “did the sacrificing.” This led to work-family conflict in a different direction. He fought for a location that was contrary to his professional development vector but better for Sarah. His mentors told him this assignment would be bad for his career, but because Sarah had made sacrifices for Dave, he willingly took himself off the “career-path” for Sarah. In a way, they sacrificed Dave’s career for Sarah’s needs. This suggests that career-sacrifice may be a transferable good passed between members of a dual-career family. Further, Dave said there was a lot of conflict within the marriage after this “career-ending” move. The two became a commuter couple for the first portion of the next assignment. Sarah could continue to work in Colorado and he could move on to DC. He described this period as very difficult for the two; they even contemplated divorce. They added, it is “hard for people that are professionals to marry a military member...and some couples never got together because of this.” This example shows the strong negative effects the USAF-dual-career interaction can have on a family and an Airman.

#### Cultural Anachronisms

To gather data on Air Force culture regarding dual-career families, Dave and Sarah were asked about their experience with pressure for spouses to participate in social events. Dave acknowledged this pressure existed even at the beginning of his career and their relationship. He said:

There were certain things, social things, that were just part of the institutional fabric...Your wife had to go to officer’s wives club meetings. There were things that were just expected....I asked her to go to the officer’s wives club meeting and she went to one and she was so disillusioned by the fact that every one of them wore their husbands rank and that there was a hierarchy...there were things about that that were so antithetical to what she thought something like that should be, in terms of a support network...that she was completely turned off by it.

Dave said, however, “That certainly caused friction [within our marriage] because I thought that’s part of what she had to do,” yet it was something that made Sarah feel uncomfortable and demeaned. They said this happened in at least two of the squadrons to which Dave was assigned.

Dave and Sarah described an interesting Air Force cultural phenomenon as well: the hyper-focus on the Airman in social interaction. She said of conversations with most other military members and spouses, her career “wasn’t even on their radar....The culture is to focus on [the military member], and what they are doing, not what the husband or the wife is doing...it [seemed like] a waste of time to even pursue all of that. I do not think people are being harsh, it [the spouse’s career] is just not on their radar.” Dave agreed: “it’s just not part of the conversation at all.” So, not only does the Air Force have no apparent method for knowing whether the spouse has a career or not, Air Force cultural mores also seem to minimize the spouse. Sarah said the cultural norm seems to focus on the question, “what does this military person do and how does it affect me? That’s the social culture.” Later, she said of the Air Force as an organization, “the spouse is treated like an appendage...they are completely ignored...I’ve never really been reached out to, ever, except to fill out [a] survey...”

The term *dependent* also struck a strong chord with Sarah. She called it “demeaning,” “nasty,” and “antiquated.” “They need to find another word,” she said. The feeling is exacerbated when spouses are treated poorly on base, something she experienced specifically at military medical facilities. She said the civilian medical world treats every patient as if they are important.

#### The Couple’s Suggestions for the Air Force

When asked for suggestions to improve quality of life for dual-career families, the couple shared a few more observations on the career situation for military spouses and provided potential areas for improvement. First, Dave said the Air Force should explore giving Airmen with career-oriented spouses more geographic stability in their careers, although he said that would certainly require the Air Force to “widen its aperture.” Second, he noted a focus on employment (instead of career) in existing spouse support programs. He said the Airman & Family Readiness Center’s employment opportunities

had jobs such as “working at the BX, being a bagger at the commissary, or mowing lawns. [In other words,] non-career-oriented.” He recommended, “some kind of support for professional family members,” to include “assistance with licensing issues,” etc. Sarah expanded on this request with a suggestion for a resume service for professionals. Third, Sarah noted the importance of a personal touch with people. She suggested the military sponsor support groups for professional spouses because, as she said, “sometimes people just want to talk about it outside of arguing about it [with their spouse] or fretting about it.” Finally, Sarah offered a poignant observation: **“If they want a strong military force, strong families will really help create that. No man or woman is an island.”**



## Focus Group

### Overview, Participants, and Method

The focus group consisted of six USAF dual-career couples chosen from among nine respondent volunteer couples. Both members of each couple were present during the focus group. The couples all included one Air Force officer with approximately 13 years of service and a civilian spouse. Among the civilian spouses, there were two teachers, one lawyer, one dietician, one political consultant/strategic communications professional, and one who was both a government civilian and an Air Force Reservist. At least two of the spouses had prior military service. Among the group polled for volunteers, many more than six couples fit the criteria of being a dual-career couple, but time constraints kept some couples from participating. Two volunteer couples were not selected and one dropped out at the last minute due to a scheduling conflict. Of the two not selected, one was a member of an allied nation and did not fit the research demographic for the study (US Air Force). The other couple technically fit the research demographic, but the researcher chose not to include this couple for two reasons: (1) the researcher wished to keep the focus group to approximately six couples, and (2) because the spouse is a male retired Colonel, the researcher felt other focus group participants may temper their responses based on a perceived superior-subordinate relationship or social desirability bias. The couple that dropped out at the last minute included an Airman and a civilian spouse who is a lawyer. These volunteer couples met for a focus group in February 2014.

The focus group was conducted at a subdivision clubhouse in the late afternoon during a single session. The focus group discussion occurred in two parts, each approximately fifty minutes long and separated by a fifteen-minute break. The focus group began with introductions of the researcher, assistant (interviewer's spouse), and the participants. The researcher then gave a description of the research purpose, the focus group method, and the anonymity contract regarding audio recording and data use. An audio recorder captured the entire event, except the informal discussions during the break. As a process, the researcher would ask a question about a concept found in Chapter 1 to see how many people experienced the concept.<sup>2</sup> Then the researcher would

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<sup>2</sup> In some cases, the questions arose from the results of the case study.

ask for someone to describe their experience in detail. This generally sparked a discussion between participants that sometime strayed from the initial question, but usually provided relevant information. The researcher usually followed this new line of discussion to provide additional data, but sometimes would inject another question to refocus the discussion on topic. Toward the end of the focus group, the researcher asked for recommendations to the Air Force for how to better care for dual-career families.

### **Limitations of the Focus Group**

Similar to the case study, the focus group has limitations both inherent in the method and specific to this particular event. First, as with the case study, the small sample size limits the generalizability of the findings to the greater USAF population. Second, this group may not be demographically representative of the very diverse Air Force population. The group consisted entirely of high-performing officers who have, in general, chosen to make the Air Force a long-term career. The Air Force is likely interested in research about this specific demographic, but the study may inform on the greater Air Force dual-career population in general. Third, this focus group did not differentiate the data between the specialties (Air Force Specialty Code) of the Airmen or the career type of the spouses. Within the dual-career demographic, there are sub-demographics for both the spouse (teacher, lawyer, etc) and the Airman (officer, enlisted, pilot, maintainer, intel, etc). The experiences of these sub-demographics may covary with their demographic, but that analysis is best suited for quantitative research. Fourth, a focus group has some inherent biases, such as social desirability bias (for example: a couple not wanting to discuss marital problems in front of a group of peers). Finally, and also like the case study, the focus group leader is also the researcher, which may have allowed bias to transfer to the participants, thus affecting their responses.

### **Observations – Focus Group**

The study began with a discussion of the definition of *career* and *job*. All participants considered the two terms different. One participant said, “a career is

something long-term; a job is something to pass the time or make a little money.”<sup>3</sup> A career, another said, provides “a chance for promotion, advancement, and continuity.” “There’s a personal fulfillment that comes with having a career versus going to a job,” said one respondent, “you’re working towards something greater.” Finally, one participant said a career is tied to a person’s identity: “there’s something definitional about it...it defines who you are.” Everyone agreed on all of these comments.

When asked about the requirements for a career, all spouses said they needed specialized training, licensing, or educational qualifications for their career. Among the six spouses present, all had Bachelor’s Degrees and the rest either had, or were in the process of completing, a Master’s Degree or a professional degree. The two teachers discussed the challenges of moving these licenses and said that although there is a Federal teaching license, it is “extremely difficult and time consuming” to get. They also said the state-specific certificates expire after a certain period of time, so they needed to update them. However, this process required taking additional college-level courses, preparing for certifications, and paying certification fees, which was expensive. One spouse praised the MyCAA (My Career Advancement Account) program, which is a scholarship program designed to offset the costs of education and licensing challenges for military spouses.<sup>4</sup> However, these spouses disappointedly noted the program is only available for junior (E1-E5 and O1-O2) spouses so although it may have helped them on one PCS move, it no longer applied. The lawyer said law certifications have similar requirements, but that she only had to take the additional courses if she wanted to practice law and currently, she teaches law at an online college. The dietician also said she had to get a license for each state and needed continuing education in every state. These requirements, however, are just the minimum to work within a given career. More certifications may be required in order to advance. One Airman likened it to Squadron Officer’s School in residence. “It’s not mandatory,” he said, “but it sure looks good if you go,” and “limits your advancement if you don’t go.” The strategic communications

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<sup>3</sup> All references to the Focus Group and its participants refer to this reference; Focus Group conducted in Deer Creek Clubhouse, Montgomery, AL, interview by John Paul F. Mintz, February 24, 2014.

<sup>4</sup> “The Military Spouse Career Advancement Account (MyCAA) Scholarship program is a workforce development program that provides up to \$4,000 of financial assistance to eligible military spouses who are pursuing a license, certification or Associate’s degree in a portable career field and occupation”; “My Career Advancement Account,” accessed March 1, 2014, <https://aiportal.acc.af.mil/mycaa/Default.aspx>.

professional said she had to get a post-Master's degree certification in order to compete for advancement.

The respondents also agreed the biggest challenge to their careers was the lack of stability caused by frequent PCS moves in which they felt they had little input to the location or duration of the assignment. One Airman wondered why he was able to stay at his base for almost 7 years and yet other Airmen "go from one F-16 squadron to another F-16 squadron" to do the same job. He said that because of his stability, his spouse was able to go to law school and at least spend a few years within her career. Another Airman asked, rhetorically, why Airman moved to different bases: "How many bases have we moved to [do the same job] at a different base?" "At the gaining location, there's probably a dude that's swapping with you, that probably wants to stay as well," said another, "you were passing a dude on the highway." The Airmen acknowledged the need for breadth, but suggested lateral moves within the same base. He said, "you can get a different perspective by looking at the same horse from different directions." The length of assignment was also a specific focus. A number of respondents said that being in place at least five years instead of three or less would make a significant difference.

From one spouse:

Going somewhere for two years...do you really wanna put the effort into the job interview and invest your time and your money and your energy into something that's gonna be less than two years which will be a blip on your resume which is just gonna ask the next job "why did you leave after two years? It's just not worth it...if you had five years, then you're thinking, this could be something this could lead to the next step. This does not look like I'm bailing out on jobs every few years.

Also a concern for the spouses is the lack of a long-term assignment outlook for their Airmen, "you never know where you're going and you never know how long you're going to be at a place," said one respondent.

The researcher also asked questions to explore the spouses' experiences during the transition from being a single, career-oriented person to a military spouse. All of the spouses chose and were pursuing their careers before they married their Airman. In their pre-marriage discussions, they found a variety of experiences. Some said they were

aware of the challenges, but not the full extent of the difficulty they would face.<sup>5</sup>

Another was skeptical that they could make the marriage work despite the Air Force challenges to her career because of the “depressing stories” she heard from other spouses. Her Airman, on the other hand, was more optimistic because he focused on the successful cases such as his squadron commander’s wife who was a successful lawyer. Still others, particularly the former dual-mil families, knew exactly how the Air Force worked, yet still faced difficulties trying to manage a one-Airman dual-career family (with a civilian spouse).

Regarding the Air Force’s support for career-minded spouses, the participants all followed one basic theme: the support available was sparse and what was available was aimed at helping people get jobs, not maintain careers. Two respondents claimed the office only had paper handouts with links to basic job search websites that anyone could find with a simple Internet search.<sup>6</sup> Another respondent was much more direct: “it’s not helpful, there’s no information there, and there’s no support...they just don’t know [about careers].” “The person you’re liaising with in the office does not comprehend [what you’re looking for]...it’s just another [person] handing you pamphlets...They’re not educated on the process for career building...And, the glut of jobs are targeted at...spouses...who do not have a...career already.” The on-base support is “aimed at getting spouses...a job, not a career”, said one spouse. An Airman added, it’s “not for your graduate-degree spouses.” The best help, they said, was to find a spouse who had successfully navigated the challenges already and ask for their advice. One interesting problem was a difficulty finding the help after PCS moves. He said it seemed as if the name changed by MAJCOM or base, so one would “lose track of the very officer that could offer you help.” Only one couple noted this difficulty. The group also acknowledged that with limited resources, it is reasonable to expect the Air Force to focus its help on the demographic with a lower income. However, one respondent added that the service “needs to realize that it may lose some of its ‘shiny pennies,’ (best and brightest) from a retention point of view.” Another spouse said, “I want those folks to get

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<sup>5</sup> “I think you’re aware, but it’s just different once you’re in it, you know you’re going to move around.”

<sup>6</sup> They did not directly name the office, but seemed to indicate it was the Airman and Family Readiness Center.



help too...it's just not an even playing field just because my [Airman] makes more money [does not] mean we're good (and do not need career support)."

### A Culture of Anachronism

Regarding Air Force culture, the group was also unified in their experience; they all felt the Air Force followed (even pressured toward) an outdated model that is mostly incompatible with dual-career families. This concept seemed to create a significant emotional response; the group spent nearly 20 minutes out of the first 50 minutes discussing anachronistic culture and organizational processes. One Airman summarized his thoughts on the Air Force family schema:

There is very much this idea that we're a family organization...with cookouts and burger burns and the wife brings the kids and they come and see daddy and it's all very circa 60's/70's/80's military life. Like they're trying to recreate some story, whether it be the great Santini or the antithesis of the great Santini...as if the Air Force said 'great, that's doctrine: a spouse, two to seven kids, and you're gonna have this life...We're gonna move you all over the world...Just wait until you tell your spouse and she's gonna be so excited. Think about all the exciting things she can do in DC or wherever.' That's great if it's the cookie cutter experience that we're all having, but it's clearly not...I always felt there was one way the Air Force wanted you to do it. You're gonna live on the base and you're gonna cut your yard and you're gonna do these things – sort of an issued family. And if you did not do that, then you're gonna be an aberration and it was *your* choice to go a different route.

Everyone seemed very supportive of this comment. One person added, "the Air Force has an opinion about how the family is supposed to be" and said the Air Force thought an Airman's spouse should be a housewife. Another respondent described this Air Force culture regarding families as an "old paradigm." Still another Airman offered an opinion on the organizational reasons for this anachronistic culture:

We're probably [at least a decade] away from a solution because, who makes changes? Senior leaders make changes...and lot of the senior leaders I've met or had the opportunity to know...most of them, their spouses have cut the cord on a career at some point in time...This problem doesn't resonate to senior leaders yet. It might in a few years as the world changes, but not yet.

These general comments resonated with the group, but they also provided specific examples of anachronistic behaviors incompatible with dual-career families. For example, one Airman chided the “Year of the Air Force Family” as “all wrong” and series of “bouncy-houses and craft shows” when what his family needed was to a change in office hours and procedures to support a spouse who is unable to meet typical base support agency office hours because the spouse also has to work during normal hours.

Most of the spouses (and Airmen) felt pressure for the spouse to participate in unit events and take on responsibilities. One Airman described a situation in which his spouse, who was working for the state governor, got a call from the “squadron commander’s wife that [said] ‘I need you all (the spouses) to meet me at a Flight commander spouses’ lunch on Wednesday at 10:00 AM because my kids will be at school.’” The Airman’s spouse then said to the focus group:

I just started a new job and I’m not gonna tell them ‘oh, I gotta go meet my husband’s boss’s wife on Wednesday because she said so, and I don’t know how long I’m gonna be gone.’ So [I said] ‘I’m sorry, I can’t make it,’ which did not go over well...There were a lot of expectations...we’ve had a few things like that happen. [For example], the cookouts, but they’re often at 2:00 on a Thursday, so I can’t go...and quite frankly, I don’t want to use my vacation time to do that.

In a frustrated manner, another spouse said hypothetically to an Airman, “maybe you can come in the middle of your work day and meet my new Principal.” Another added, “there’s a culture of out-of-touchness.” When the rest of the group was asked if they had similar experiences, one said:

It seems hypocritical...if the active duty member has any leadership aspirations, there is absolutely the expectation that his wife, or her husband, take on the spouse group. And that’s a full time job...a huge commitment. How the AF would expect a woman to be able to juggle children, a career, and those obligations and not be paid for them is ridiculous.

However, although most spouses and Airmen had this experience, one couple tempered the discussion. One of the spouses (who is a former Airman) said she did not feel pressure to lead spouses’ groups, although she admitted to feeling unwelcome pressure to

attend social events such as Air Force Balls, etc. Another Airman said his squadron addressed this type of concern by asking for volunteers for the key spouse, so they did not force the responsibilities on someone by virtue of their Airman's position.

### Child Care

The group also indicated that although balancing two careers is difficult, adding children and childcare to the equation made it nearly impossible. One spouse said her Airman's Air Force career meant she could not maintain a career and have children. She called it an "unworkable puzzle" because of the unpredictability of the Airman's job. It was not that any two careers prevented a couple from caring for children and having careers, but the Air Force specifically created significant barriers to having children and maintaining two careers. "Do I want a career or do I want children?" one spouse said, "because with his job the way it is, I can't realistically have both." Another said "I can't really work and have this new baby and you're (the Airman) gone all the time."

### Discrimination Against Military Spouses

The participants also explained how military spouses face hiring discrimination and promotion discrimination, both as a result of frequent geographic relocation. When asked if they had ever experienced hiring discrimination, at least three of the spouses spoke up. They said companies typically ask potential employee spouses about their Airman's military assignment. This caused the respondent spouses to be anxious before and during interviews. It also caused some spouses to carefully measure their words (and sometimes lie) so as not to advertise that their spouse was military or that they might be moving soon.<sup>7</sup> One spouse *knows* her company discriminates against military spouses because of the constant moves. She said she did not think she would have been hired if she had been forthright about her Airman's frequent geographic moves. "Now that I actually hire for the company," she added, "I know I wouldn't have gotten the job." The

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<sup>7</sup> Lying to a potential employer seems to be a widespread practice for people in the civilian workforce who feel they may be discriminated against, such as pregnant women; Whitney Johnson, "In the Messiness of Life, What's Fair to Employers?," *Harvard Business Review Blog Network*, February 26, 2014, <http://blogs.hbr.org/2014/02/in-the-messiness-of-life-whats-fair-to-employers/>.

sometimes-short assignments of Airmen create an especially difficult situation for the spouse. “Who’s going to hire me for a ten-month stint?” said one spouse.

The advancement discrimination the spouses experienced was also a function of PCS moves. One telecommuter spouse (who is a telecommuter not by choice, but because of her Airman’s career) said she was told “you’ve made it as high as you’re going to go as a telecommuter.” Another was also told she was not considered a candidate for advancement because she telecommuted, but that she would be if she was at the office in-person. Two of the spouses said they had taken a number of lateral moves within their companies because of their Airman’s PCS moves, something they said reduces their chances for long-term advancement.

#### Effects on the USAF Work Force

The group’s comments showed that the spouse’s career challenges affect the spouse, the family, the airman at work, and affect the airman’s career decisions, sometimes to the detriment of the Air Force. In addition to the aforementioned effects on the spouses, some respondents were explicit in the way this affected them. One spouse said (tongue-in-cheek) she “had a few meltdowns” before her and her Airman got married after she found out how hard it was to maintain a career as an Air Force spouse. Another said, “it [expletive deleted] sucks to know that you have to subordinate [your career] to your active duty spouse and...I’d be lying if I said I didn’t actively have to fight allowing resentment to set in.” Also, at least one spouse said stress from Relative Deprivation was not only present, but it combined with existing stress to make the situation worse: “it’s exacerbated by the fact that you see people now, on Facebook™ and stuff, that were sharing that dream with you – [the one] you wanted to do. And that makes it worse in a lot of ways.” But the spouses were not the only people this affected.

These respondents said these effects on the spouse also affected the relationship and the family. One spouse claimed the resulting stress nearly caused her and her Airman to divorce, more than once. “It’s no wonder the divorce rate in the military because [my Airman] and I have come darn close a few times, not because that’s really what we wanted, but it seemed like literally the only solution.” In addition to these emotional effects, the group described the financial effects on the family. Regarding the

short-term, there was a comment comparing military members to civilian peers: “Our generation is very much like the rest of our [civilian] peers who understand that things are expensive and this is a two-income world. The houses are all bought by two income [families] in the places where we all want to live so you kinda gotta have two-incomes...” The group also had concerns about long-term financial effects. One respondent brought up the Time Value of Money to describe these long-term effects of a spouse’s career disruptions. “You lose not just those earning years, but the benefits that the time value of money those earning years can provide...Waiting until you’re out, and then [letting your spouse] have a career? You’ve lost twenty years of TVM...and raising kids is expensive.” More than one participant said that financial stability in retirement was a major concern regarding a spouse’s career disruption. The stress on the family seemed to transfer to the Airmen as well.

All six of the Airmen acknowledged that their spouse’s career challenges created stress and emotional effects on them, including while they were at work. There was no discussion of the stress’s effects on operator’s missions, but the group discussed the constant underlying stress on the Airman. One Airman said,

There’s a tension between the mission, and you feel this, all of us that wear a uniform, you feel the tension between the responsibility to the unit and the mission and being the best at it, because it matters, and the responsibility you have as a husband and a father. Where those things don’t match up, that weighs on you, after the landing and before takeoff. That’s always on your mind.

Another summed up his experience by saying “it overhangs everything, particularly during assignment time.” Other’s experiences seemed to surround attempts to balance their spouse’s career needs with their own, specifically with how they communicate that to their commander. Most Airmen did not feel they could freely share their spouse’s career concerns with their commander at assignment time without fear their commander assuming they are not fully committed to the Air Force. One described the anxiety about talking to the commander:

What’s our conduit, how do we solve or alleviate these stresses? We talk to our commander...but there’s a filter that occurs...you go in and you meet with [your commander], whose personalities vary widely and you’re [supposed to be] the stoic military member

that says, 'my kids and my wife are gonna take it as it comes.' But you don't really wanna say that because...you wonder...you know going in to that situation that you can't be honest because this dude is drinking the blue kool-aid and him and his wife may be divorced the next year [because he doesn't get it] or they may be leave-it-to-Beaver at home and they may dig it and I'm really happy for them, but it's tough to transmit these dynamics to folks that may not have these dynamics to deal with at home. And [you worry that] their response then is to think, 'well, is this dude really a team player?' when it has nothing to do with that. So yeah, we've definitely had stressful times.

"You don't wanna be that guy that brings your home life into the squadron," said another, "even if I had the nicest commander in the world...I'd be reluctant to bring it up." It also seemed that this anxiety may be cultural and specific to particular commanders, because this same Airman regretfully admitted that he was not always understanding with his subordinates when he was a Flight Commander. This fear was more present, according to the group, when a commander was not involved. One Airman said he would never consider putting anything about his spouse's career on his Airman Development Plan (assignment preference form) because there seems to be an expectation of unlimited organizational commitment, even from the family. These factors not only affected assignment decision, but bigger decisions for the families.

Finally, every one of the Airman and their spouses said the spouse's career prospects were a major factor in the constant decision-process regarding whether the Airman will stay in the Air Force. For example, one spouse was told by her boss, "if you were only in [City X], you'd be a superstar," which the Airman said brought him very close to getting out. In addition to the participants' experiences, a few of the participants relayed stories of their co-workers who left the Air Force for their spouses' careers. They named at least three below-the-zone O-5's who left the service in order to give their spouse a better opportunity to pursue their career. One gave his analysis of the situation:

If the service really cares that much about retaining its best and brightest, they need to understand that sometimes the best and brightest like to meet other best and brightest fall in love, get married, and have kids...Just as much as they have changed their attitudes toward homosexuality, towards race, towards gender issues, [they need to get] the idea that you can have [career-minded] people who are married to other [career-minded] people

and [who want] successful careers that do not necessarily involve moving around every three or four years just so you can get some ‘growth.’

Finally, one Airman summarized his thoughts on the Air Force’s personnel management strategy regarding talented Airmen who are in dual-career families: “The Air Force has a retention problem for quality people who attract other quality people.” In other words, the Air Force may be losing some of its talented Airmen because their spouses wish to pursue a career but cannot because of the Air Force.<sup>8</sup>

## **Chapter 2 Summary**

This chapter presented observations on current USAF dual-career families to improve the body of research on Air Force families. The case study examined the challenges an Airman and his pharmacist spouse faced throughout a 21-year career. The focus group then explored the experiences of six mid-career Airmen and their spouses. These micro-level studies provided data on how Air Force culture and practices affect its dual-career families. Additionally, the narratives connect the reader with real Airmen and spouses through a candid, personal look at their experiences. The next chapter will discuss the data’s meaning and implications in current Air Force context.

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<sup>8</sup> This concept of talented, high-demand Airmen leaving active duty because of family considerations is echoed by Stahl’s work which found that family considerations are a major driver, if not the primary consideration, for the Air Force’s retention problems within the Combat Air Forces; Stahl, “Blunting the Spear: Why Good People Get Out.”



### **Chapter 3: Analysis**

An analysis of the data presented in Chapter 2 confirms many expectations from Chapter 1. The Air Force policy of frequently moving its Airmen is a direct and primary cause of career disruption for its spouses. This practice of hypermobility has latter-order effects that perpetuate this career difficulty. Additionally, Air Force organizational and social cultures appear to clash with the dual-career family as well, due to what research shows are anachronistic (outdated) practices and social mores. The combination of the career difficulty and cultural anachronisms cause emotional and financial challenges to Air Force dual-career families. These challenges affect the well-being of the spouses and Airmen, push existing Air Force families toward divorce and disrupt Airmen's budding relationships. In addition, the research shows these effects cause Airmen to have increased stress at work, make career choices that fail to maximize their potential, and cause them to reconsider their commitment to serving in the Air Force.

#### **Hypermobility vs Spouse Careers**

Of the seven dual-career families that participated in this study, all of them have had their careers disrupted numerous times by their Airman's Permanent Changes of Station (PCS). The disruption existed in five main forms. At each assignment, the spouses had to terminate employment within their careers as a result of their Airman's changes of station. The Airmen felt they had no control over when or whether they would be reassigned, and felt unspoken pressure to hide their concerns regarding their spouses' careers from their Commanders and assignment system. After their Airmen's changes of station, the spouses faced difficulty re-attaining employment within their career. This was due, in part, to hiring discrimination by employers, seemingly as a result of hyper-mobility associated with being a military spouse. Finally, the spouses faced difficulty advancing within their career because of a "glass ceiling" – promotion discrimination also seemingly related to hyper-mobility. These disruptions were all related to the primary cause of disruption: hypermobility.

The primary disruption to spouses' careers is caused by the incompatibility between the hypermobility of Airmen and the reduced or non-portability of the spouse's



career. Every spouse in the study had to involuntarily terminate career-related employment due to a change of station at least once, and most did it multiple times. Sarah, for example, the spouse from the case study, has had to do this five times. Of the spouses in the focus group, all of them have had to quit a job within their career. In fact, the most common employment scenario reported approaching a change of station was employment termination. None of these spouses reported a willingness of any of their employers to geographically relocate them to the same location as their Airman. However, there were two exceptions in which spouses did not leave their employer. One involved spouses that were able to telework with their employer (whether as a pre-existing or newly negotiated arrangement); all of these spouses had to terminate employment at least once before securing their current telework position. The other exception was the couples that chose to be geographically separated (commuter couple) in order for the spouse to retain her career. Unfortunately, this required the spouse to choose between career and family. Thus, for the spouses in this study, *reduced- or non-portability of spouse careers is a condition at odds with the Airman's frequent geographic relocations (1.1)*. One may claim an Airman's change of station is voluntary and thus the choice to disrupt the spouse's career belongs to the Airman. The research, however, shows a more complicated context.

The Airman in the focus group described a lack of control over when and whether they will move. They felt they did not have a choice *whether* they were going to relocate, and felt as if they had little input to *where* the Air Force would relocate them. They were correct in this feeling that they did not have a choice *whether* they would be relocated. Officers under an Active Duty Service Commitment (ADSC) generally have no option to refuse the assignment; and being under an ADSC is typical.<sup>1</sup> The rules are similar for Enlisted Airmen, although the verbiage is slightly different. Airmen *not* under an ADSC sometimes can refuse, but are generally forced to leave the Air Force under the "Seven Day Option."<sup>2</sup> Any requests to defer or delay an assignment are typically made to support the needs of the Air Force or for special circumstances such as an Airman

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<sup>1</sup> "Assignments, Incorporating through Change 2, 8 June 2012" (US Air Force, June 8, 2012), 2.29.5.1, 2.29.5.2.

<sup>2</sup> The Seven Day Option is a policy in which the Airman has seven days to submit their request to leave the Air Force; "Assignments, Incorporating through Change 2, 8 June 2012," 2.30.

undergoing medical rehabilitation.<sup>3</sup> However, this is just a request and is typically used to temporarily delay an assignment. Furthermore, the Air Force actually has some policies in place that specifically designed to prevent officers from being able to stay in one place for more than four or five years.<sup>4</sup> And, AFI 36-2110 specifically cites humanitarian assignment and deferment requests based on spouse employment considerations will generally be denied.<sup>5</sup> Thus, *Airmen of career-minded spouses feel they have little input into when and whether they change station (thus disrupting their spouses' careers) (1.2)*. Yet, it is not only when and whether they will move, but also to where.

The Airmen also felt they had little control over where their next assignment would be and felt they could not truthfully communicate their preferences regarding their spouses' careers. Before an upcoming assignment, Airmen communicate their preferences via their web-based Airman Development Plan (ADP) and their commander/supervisor to Air Force Personnel Center. Despite these preferences, the Airmen in the study felt required to tell their commanders they are willing to accept any assignment. They were hesitant to tell their commander about any "limitation" on their commitment (the spouse's career) for fear of "not being considered a team player."<sup>6</sup> Also, the Airman felt they could not communicate their concerns on their ADP. They said they felt required to say, "I will accept any assignment consistent with the needs of the Air Force" on their ADP or they will be given a bad assignment or be denied an assignment on their career track. This experience is supported by official policies. For example, career-furthering assignments such as Squadron Command and Developmental Education come with a written requirement to be an unlimited "volunteer" for any location, to include year-long deployments. Also, Air Force Instruction 36-2110 specifically states "individual preferences...may be considered to the extent these factors are consistent with operational manning requirements" and "While an officer's preferences will be considered, there is no guarantee the next assignment or location will

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<sup>3</sup> "Assignments, Incorporating through Change 2, 8 June 2012."

<sup>4</sup> "Assignments, Incorporating through Change 2, 8 June 2012," Attachments 18 and 19.

<sup>5</sup> "Assignments, Incorporating through Change 2, 8 June 2012," A24.7.7.

<sup>6</sup> All quotes from the focus group in this Chapter reference this citation; Focus Group conducted in Deer Creek Clubhouse, Montgomery, AL.

be to a preference--ultimately the next assignment will be determined by the needs of the AF.”<sup>7</sup> Thus, in order for Airmen to maintain their careers, they must volunteer to move their families at the discretion of their assignment authority. *Official policies thus support the participant’s impression that the Air Force has an expectation of unlimited commitment with no consideration for the spouse’s career. (1.3).* Once the family knew their next duty station, the spouses began their search for new employment within their career, but always experienced difficulties starting over at their new location.

The research participants also reported significant difficulty re-attaining employment within their careers and near the Airman’s new duty station following each change of station. The study found this process can take up to a year, thus causing a break in pay, a decrease in career proficiency, and an unwanted employment gap in future resumes. The process of re-attaining employment is time-, money-, and effort-intensive; the process includes: searching for open positions, researching the company(ies), rewriting resumes, preparing for the interview, calling in favors from professional network, interviewing, and waiting. Also, the geographic separation between the spouse and the new duty makes in-person interviews costly and unwieldy. Another difficulty the spouses faced includes state-specific relicensing, a process that needs to be completed before applying to another employer, but is expensive, time consuming, and difficult. The study thus confirmed *spouses face difficulty re-entering their career following a PCS due both to licensing delays and the basic process of re-attaining employment in a new location (1.4).*

The study found the spouses experienced hiring discrimination due to being a Air Force spouse. Half of the focus group experienced this discrimination. Often, it came in the form of a direct question: “Is your husband in the military? How long is he stationed here?” followed by an abrupt end of the interview. Others felt they were not even considered because their resume shows a different career every few years, negatively labeling them as a “job hopper.” Although the Air Force favors diverse work experience, civilian companies sometimes prefer a person with depth. This hiring discrimination is likely the result of the hyper-mobility of the spouses, as companies seem to want an employee who will be in one place for a long period of time. Although it is generally

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<sup>7</sup> “Assignments, Incorporating through Change 2, 8 June 2012,” 2.4, 2.32.1.1.

difficult to prove discrimination without inside information on the hiring company, one of the spouses (who is now a hiring manager for her company) confirmed that her company would not have hired her if they had known she was a military spouse. Thus, *the hyper-mobility of Air Force spouses perpetuates (or at least contributes to) an environment of hiring discrimination against Air Force spouses (1.5).*<sup>8</sup> Yet, it is not only hiring discrimination the spouses faced.

The spouses also faced promotion discrimination. Two ways exist for an employee to be promoted within their career: be promoted within the company (vertical promotion) or be hired to a promotion in another company (diagonal promotion). The spouses' hyper-mobility prevented both. Due primarily to the short (2-3 year) assignments within a company, a spouse never has time to move up within the ranks of that company. Even the teleworkers that were able to stay with their company despite changes of station faced explicit statements that they will not be promoted as teleworkers. These spouses said they had to turn down promotion opportunities within their company because telework was the only option their Airman's career afforded them. The spouses who changed employers to another company after a change of station were not hired into a diagonal promotion, possibly due to the employer's knowledge of their hyper-mobility. It could also be that because of the spouse's frequent moves, this condition perpetuates itself by causing a lack of depth within the spouse's career (even across different companies). Further, a company may not be willing to invest coveted higher positions on a military spouse from whom they may not get any return on their investment after 2 years. Thus, *the hyper-mobility of military spouses reduces their promotion potential, which manifests itself as promotion discrimination (1.6).*

The results of this study show how the Air Force policy of hypermobility is detrimental to its spouse's careers. First, the reduced- or non-portability of spouse careers is a condition at odds with the Airman's frequent geographic relocations. Despite desires to manage these relocations to support their spouses' careers, Airmen feel (correctly) they have little input into when and whether they change station and official policies thus support the participant's contention that the Air Force has an expectation of

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<sup>8</sup> This seems to apply to all military spouses, though this study is limited to Air Force spouses.

unlimited commitment with no consideration for the spouse's career. Spouses attempt to work around these challenges and seek re-employment after quitting due to a change of station. Yet, spouses face difficulty re-entering their career following a PCS due both to licensing delays and the basic process of re-attaining employment in a new location. Furthermore, the hyper-mobility of Air Force spouses perpetuates (or at least contributes to) an environment of hiring discrimination against Air Force spouses.<sup>9</sup> Not only is it difficult for spouses to reattain employment within their career, their careers are stunted because the hyper-mobility of military spouses reduces their promotion potential, which manifests itself as promotion discrimination. These conditions support the first two Summary Findings: *Air Force personnel management policies and organizational culture hold the Airman's career as leverage to attain unlimited commitment from the family while creating a condition of hypermobility that is a barrier to these spouses' careers (Summary Finding #1). For spouses, the ability to reattain employment at new geographic locations – employment portability – is helpful, but career continuity (the ability to maintain a continuous career with an employer, or across employers but with the possibility of upward mobility) is what career-minded spouses need (Summary Finding #2).*

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<sup>9</sup> This seems to apply to all military spouses, though this study is limited to Air Force spouses.

Table 2, Findings 1.1-1.6, Hypermobility and Spouse Careers

| #   | Section Finding                                                                                                                                                                        |
|-----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1.1 | <i>For the spouses in this study, reduced- or non-portability of spouse careers is a condition at odds with the Airman's frequent geographic relocations.</i>                          |
| 1.2 | <i>Airmen of career-minded spouses feel they have little input into when and whether they change station (thus disrupting their spouses' careers).</i>                                 |
| 1.3 | <i>Official policies thus support the participant's impression that the Air Force has an expectation of unlimited commitment with no consideration for the spouse's career</i>         |
| 1.4 | <i>Some Air Force spouses face difficulty re-entering their career following a PCS due both to licensing delays and the basic process of re-attaining employment in a new location</i> |
| 1.5 | <i>The hyper-mobility of Air Force spouses perpetuates (or at least contributes to) an environment of hiring discrimination against Air Force spouses.</i>                             |
| 1.6 | <i>The hyper-mobility of military spouses reduces their promotion potential, which manifests itself as promotion discrimination.</i>                                                   |

Source: Author's Original Work

Table 3, Summary Findings #1 and 2

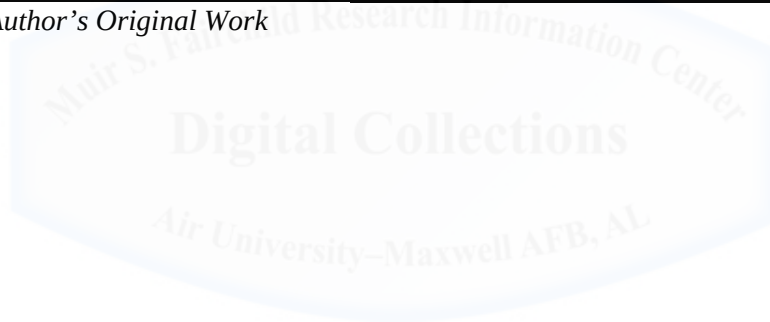
| # | Summary Finding                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|---|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | <i>Air Force personnel management policies and organizational culture create a condition of hypermobility that is a barrier to Airmen's spouses' careers while holding the Airman's career as leverage to attain unlimited commitment from the family.</i>                                                          |
| 2 | <i>For spouses, the ability to reattain employment at new geographic locations – employment portability – is helpful, but career continuity (the ability to maintain a continuous career with an employer, or across employers but with the possibility of upward mobility) is what career-minded spouses need.</i> |

Source: Author's Original Work

Table 4, Career-Employment Portability Spectrum

| Career Situation:                                  | Unemployed: Lost Career (employment immobility) | Job: Lost Career (employment mobility) | Career Collapsing (employment portability) | Career Decay (employment portability) | Career Stagnation (career portability) | Career Continuity | Career Security   |
|----------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Employment Situation                               | Unemployed                                      | Employed                               | Employed                                   | Employed                              | Employed                               | Employed          | Employed          |
| Relation of new employment to desired career field | None                                            | Unrelated                              | Related but Not Desired                    | Similar or Not Desired                | Same or Desired                        | Desired           | Desired           |
| Employer at new location                           | None                                            | Any                                    | Related but not desired                    | Related but not desired               | Same or Desired                        | Same or Desired   | Same or Desired   |
| Type of career move                                | None                                            | Downward                               | Lateral or Downward                        | Lateral or Downward                   | Lateral or Downward                    | Lateral or Upward | Lateral or Upward |
| Prospect for upward mobility                       | None                                            | None                                   | None                                       | None                                  | None                                   | Some              | Yes               |
| Career security                                    | None                                            | None                                   | None                                       | None                                  | None                                   | Some              | Yes               |
| Effect of USAF on career                           | Devastating                                     | Devastating                            | Major                                      | Significant                           | Some                                   | Little            | None              |

Source: Author's Original Work



## A Culture of Anachronism

The nature of an organization's culture can be difficult to measure, but in this research, Air Force organizational and social culture provided clear indications of its anachronistic nature. Air Force culture seems to be anachronistic – representative of a bygone “leave-it-to-Beaver” era in which *most* Air Force families assumed the form of a traditional family. Of course, many modern Air Force families are traditional families; even some USAF dual-career families are temporarily traditional families when the spouse stays home from a career for a few years to raise children. However, there is an increasing portion of American (and USAF) families that are dual-earner or dual-career families. Air Force culture, however, seems to primarily recognize and support only traditional families. Between pressure to participate in unit events and seemingly involuntary duties of leadership spouses, the Air Force's organizational and social cultures clash with modern families, particularly dual-career families. Research indicates base agencies, organizational processes, and even programs designed to support Air Force spouse employment fail to appropriately support its career-minded spouses and dual-career families.

The study found the spouses of unit leadership sometimes expected spouses of other Airmen to participate in spouse functions. These functions sometimes happened during the workday, which meant spouses with careers either needed to take time off of work or miss the function. However, the spouse's desire not to attend was not only about time constraints; some spouses felt belittled by the expectation that they are required to participate in their Airman's career. Unfortunately, in most cases, both the Airman and the spouse felt the Airman's career might suffer in the form of reduced promotion or assignment opportunities as a result of his spouse not being considered a “team player.” The spouses also had concerns about not participating for fear of social ostracism against them. One spouse claimed to have suffered social repercussions as a result of not participating in unit spouse functions. *Both the spouse and the Airmen felt pressure for the spouse to participate in unit events and spouse functions (3.1). And, this pressure existed in part due to fear of command retribution on the Airman's career and social retributions on the spouse (3.2).*



Also, spouses whose Airmen were in leadership positions felt an expectation that the “leadership spouse” perform duties such as leading spouse groups, meeting with other “leadership spouses,” and others; and that these expectations are at odds with a person already juggling a career and a family. One spouse called it “ridiculous” that the Air Force expects a spouse “to be able to juggle children, a career, and those obligations and not be paid for them.” Other spouses were uncomfortable and annoyed asking for time off work, as one spouse said, to “go meet my husband’s boss’s wife.” And when she did not go to the meeting, “it did not go over well.” However, at least one spouse (a former Airman) said she did not feel a significant pressure to participate in spouse groups, regardless of whether an expectation existed. Dave from the case study also said, in retrospect, the pressure he felt for his spouse to participate was probably unwarranted. Another Airman said his squadron asked for volunteers to perform the Key Spouse duties, which worked well to reduce the workload on leadership spouses. Thus, *the research suggests that pressure exists on leadership spouses to take on matriarchal responsibilities sometimes codified in Key Spouse responsibilities (3.3)*; On the other hand, *some units may have found creative ways to effectively mitigate these concerns (3.4)*.

There also seemed to be a general impression of discontent from the participants regarding Air Force family culture’s anachronistic character. According to the participants, Air Force family culture is designed to support only one family shape, a shape dual-career literature calls a *traditional family* – a male breadwinner, a female homemaker spouse, and between two and four children. Whether it is the Air Force family “doctrine” of a family “circa 60’s/70’s/80’s military life” or the “culture of out-of-touchness,” *the research suggests the Air Force’s organizational family schema is based on a traditional family, which is not fully representative of its current family demographic (3.5)*.

In addition to the general impression that the Air Force has an anachronistic family culture, the participants also described specific experiences that supported their impression. The participants said some of the programs designed to support Air Force families during the Year of the Air Force Family did not help dual-career families. For example, instead of the “bounce houses and craft shows,” one family that said they’d

rather see base agencies' office hours extend past 4:00PM, so a family with a working spouse and Airman can still access the agencies. Also, it seems that office hours are not the only problem, but that spouses felt that base agencies (specifically medical facilities) only cared about the Airmen and often treated spouses poorly. Another codified organizational remnant of this traditional family schema is the official term used to describe an Air Force spouse: dependent. As Sarah from the case study said, *the term dependent is an unwelcome manifestation of an anachronistic organizational culture anathema to career-minded spouses (3.6)*. Also, *research indicates some Air Force base agencies may minimize, ignore, or fail to appropriately support needs of dual-career families (3.7)*.

The research also found support programs designed to help spouses with employment may also be ineffective in helping its career-minded spouses. According to the focus group respondents, existing spouse employment programs seem to help spouses with employment, but not careers. For example, more than one focus group respondent said the base support programs they explored only had a handout with a list of websites that anyone could find with a simple Internet search. The case study supports the contention that there is a focus on just providing a spouse with any potential job opportunity rather than helping them further their career. Dave said the support program of the Airman and Family Readiness Centers he has visited only provide opportunities such as "working at the BX, being a bagger at the commissary, or mowing lawns."<sup>10</sup> And, as one Airman from the focus group said about his experience, "it's not for your graduate degree spouses." According to the research, *it seems that despite the unique and extreme difficulty the Air Force causes for spouses in pursuit of a career, existing spouse support programs focus heavily on spouse employment (jobs) and inadequately support career-minded spouses (3.8)*.

Regarding the seemingly anachronistic nature of Air Force organizational and social culture, the research appears to support the hypothesis that the Air Force family schema is both outdated and detrimental to dual-career families. For example, spouses

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<sup>10</sup> All citations from the case study in this chapter refer to this citation; Anonymous Airman and Spouse, Case Study Interview held at Air University, Maxwell AFB, AL.

and Airmen felt organizational and social pressure for the spouse to participate in unit events and spouse functions. This pressure seems to have existed in part due to fear of command retribution on the Airman's career and social retributions on the spouse. Also, the research suggests that pressure exists on leadership spouses to take on matriarchal responsibilities sometimes codified in Key Spouse responsibilities. Furthermore, the research suggests the Air Force's organizational family schema is based on a traditional family, which may is not completely representative of its current family demographic. One manifestation of this situation is the term *dependent*, an unwelcome manifestation of an anachronistic organizational culture anathema to career-minded spouses. Research also indicates some Air Force base agencies may minimize, ignore, or misrepresent the needs of dual-career families. Thus, it seems that despite the unique and extreme difficulty the Air Force causes for spouses in pursuit of a career, existing spouse support programs focus heavily on spouse employment (jobs) and inadequately support career-minded spouses. These findings lead to the second Summary Finding: *The Air Force's organizational and social cultures seem to be biased toward an anachronistic demographic primarily consisting of a traditional family model in which the spouse does not pursue a career and biased against a modern demographic that includes dual-career families (Summary Finding #3).* See Table 6 below.

Table 5, Findings 3.1-3.8, Anachronistic Culture

| #   | Section Finding                                                                                                                                                                       |
|-----|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 3.1 | <i>In the dual-career participants, both the spouse and the Airmen felt pressure for the spouse to participate in unit events and spouse functions.</i>                               |
| 3.2 | <i>This pressure (in 3.1) existed in part due to fear of command retribution on the Airman's career and social retributions on the spouse.</i>                                        |
| 3.3 | <i>The research suggests that pressure exists on leadership spouses to take on matriarchal responsibilities sometimes codified in Key Spouse responsibilities.</i>                    |
| 3.4 | <i>Some units may have found creative ways to effectively mitigate these concerns (in 3.3).</i>                                                                                       |
| 3.5 | <i>The research suggests the Air Force's organizational family schema is based on a traditional family, which is not completely representative of its current family demographic.</i> |
| 3.6 | <i>The term dependent is an unwelcome manifestation of an anachronistic organizational culture anathema to career-minded spouses.</i>                                                 |
| 3.7 | <i>Research indicates some Air Force base agencies may minimize, ignore, or misrepresent the needs of dual-career families.</i>                                                       |
| 3.8 | <i>The research suggests existing spouse support programs focus heavily on spouse employment (jobs) and inadequately support career-minded spouses.</i>                               |

Source: Author's Original Work

Table 6, Summary Finding #3

| # | Summary Finding                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|---|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 3 | <i>The Air Force's organizational and social cultures seem to be biased toward an anachronistic demographic primarily consisting of a traditional family model in which the spouse does not pursue a career and biased against a modern demographic that includes dual-career families.</i> |

Source: Author's Original Work

## Effects and Implications

The effects of the Air Force-induced career disruptions and cultural anachronisms created negative emotional outcomes for the spouses and Airmen in the study. For example, the spouses reported feeling varying levels and types of stress in response to these career disruptions: anxiety, depression, anger, frustration, and hopelessness. Not only did they report these feelings, but they also displayed the corresponding emotion during the discussion. When discussing the cultural anachronisms, both the descriptions and emotions seemed to intensify. It seems, then, that *Air Force-induced career disruptions and its apparently anachronistic culture cause emotional distress in its dual-career families (4.1).*

Based on the spouses' comments, the stress models described in Chapter 1 – Conservation of Resources, Identity Theory, and Relative Deprivation – seem to explain the participants' stress, although not all participants showed all three of these stress pathways. The evidence leans toward Hobfoll's Conservation of Resources model, which accurately predicted stress in the all of the spouses.<sup>11</sup> The model of Relative Deprivation described the experience of a few spouses, but other spouses (specifically Sarah from the case study) said it was not a factor in their experience.<sup>12</sup> However, Sarah said she *would* have felt stress had she compared herself to her peers, so she did not compare herself to her peers so as to avoid the stress. Identity theory also did not seem to apply to Sarah's experience, because she did not associate her identity with her career. However, the focus group observed spouses who specifically stated their careers were a major contributor to their identities. Thus, *psychological stress models including Identity Theory, Relative Deprivation, and Conservation of Resources may explain emotional distress in Air Force spouses as a result of career disruptions (4.2).*

There seemed to be a few concepts that offset the stress a spouse feels from the disruption to her career. One concept Dave and Sarah exposed is that assignments to

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<sup>11</sup> Hobfoll's Conservation of Resources model applied to Air Force spouses predicts stress as changes of station stripped object resources (certifications), conditions (tenure, seniority, promotion potential), personal characteristics (positive outlook on career), and energies (time, money, and knowledge) from them; Hobfoll, "Conservation of Resources," 517.

<sup>12</sup> Relative Deprivation model predicts stress when a person compares what they think they should have with what they think they can have; Iain Walker and Heather J. Smith, "Fifty Years of Relative Deprivation Research," in *Relative Deprivation: Specification, Development, and Integration* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

desirable locations may help to offset the emotional needs of the career-minded spouse. In the case study, Sarah said that Europe was wonderful, even though she was unable to pursue her career; she took it as an opportunity to focus on their family. In addition to the offset a desirable location may provide, there may be another factor that offsets the stress: time. The case study family described an “acceptance point” at which Sarah came to terms with the fact that her Airman moved a lot and that maintaining her career would be challenging. For this case, the acceptance point came after 12-13 years of marriage, which was after Dave’s initial Active Duty Service Commitment (ADSC) expired. The focus group did not fully explore the acceptance point, but one Airman noted he thought most Air Force senior leaders’ spouses had “cut the cord” on their careers. At least one spouse also said she did not pursue her career during one assignment because “it’s just not worth it.” It seems the time and effort required, in addition to the consistent let-downs from job rejections may cause spouses to simply stop pursuing their career. In some cases, there may be an “acceptance point” at which career-minded spouses’ stress levels decrease because they accept and understand the challenges they face as an Air Force spouse. *Certain conditions (such as desirable locations and “acceptance points”), then, may reduce the emotional stress a dual-career family feels from the spouse’s career disruptions (4.3). However, some spouses temporarily or permanently stop pursuing their career due to the difficulties they face as Air Force spouses (4.4).*

The dual-career families in this study also felt financial effects as a result of Air Force-induced career disruptions. For the case study couple, Sarah was unemployed almost seven of 18 years since their marriage. On one assignment, she was unable to work at all, and on four other occasions following a change of station, she was not employed for six months to a year while working toward relicensing and finding a new employer. These costs of lost time at work while not employed are significant not only in the real loss, but also the long-term as the time-value of money reduces overall earnings. This time not employed within her career as a result of Air Force-induced *hypermobility cost the case study family as much as or more than one million dollars.*<sup>13</sup> The costs of

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<sup>13</sup> Estimated: For a Pharmacist who makes nearly \$100K per year, this quickly adds up. In addition to the immediate reduction in income, a twenty-year career with eight years not working may as much or more than a \$1M loss for the couple. 2% interest (very conservative) with eight years not working, spread out at years 1, 4, 7, 10, 11, 12, 14, and 17 yields a total of \$1,471,159 whereas 20 years of continuous work yields

retesting, relicensing, and lack of promotion opportunity also had a financial impact for this family, as it did for the families in the focus group. According to the research, frequent relicensing, testing and administrative fees, totaled thousands of dollars for some families. *Air Force dual-career families may suffer a significant financial impact as a result of hypermobility-related career disruptions (4.5).*

Because of the structural difficulties associated with both parents working full-time while raising children, the dual-career family typically had to choose between pursuing two careers and having children; in all of the participant families, the spouse was the one who sacrificed their career in order to have children. Figure 3 below, an extension of Figure 2 in Chapter 1, represents the tension placed on dual-career families with children as the careers and children all compete for the “resources” of the parents with careers. Although many non-Air Force families face this same choice, it seems Air Force dual-career families may face greater challenges than civilian dual-career families. The case study couple, for example, said they faced difficulty having children in part due to geographic separation. One spouse from the focus group strongly called the dilemma an “unworkable puzzle” in which she was forced to ask herself “Do I want a career or do I want children? Because...I can’t realistically have both.” In that discussion, she was referring primarily to her Airman’s unpredictable deployment and temporary duty (TDY) schedule. In some cases, spouses found ways around this conundrum, yet invariably at a cost to their career.

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\$2,478,331. This difference obviously does not take into account pay raises or other money saved (or spent), but gives an idea of the financial impact.



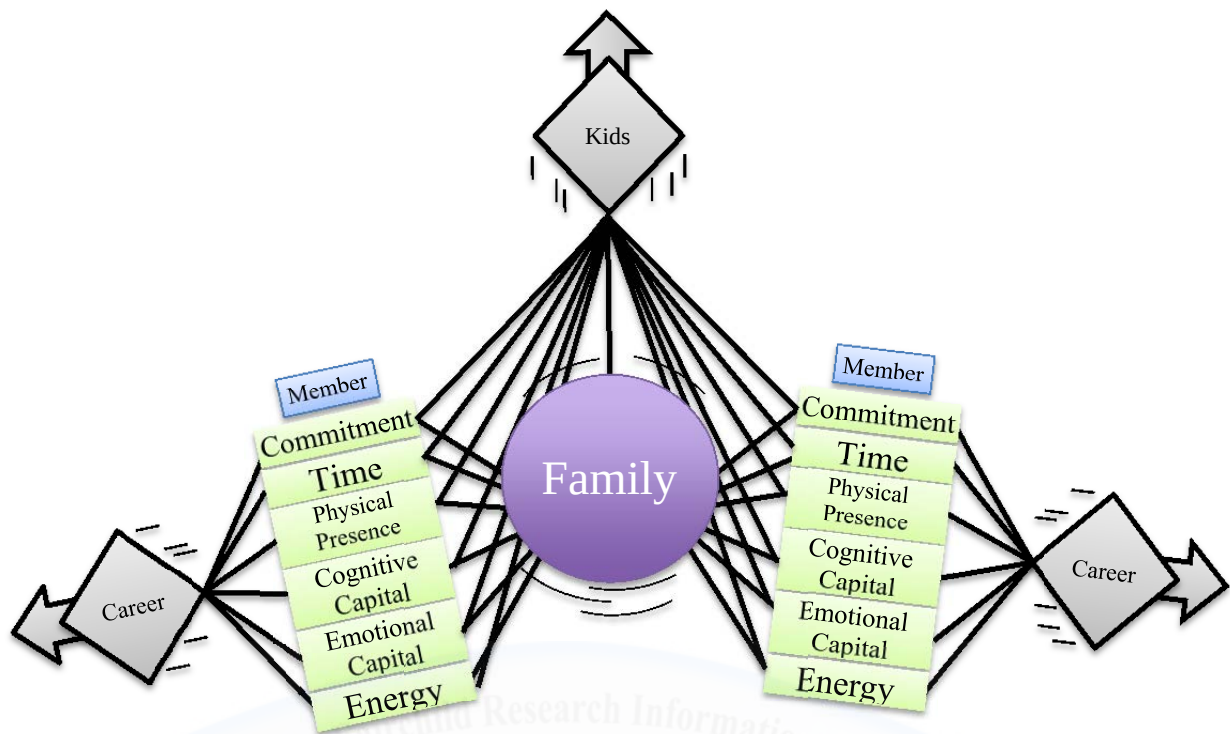


Figure 3, Family and Members Strained by both Careers and Children

Source: Author's Original Work

The teleworkers were able to spend more time at home, yet at least one still had to hire a nanny in order to focus appropriately on her work. A number of spouses took multi-year breaks from their careers in order to raise children. This seemed to be the typical solution to the childcare versus career situation. It seems, then, *the hypermobility of Airman (both changes of station and temporary duty/deployment) increases the difficulty of dual-career families that either have, or want to have, children, to include pressuring Air Force dual-career families to choose between having children and pursuing two careers (4.6). This forced choice between children and careers may also be viewed as an unintentional organizational bias that supports the traditional family but not dual-career families (4.7)*

Also, not only are existing Air Force dual-career families affected by the challenges to spouses' careers, couples that are considering marriage are also affected. Some of the participants, for example, were unaware of the severity of the difficulty they



would face in trying to pursue two careers. As one spouse said, “you’re aware [that it may be difficult], but it’s different once you’re in it.” This did not just apply to the spouses; one Airman said he formed his opinion on Air Force dual-career families by observing his Squadron commander’s family. The commander’s wife was a lawyer so, as the Airman said, “see? they can do it!” but he now knows that situation was a rarity: “one in fifty.” Another Airman said the couple had to make a decision on the subject “in the blind.” Even the spouses that are former Airmen did not fully understand the difficulty the hypermobility would pose to their career. So, *some unmarried Air Force couples considering marriage are not fully informed of the risks and challenges involved in being an Air Force dual-career family (4.8)*. However, Sarah described other cases in which a couple was informed enough to make a decision, and decided not to get married because the hypermobility would prevent both partners from fulfilling their careers. At least in this case, *the hypermobility of Air Force families may be a causal factor in preventing some Airmen from getting married (4.9)*.

For couples already married, the emotional strain of career disruptions and cultural anachronisms has also caused couples to fight, live apart, and has brought more than one close to divorce. Many of the participants described heated arguments and “meltdowns” over Air Force-related career disruptions and cultural anachronisms. At least one couple chose to live apart – become a commuter couple – in order to allow the spouse to retain her career. Some may argue the choice of a couple to live apart was not a result of the emotional strain, but as a choice to pursue two careers. In fact, it was both. And, as expected, living apart had negative emotional effects on both the spouse and the Airman, to the point the couple contemplated divorce. The couple did not divorce, but that level of strain on a family is detrimental to both partners and the relationship itself. Other couples said career-related strains brought them close to divorce as well. A few participant couples almost did not marry because of the effects the Air Force would have on the spouse’s career and most spouses said they were not completely aware of the career challenges they would face as an Air Force spouse. Even the spouses who are former Airmen seemed surprised at the difficulty they faced in maintaining a career as an Air Force spouse. The participant families also had arguments over perceived requirements of spouse participation in Air Force-related events. This stemmed from the

perception that participation is required under threat of both the impact to the Airman's career as well as the social ostracism of the spouse. Thus, *the negative emotional outcomes of Air Force-related career disruptions and cultural anachronisms has caused some of its dual-career families to argue, live apart, and has even brought some close to divorce (4.10).*

These effects on the family produced negative stress outcomes in the Airman, as predicted by both crossover and spillover theory.<sup>14</sup> Both the case study and focus group observed that the Airmen experience stress, frustration, anxiety, and guilt as a result of their spouse's career-related challenges and cultural anachronisms. Frustration and anger appeared common, and were directed mostly at the Air Force culture and the "big Air Force" than any particular person. Some Airmen felt anxiety approaching PCS season, because they knew their spouses would face another career disruption and their family would endure the ensuing emotional, financial, and time challenges. Also, more than one Airman reported feeling guilt as a result of the distress his spouse went through during these career challenges. These emotions were both acute (surrounding the PCS and or career-related challenges) and chronic. At least two Airmen noted the stress was chronic and admitted it affected them. Though the research did not specifically include a discussion of the stress's effects on airborne or operational missions, one Airman said it was "always on his mind." *The evidence indicates the emotional stress from both disruptions to the spouse's career and tensions created by cultural anachronisms affect the Airman's emotional well-being and may affect the Airman's mission-related performance (4.11). Thus, the work-family conflict theories of both crossover and spillover applied to these Air Force dual-career families (4.12).* See Figure 4 below for a visual representation of the stress pathways, crossover, and spillover. The reader should take particular note of all the two-way stress pathways and how feedback loops exist within USAF dual-career families. Also, the reader should compare Figures 4, 5, and 6 to see how the Air Force adds both stress pathways and stressors on a family.

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<sup>14</sup> Crossover is the transference of stress from one spouse to another, spillover is the transference of stress, within a person, from one domain (family) to another (Air Force).

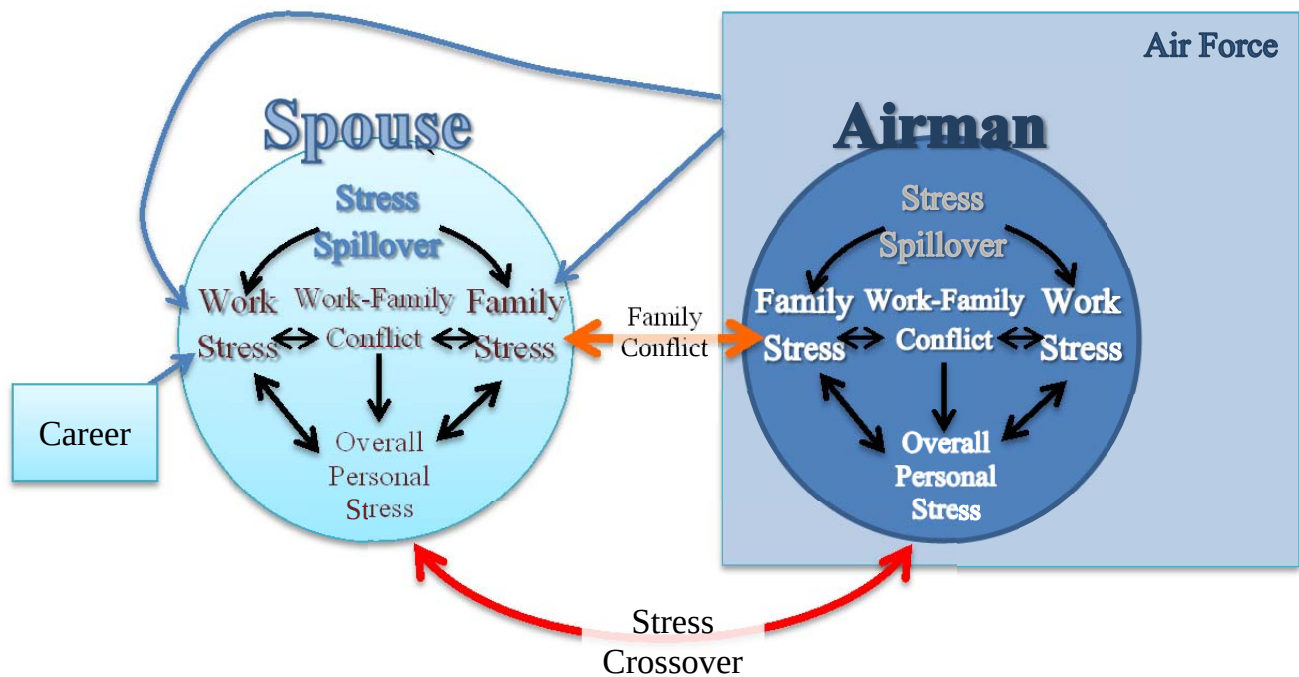


Figure 4, USAF Dual-Career Family Stress Pathways<sup>15</sup>

Source: Author's Original Work

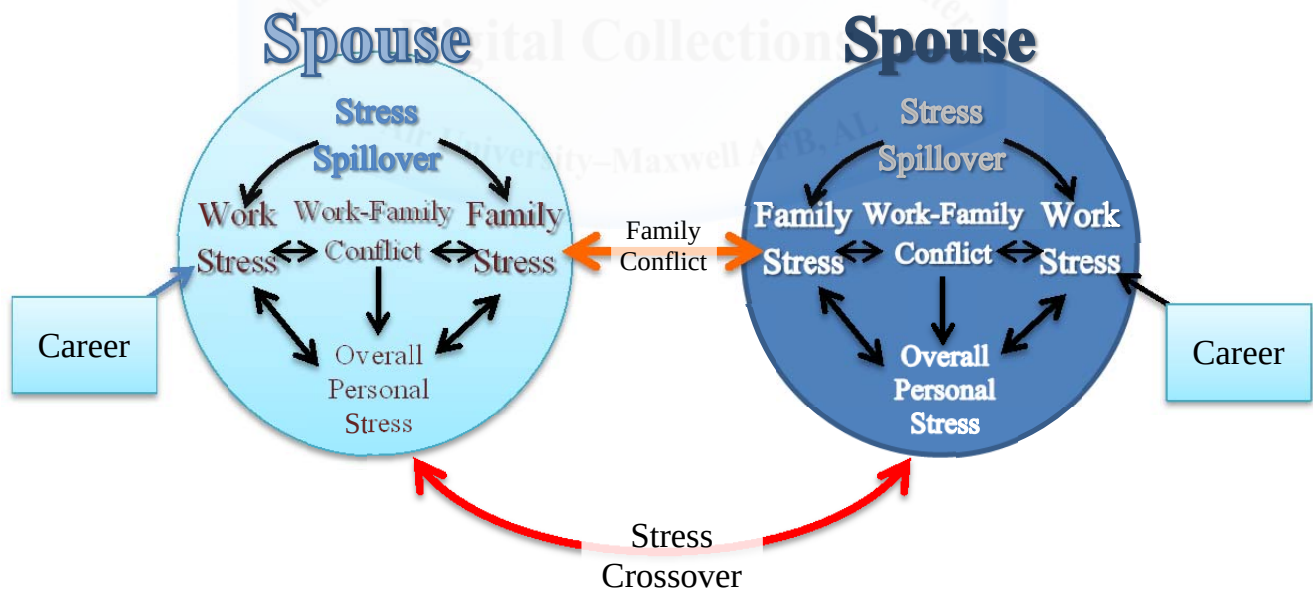


Figure 5, Civilian Dual-Career Stress Pathways

Source: Author's Original Work

<sup>15</sup> Note: The Air Force is depicted larger than the career in Figure 5 because it requires more of a person than many civilian careers. Also, notice the link between the Air Force and Work Stress of the spouse. This is caused by hypermobility. The link between the Air Force and Family Stress is caused by the anachronistic expectations on some spouses. These links are not present in the diagrams depicting civilian dual-career families and traditional families.

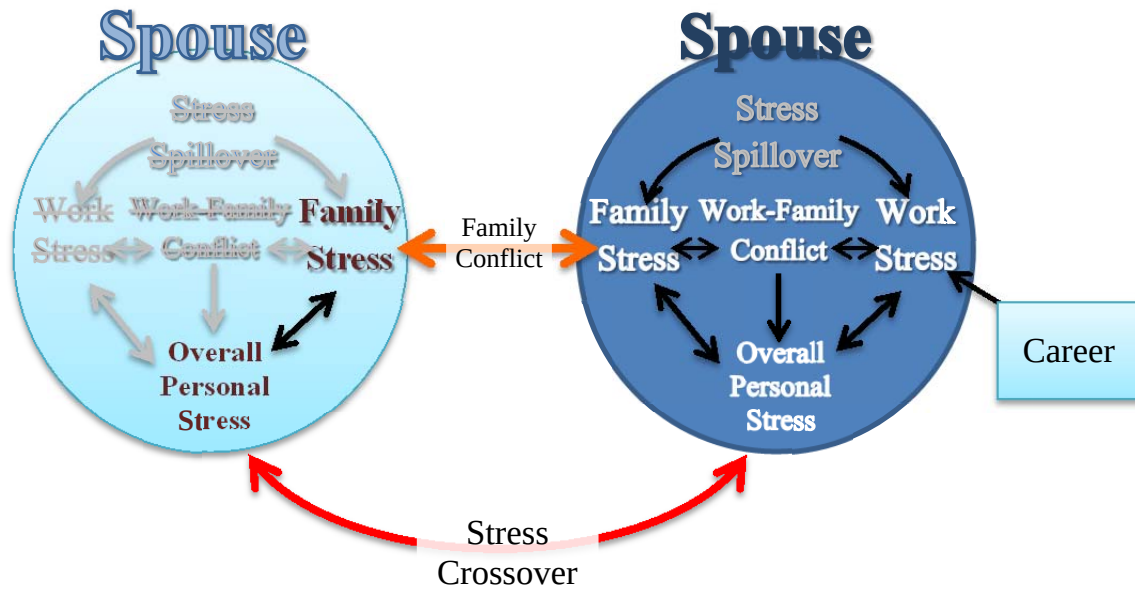


Figure 6, Traditional (one career) Family Stress Pathways

Source: Author's Original Work

Airmen also reported that their spouses' career disruptions and associated negative stress outcomes affected their career choices. In the case study, Sarah's career challenges played a role in the decision for Dave to stray from his professional development vector. In the focus group, more than one Airman made decisions contrary to their professional development vectors in order to help their spouse retain their career. Also, multiple Airmen have considered and are considering leaving the service specifically because of the spouses' career disruptions. The participants also knew a number of Airmen who left the service in order to allow their spouse to pursue a career. Additionally, one Airman of a dual-career family (who had a scheduling conflict during the focus group) said the he may leave the service because his wife is a talented lawyer who has given up her practice for a significant portion of his career. *Air Force-related career disruptions cause some Airmen to make career choices that not only reduce their professional development potential but also contribute to their decision whether to stay in the Air Force (4.13)*

The effects and implications of Air Force-induced challenges to its dual-career families are many and significant. Air Force-induced career disruptions and its apparently anachronistic culture cause emotional distress in its dual-career families, which may be explained by psychological stress models including Identity Theory, Relative Deprivation, and Conservation of Resources. Certain conditions (such as desirable locations and “acceptance points”) may reduce the emotional stress a dual-career family feels from the spouse’s career disruptions, but some spouses temporarily or permanently stop pursuing their career due to the difficulties they face as Air Force spouses. Also, the Air Force’s dual-career families may suffer a significant financial impact as a result of Air Force-related career disruptions. In addition to the financial impact, the hypermobility of Airman (both changes of station and temporary duty/deployment) increases the difficulty of dual-career families in having children and may pressure Air Force dual-career families to choose between having children and pursuing two careers. This forced choice between children and careers may also be viewed as an organizational bias toward traditional family and against dual-career families. Even before marrying to become an Air Force family, some Airmen and their significant other are not fully informed of the risks and challenges involved in being an Air Force dual-career family. To some extent, the hypermobility of Air Force families has been a causal factor in preventing some Airmen’s marriages. The negative emotional outcomes of Air Force-related career disruptions and cultural anachronisms cause its families to argue, live apart, and has brought some close to divorce. The Air Force may prevent marriages, disrupt marriages, and it may be doing so to some of its best people. The evidence indicates the emotional stress from career disruptions and tensions created by cultural anachronisms affect the Airman’s emotional well-being and may affect the Airman’s mission-related performance. Also important, Air Force-related career disruptions cause some Airmen to make career choices that not only reduce their professional development potential but also contribute to their decision whether to stay in the Air Force. These findings lead to the third and fourth Summary Findings.

*Organizational and social incompatibilities between the Air Force and dual-career families are emotionally and financially damaging to Air Force families, spouses, and Airmen (Summary Finding #4). Dual-career Airmen may be distracted at work, may*

*carry additional stress into dangerous and important operational missions, and may decide to leave the service due to their spouses' Air Force-induced career difficulties (Summary Finding #5). See Table 8 below.*





Table 7, Effects and Implications - Findings

| #    | Section Finding                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 4.1  | <i>Air Force-induced career disruptions and its apparently anachronistic culture cause emotional distress in its dual-career families</i>                                                                                                                                                                |
| 4.2  | <i>Psychological stress models that include Identity Theory, Relative Deprivation, and Conservation of Resources may explain emotional distress in Air Force spouses as a result of career disruptions.</i>                                                                                              |
| 4.3  | <i>Certain conditions (such as desirable locations and “acceptance points”) may reduce the emotional stress a dual-career family feels from the spouse’s career disruptions.</i>                                                                                                                         |
| 4.4  | <i>Some spouses temporarily or permanently stop pursuing their career due to the difficulties they face as Air Force spouses.</i>                                                                                                                                                                        |
| 4.5  | <i>Air Force dual-career families may suffer a significant financial impact as a result of hypermobility-related career disruptions.</i>                                                                                                                                                                 |
| 4.6  | <i>The hypermobility of Airman (both changes of station and temporary duty/deployment) increases the difficulty of dual-career families that either have, or want to have, children, to include pressuring Air Force dual-career families to choose between having children and pursuing two careers</i> |
| 4.7  | <i>This forced choice between children and careers may also be viewed as an unintentional organizational bias against dual-career families and toward traditional families.</i>                                                                                                                          |
| 4.8  | <i>Unmarried (and yet-to-be-married) Air Force couples considering getting married are likely not fully informed of the risks and challenges involved in being an Air Force dual-career family.</i>                                                                                                      |
| 4.9  | <i>The hypermobility of Air Force families may be a causal factor in preventing some Airmen’s marriages.</i>                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| 4.10 | <i>The negative emotional outcomes of Air Force-related career disruptions and cultural anachronisms has caused some of its families to argue, live apart, and come close to divorce.</i>                                                                                                                |
| 4.11 | <i>The evidence indicates the emotional stress from both disruptions to the spouse’s career and tensions created by cultural anachronisms affect the Airman’s emotional well-being and may affect the Airman’s mission-related performance.</i>                                                          |
| 4.12 | <i>The work-family conflict theories of crossover and spillover both applied to these Air Force dual-career families.</i>                                                                                                                                                                                |
| 4.13 | <i>Air Force-related career disruptions cause some Airmen to make career choices that not only reduce their professional development potential but also contribute to their decision whether to stay in the Air Force</i>                                                                                |

Source: Author’s Original Work

Table 8, Summary Findings #4 and 5

| # | Summary Finding                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|---|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 4 | <i>Organizational and social incompatibilities between the Air Force and dual-career families are emotionally and financially damaging to Air Force families, spouses, and Airmen.</i>                                               |
| 5 | <i>Dual-career Airmen may be distracted at work, may carry additional stress into dangerous and important operational missions, and may decide to leave the service due to their spouses' Air Force-induced career difficulties.</i> |

Source: Author's Original Work

### Chapter 3 Summary

An analysis of the research shows USAF dual-career families face many challenges. The findings suggest the major cause of these difficulties is the incompatibility between the hypermobility of Airmen and the relative geographic immobility of a spouse's career. Also, although the traditional family may have completely dominated the demographic of decades ago, today's families come in many shapes, including dual-career families. As a result, the Air Force seems to have an organizational and social culture that is both mismatched with, and detrimental to, its current family demographic. All other effects and implications appear to stem from these two related causes. In detail, the following findings summarize the situation for the relationship between the Air Force's family schema and its dual-career families.

Air Force personnel management policies and organizational culture create a condition of hypermobility that is a barrier to Airmen's spouses' careers while holding the Airman's career as leverage to attain unlimited commitment from the family (Summary Finding #1). For spouses, the ability to reattain employment at new geographic locations – employment portability – is helpful, but career continuity (the ability to maintain a continuous career with an employer, or across employers but with the possibility of upward mobility) is what career-minded spouses need (Summary Finding #2). Also, the Air Force's organizational and social cultures seem to be biased toward an anachronistic demographic primarily consisting of a traditional family model in which the spouse does not pursue a career and biased against a modern demographic that includes dual-career families (Summary Finding #3). The Air Force organizational and social



incompatibilities with dual-career families are emotionally and financially detrimental to Air Force families, spouses and Airmen (Summary Finding #4). As a result, dual-career Airmen may be distracted at work, may carry additional stress into dangerous and important operational missions, and may decide to leave the service due to Air Force-induced difficulties (Summary Finding #5). These findings mean that *the USAF family schema (culture, practices, policies) is incompatible with dual-career families; as a result, the USAF may be increasing the cost and risk of its own workforce while reducing its effectiveness. (Overall Finding - Table 10).*



Table 9, Summary Findings #1-#5

| # | Summary Findings                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|---|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | <i>Air Force personnel management policies and organizational culture create a condition of hypermobility that is a barrier to Airmen's spouses' careers while holding the Airman's career as leverage to attain unlimited commitment from the family.</i>                                                          |
| 2 | <i>For spouses, the ability to reattain employment at new geographic locations – employment portability – is helpful, but career continuity (the ability to maintain a continuous career with an employer, or across employers but with the possibility of upward mobility) is what career-minded spouses need.</i> |
| 3 | <i>The Air Force's organizational and social cultures seem to be biased toward an anachronistic demographic primarily consisting of a traditional family model in which the spouse does not pursue a career and biased against a modern demographic that includes dual-career families.</i>                         |
| 4 | <i>Organizational and social incompatibilities between the Air Force and dual-career families are emotionally and financially damaging to Air Force families, spouses, and Airmen.</i>                                                                                                                              |
| 5 | <i>Dual-career Airmen may be distracted at work, may carry additional stress into dangerous and important operational missions, and may decide to leave the service due to their spouses' Air Force-induced career difficulties.</i>                                                                                |

Source: Author's Original Work

Table 10, Overall Finding

| Overall Finding                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>The USAF family schema (culture, practices, policies) is incompatible with dual-career families; as a result, the USAF may be increasing the cost and risk of its own workforce while reducing its effectiveness.</i> |

Source: Author's Original Work

## **Chapter 4: Recommendations**

The fundamental challenge to USAF dual-career families is the hypermobility of its Airmen that conflicts with the relative geographic immobility of most spouse's careers. A significant number of initiatives and efforts have gone into improving the mobility of spouses. Joining Forces, an initiative chaired by First Lady Michelle Obama and Dr. Jill Biden, has provided positive change in the arena of spouse employment. Despite the outstanding results of Joining Forces and other spouse employment support efforts in improving spouse employment portability, there is work still to be done on improving the career continuity of military spouses. Also, if career continuity is the ultimate objective, one glaring obstacle is the hypermobility of military members, something current efforts have not yet addressed. Perhaps current efforts have researched the problem and determined, to outside organizations, military hypermobility is a fixed variable, but if so, those conclusions are neither explicit nor acceptable if the Air Force wishes to adequately support its dual-career families. As a result, the recommendations of this study address the problem anew in hopes of providing a salient perspective of the problem in the USAF and in the military in general.<sup>1</sup>

### **Current Spouse Career Support Efforts**

Despite the challenges to dual-career families identified in the research, there exists no shortage of very positive efforts exist to address the difficulties military spouses face navigating employment-related challenges. These efforts include (but are not limited to) political action initiatives, research efforts, and spouse employment resources. These outstanding efforts have improved the licensing situation for many professions, partnered with civilian corporations to explain the unique skills and experiences of

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<sup>1</sup> NOTE: Due to time limitations on the researcher and the diverse and complex nature of the subject, it was not possible to conduct a comprehensive assessment of all existing and historical efforts. As a result, some of these recommendations may not apply because they either already exist, have failed, or they miss knowledge this researcher was not privy to. Specifically regarding current efforts, the researcher made a genuine effort to investigate and represent the outstanding contributions of existing spouse career support efforts. However and again due to the scope of the research, it is possible the researcher missed or unwittingly misrepresented the contributions and/or focus of current efforts. If this is the case, corrections are welcome.

military spouses, and encouraged lawmakers and the Executive Branch alike in supporting employment for military spouses. This section will both describe and recognize the most prominent efforts to support military spouse employment. The purpose of this section is to acknowledge to the reader that this research *supports existing knowledge and efforts* regarding the difficulties Air Force (and indeed all military) spouses face in pursuing careers. Research institutes such as RAND have published a number of studies and surveys on military spouse employment.<sup>2</sup> The Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF) at Syracuse University also released in January 2014 a current study on military spouse employment.<sup>3</sup> And, the Blue Star Families produced a 2012 Military Family Lifestyle Report that adds to this body of knowledge.<sup>4</sup> Although such research provides powerful insight into the challenges military spouses face, the laudable change efforts, primarily address only one side of a dual-sided issue; they aim to improve the employment portability of military spouses.<sup>5</sup>

The main political action initiative is Joining Forces, started by First Lady Michelle Obama and Dr. Jill Biden in 2011. Although Joining Forces is a multi-issue, “national initiative to engage all sectors of society to give our service members and their families the opportunities and support they have earned,” it is also one of the most visible and powerful efforts to address military spouse career challenges.<sup>6</sup> Joining Forces has accomplished great strides in support of military spouse employment. In the last three years, it is partnered with companies to hire and train more than 380,000 veterans and military spouses.<sup>7</sup> Joining Forces has worked with the Department of Defense, the Joint

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<sup>2</sup> To name just a few of RANDs studies on this topic: Nelson Lim and Nelson Lim, “*Working around the Military*” *Revisited : Spouse Employment in the 2000 Census Data*, Spouse Employment in the 2000 Census Data (Santa Monica, CA: Santa Monica, CA : RAND, 2007); Margaret C. Harrell et al., *Working Around the Military: Challenges to Military Spouse Employment and Education*. (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2004), <http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG196.html>; Nelson Lim and David Schulker, *Measuring Underemployment Among Military Spouses*, Product Page (Santa Mon: RAND Corporation, 2010), <http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG918.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Maury and Stone, *Military Spouse Employment Report*.

<sup>4</sup> Greentree et al., *2012 Military Family Lifestyle Survey: Comprehensive Report*.

<sup>5</sup> As few of these efforts happen due solely to one person or organization, the reader is advised that any outcomes described in this section are likely the result of the complex network of efforts aimed at changing the environment to better support military spouse employment and careers.

<sup>6</sup> “About Joining Forces,” Government, *White House*, accessed April 15, 2014, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/joiningforces/about>.

<sup>7</sup> Data not broken down between spouses and veterans; “Joining Forces: Employment,” Government, *White House*, accessed April 9, 2014, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/joiningforces/issues/employment>.

Chiefs of Staff and their Spouses, and state Governors to improve license portability for military spouses. As of April 2014, 37 states have improved or are improving license portability for military spouses and 44 states have improved or are improving unemployment compensation for military spouses whose careers are uprooted due to a change of station.<sup>8</sup> These are just a few of the positive changes Joining Forces has accomplished, as some of their other initiatives are now led by other organizations such as the DoD.

A triad of initiatives to improve spouse portability exists within the DoD. One of these is the Military Spouse Employment Partnership (MSEP). MSEP is designed to improve hiring opportunities for military spouses. It provides a job search website (MSEPjobs.com) as well as resources such as resume and interview advice for military spouses. The second leg of this triad is a DoD Program is called SECO (Spouse Education and Career Opportunities), which “provides expert education and career guidance to military spouses.”<sup>9</sup> The third leg is the MyCAA (My Career Advancement Account), a “workforce development program that provides up to \$4,000 of financial assistance to eligible military spouses who are pursuing a license, certification or Associate’s degree in a portable career field and occupation.”<sup>10</sup> MyCAA is the program the focus group discussed that is limited to spouses of junior officers and enlisted. It is a fantastic program which, according to the Undersecretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, did not receive enough funding to meet its demand causing the DoD to limit the program’s eligibility, to the chagrin of some of the spouses in this study.<sup>11</sup> These three legs make up a major portion of the DoD’s efforts to improve spouse portability. Another DoD entity is DACOWITS (DoD Advisory Committee on Women in the Services), which focuses primarily on servicewomen, but also provides advice on the education, employment, and career concerns of military spouses. TRANSITION

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<sup>8</sup> Department of Defense, “Issue 2: Facilitate Military Spouse Transition through Licensure Portability and Unemployment Compensation,” *USA4MilitaryFamilies*, April 15, 2014, [http://www.usa4militaryfamilies.dod.mil/MOS/f?p=USA4:ISSUE:0:::P2\\_ISSUE,P2\\_MAP:2,1](http://www.usa4militaryfamilies.dod.mil/MOS/f?p=USA4:ISSUE:0:::P2_ISSUE,P2_MAP:2,1).

<sup>9</sup> “About The SECO Program,” *MilitaryOneSource*, accessed April 15, 2014, <https://myseco.militaryonesource.mil/Portal/Account/Login?ReturnUrl=%2fPortal%2f>.

<sup>10</sup> “MyCAA.”

<sup>11</sup> Clifford Stanley in Elaine Wilson, “Spouse Jobs Program to Relaunch in October,” *Armed Forces Press Service*, July 30, 2010, <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=60081>.

The Air Force also has spouse employment efforts on base, usually as part of the Airman and Family Readiness Center (A&FRC). According to one A&FRC career counselor, they work with the aforementioned Military Spouse Employment Partnership (MSEP and MSEPjobs.com) to provide employment opportunities and resources for Air Force spouses.<sup>12</sup> This A&FRC works personally with local and regional corporations on job announcements and to bring them on base for job fairs. They also provide the spouse with information on the SECO program (Spouse Education and Career Opportunities) and an Air Force Aid program that financially supports some spouse licensing needs. In addition, the A&FRC described resume services and interview advice for spouses. However, it is not only the government seeking to improve the employment environment for military spouses.

A number of civilian organizations bolster political action efforts, hold hiring fairs and conferences, and provide career- and employment-related resources to Air Force spouses. A few well-known examples are the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) and Air Force Association. MOAA sponsored the aforementioned 2014 IVMF study and is very active in supporting military spouse employment and careers. A few of these organizations seem to specifically support the career-minded, professional spouse. Some, such as the non-profit Military Spouse Corporate Career Network (MSCCN), “provides no-cost employment readiness, vocational training, and one-on-one job placement services for military spouses, and caregivers of war wounded.”<sup>13</sup> Another, the Military Spouse Juris Doctor Network (MSJDN), “supports military spouses by: advocating for licensing accommodations, including bar membership without additional examination, providing education about the challenges facing military families, encouraging hiring military spouses, and providing a support network.”<sup>14</sup> Finally, a non-profit called InGearCareer is an organization specifically for career-minded, professional spouses. InGearCareer provides resources, advocacy, and networking in order to “improve the quality of life, morale and stability for military families by

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<sup>12</sup> All references to the A&FRC in this paragraph refer to this interview; Telephone interview with Airman and Family Readiness Center Career Counselor, interview by John Paul F. Mintz, Telephone, April 15, 2014.

<sup>13</sup> “About Us,” Non-Profit, *Military Spouse Corporate Career Network: About Us*, accessed April 15, 2014, <http://www.msccn.org/WhoWeAre/AboutUs.html>.

<sup>14</sup> “About MSJDN,” *Military Spouse JD Network*, accessed April 15, 2014, <http://www.msjdn.org/about/>.

enabling military spouses to seek professional employment and maintain long term career paths despite the transient nature and demands of the military lifestyle.”<sup>15</sup> These multifaceted organizations, among others, provide positive and important contributions to the career-minded military spouse.

In addition to the resources specifically focused on careers, a number of organizations and websites exist to support spouse employment across the job-career spectrum. While most provide multiple resources, some focus on educating spouses about ways to help themselves. Examples include SpouseBuzz, National Military Spouse Network, the Military Spouse Foundation, and Military Spouse Link. Others primarily help connect spouses and employers via job search websites. Examples include the aforementioned MSEPjobs, HiringOurHeroes, BlueStar Jobs, HireVeterans, vetJobs, and HireHeroes. Still others, such as the Toyota™-sponsored eMentor program or the aforementioned MSCCN, MSJDN, BlueStar Networks and InGearCareer programs, focus on helping spouses network with corporate mentors who may have career connections or professional advice for spouses. Plus, there are a number of organizations that provide or enable scholarships for military spouses, such as Operation Homefront, the Women’s Selfworth Foundation, the Pat Tillman Foundation, and many others. These efforts all provide different types and varying degrees of support to military spouses who are pursuing employment.

The diversity and volume of these efforts shows there is a significant demand for military spouse employment and career aid; a demand that, in itself, highlights the challenges these spouses face. Yet despite these brilliant efforts, Air Force career-minded spouses (and military spouses in general) still struggle to maintain their careers. Why? It is certainly not for lack of effort on the part of patriotic organizations seeking to support their military families; this section described a great number of positive efforts (and they are only a portion of the whole). And it is certainly not for lack of leadership awareness; President Obama and the First Lady have both spoken publicly and taken concrete action to improve the mobility of military spouse employment and careers. Congress, some organizations within the DoD, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff and their

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<sup>15</sup> “InGearCareer.com,” Non-Profit, *InGearCareer.com*, accessed April 15, 2014, <http://www.ingearcareer.org/about-us/vision-mission-goals/>.

spouses have all acknowledged this problem. However, these significant efforts have *all* focused solely on efforts to improve the *employment portability* of military spouses, or as Harrell, et al, aptly titled their work: *Working Around the Military* [emphasis added].<sup>16</sup> See Table 13 on page 96. As the analysis in Chapter 3 showed, *career continuity* should be the goal of military spouse career support efforts. The rest of this chapter will be dedicated to recommendations for ways to expand upon current *employment portability* efforts and move toward *career continuity* in order to better support USAF dual-career families.



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<sup>16</sup> Harrell et al., *Working Around the Military: Challenges to Military Spouse Employment and Education*.



### **Reduce Hypermobility for Airmen in Dual-Career Families**

The primary structural cause of difficulty for dual-career USAF families is the incompatibility between the sometimes-unpredictable geographic hypermobility of Airmen and the general tendency for spouse's civilian careers to need geographic stability. Despite the brilliant efforts to improve military spouse employment portability, this is only half of the problem. The other half, indeed the causal half, is the hypermobility of Airmen. Any holistic attempt to address the problem will require a reassessment of practices, policies, and culture that drive the spouse career-disrupting hypermobility of Airmen. The following recommendations provide such an attempt.

|     |                                                                                                                                                 |
|-----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| #1A | <i>Develop ways to provide Airmen with career-minded spouses options to reduce their hypermobility without hurting their Air Force careers.</i> |
|-----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

To address this recommendation, the Air Force could reduce the hypermobility of its entire force or it could target its dual-career demographic. It could also improve assignment predictability (both timing, location, and duration) and choice for dual-career Airmen. Spouse career support is not the only motivation to reduce hypermobility; personnel relocations are costly and stress any family, regardless of career status. The House Appropriations Committee said in 2013 the DoD should reduce the hypermobility of its personnel: "The Committee believes that increasing tour lengths will not only result in cost savings, but it will also lead to less stress on the force and hardship on families that are forced to move frequently." In 1998, RAND conducted a study on the Army to determine whether it could reduce the "personnel turbulence" of its members.<sup>17</sup> The USAF should commission a similar study to add to the dialogue about force structure and posture changes on the horizon. A 2009 RAND report on a survey of military spouses also recommended the Air Force "offer airmen options that minimize geographic relocation."

This study provides five examples of ways the Air Force may reduce hypermobility. First, the Air Force should consider implementing the Total Force Integration Continuum of Service recommendations from the 2014 National Commission

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<sup>17</sup> William M. Hix et al., "Personnel Turbulence," Product Page, 1998, [http://www.rand.org/pubs/monograph\\_reports/MR938.html](http://www.rand.org/pubs/monograph_reports/MR938.html).

on the Structure of the Air Force (NCSAF) that, if implemented, would allow Airmen to voluntarily transition back and forth between the Active and Reserve/Guard components without career penalty. As the NCSAF commented:

Another important purpose of Continuum of Service is to offer Airmen more on- and off-ramps for life events, such as pregnancy, *spouse career opportunity* [italics added], enduring family medical issues, and education. This concept is not new: but in the past the continuum has flowed only toward the Reserve Components because a combination of law and tradition has made it exceptionally difficult for Airmen to return to Active Component service. A proper Continuum of Service approach would allow members to transition to a part-time Reserve Component position with the potential to return to the Active Component when circumstances change.<sup>18</sup>

Second, it should consider implementing an optional assignment limitation program similar to the existing High School Senior Assignment Deferral (HSSAD) program and the better-known Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP) to help identify and support Air Force dual-career families.<sup>19</sup> Air Force Instruction 36-2110, *Assignments*, has a list of 27 different Assignment Limitations Codes including the HSSAD and EFMP. Other programs include Voluntary Stabilized Base Assignment Program which attempts to create a stabilized tour length (four or five years), but this only applies to a subset of the Enlisted force and only to “hard to fill” (i.e. undesirable) locations.<sup>20</sup>

Third, the Air Force should seriously consider reevaluating its centralized construct of hypermobility in favor of a market-based system similar to that of many civilian companies. In this case, Airman would only move if they apply for an open position and are selected for it, instead of being forced to move constantly.<sup>21</sup> This may allow Airmen and their families a greater degree of control over their geographic location

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<sup>18</sup> *National Commission on the Structure of the Air Force*, Report to the President and Congress of the United States, January 30, 2014, 49, <http://afcommission.whs.mil/public/docs/NCSAF%20WEB220.pdf>.

<sup>19</sup> These programs provide varying levels of restricted mobility for Airmen whose families have special requirements.

<sup>20</sup> “Assignments, Incorporating through Change 2, 8 June 2012,” A14.1.

<sup>21</sup> Tim Kane explores this concept in detail in his book, *Bleeding Talent*; Tim Kane, *Bleeding Talent: How the US Military Mismanages Great Leaders and Why It’s Time for a Revolution* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

and stability. A change of this magnitude would likely be beyond the scope of the Air Force's authority as the practice of hypermobility, at least for officers, stems from US law: the Defense Officer Personnel Management Act of 1980. Unfortunately, this 34-year old law dictating officer management, as a 2006 RAND study on increasing personnel tour length remarked, "is based on fixed career- and promotion-time parameters that make [systemic] change challenging."<sup>22</sup> The study concluded, however, "the military needs a personnel management system that is more *flexible* and *contemporary*."<sup>23</sup>

Fourth, the Air Force should explore telework options for Airmen. This would allow Airmen in some positions to perform their duties without requiring a change of station. Telework would be appropriate for some staff work and professional military education positions that sometimes produce short assignments for Airmen and may not require much in-person work. The Telework Enhancement Act of 2010 is designed to facilitate workplace flexibility for Federal Executive Agencies and may be a useful starting point for the USAF regarding Airmen and telework.<sup>24</sup> Finally, the Air Force could work to funnel dual-career families to locations where there are multiple types of assignments within an Airman's development vector. Interestingly, current Air Force assignment processes seem to convey intent to minimize this stability.<sup>25</sup> This would not only reduce hypermobility but also increase predictability, thus providing career-minded spouses with better opportunities to maintain their careers.

These are certainly not the only options. Other services and other countries have explored many options, the Air Force should evaluate the other countries' militaries to see if they have programs viable for the USAF.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Peter Schirmer et al., "Challenging Time in DOPMA," Product Page, 2006, iii, <http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG451.html>.

<sup>23</sup> Schirmer et al., "Challenging Time in DOPMA," 61.

<sup>24</sup> *Telework Enhancement Act of 2010*, 2010, <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/PLAW-111publ292/html/PLAW-111publ292.htm>.

<sup>25</sup> "Assignments, Incorporating through Change 2, 8 June 2012," A19.

<sup>26</sup> For example, the new German Defense Minister said regarding the Bundeswehr's plan to address their assignment policy: "a career in the armed forces must not mean as a rule: always on duty and every few years a move"; Agence France-Presse, "New German Defense Minister Eyes More Family-Friendly Military," *Defense News*, January 12, 2014, <http://www.defensenews.com/article/20140112/DEFREG01/301120016/New-German-Defense-Minister-Eyes-More-Family-Friendly-Military>.

|     |                                                                                                 |
|-----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| #1B | <i>Develop ways to improve assignment predictability for Airmen with career-minded spouses.</i> |
|-----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Improving assignment predictability would allow career-minded spouses to more effectively manage their own career by planning ahead, since unpredictability is a contributing factor to their careers' disruptions. There are a few ways the Air Force could accomplish this. First, it could institute a next-assignment program that would assign Airmen to follow-on locations prior to departing for short or training assignments. For example, Airmen departing for Professional Military Education (PME) (almost always a one-year assignment with a relatively predictable *type* of follow-on assignment) could receive their PME location and their follow-on at the same time. This would allow their families to make decisions that may reduce hypermobility of the spouse. Second, the Air Force could incorporate location into dual-career Airmen's long-term development vectors to provide them and their spouses with greater awareness on future assignment locations. Finally, the Air Force could assign and notify dual-career Airmen of their new locations nine months or a year in advance instead of three or four. For example, the Airmen could be assigned on an earlier VML (vulnerable mover list), but have their report date delayed six to nine months beyond the normal cycle. See also Recommendation #5E, Modifying Retention Incentives.

|     |                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|-----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| #1C | <i><b>Definitely</b> explore the finding that some Airmen do not feel they can be honest with their commanders and Air Force Personnel Center regarding assignment concerns.</i> |
|-----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Integrity First is one of the Air Force Core Values and it is an assumption of this study that honesty is a fundamental condition for the existing assignment management system to have any chance of being responsive to the Airman's needs. One institutional example is the "decline with prejudice" policy held by the Air Force Personnel Center. This practice is that an Airman who is selected for an assignment such as Professional Military Education and turns down this assignment has a permanent "black mark" placed in their record and they are prevented from competing again and it may affect long-term promotion and assignment opportunities. Thus, an Airman is coerced into the assignment.

Some argue the commander's job is to prevent the Airman from applying for this assignment, thus preventing this problem entirely. Yet, the research shows that a culture has evolved in which some Airmen do not feel they can be honest with their commanders, meaning this process may not work as intended. There are surely organizationally justifiable reasons for these practices, but a reevaluation of the system that breeds a culture of dishonesty and coercion is warranted.

|     |                                                                                                                                     |
|-----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| #1D | <i>Explore the finding that there appears to be an unstated expectation of unlimited commitment from Airmen and their families.</i> |
|-----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Another Air Force Core Value is Service before Self. However, the research suggests that Airmen sometimes feel that Air Force personnel assignment processes (possibly inadvertently) pressure Airmen into an exaggerated subservience to any and all requests from the "Service." In this case, the manifestation of the Service is the assignment process. Few Airman wants to verbally describe his or her own needs as competing with "the needs of the Air Force" or "operational requirements. Unfortunately, when it comes to processes that directly affect Air Force families, the Airman now has a significant conflict between duty to family and duty to the service. The family typically yields, also under the auspices of service before self, as the hundreds of thousands of family members who move and uproot their lives every few years can attest. On the contrary, the military, as Segal said, is a "greedy" institution that does not typically yield.<sup>27</sup> It demands nearly unlimited commitment from the family by, as the findings in Chapter 3 described, holding the Airman's career hostage. Because a culture exists that "needs of the Air Force" take precedence, some families suffer. As in recommendation #1C, honesty and integrity seem to be fundamental assumptions of a properly functioning personnel management system, yet evidence indicates Air Force personnel management culture may have evolved away from these core values.

This recommendation can be accomplished through focus groups and interviews as micro-level data will provide more detail to this subject than climate surveys. However, targeting this question in periodic Unit Climate Assessments may provide

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<sup>27</sup> Segal, "The Military And the Family As Greedy Institutions."

insight into the scale of the problem. In addition to active duty Airmen and families, those who have left active duty would also provide useful data.

Table 11, Recommendations 1A-1D

| #  | Recommendations                                                                                                                                                                  |
|----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1A | <i>Develop ways to provide Airmen with career-minded spouses options to reduce their hypermobility without hurting their Air Force careers.</i>                                  |
| 1B | <i>Develop ways to improve assignment predictability for Airmen with career-minded spouses.</i>                                                                                  |
| 1C | <b>Definitely</b> <i>explore the finding that some Airmen do not feel they can be honest with their commanders and Air Force Personnel Center regarding assignment concerns.</i> |
| 1D | <i>Explore the finding that there appears to be an unstated expectation of unlimited commitment from Airmen and their families.</i>                                              |

Source: Author's Original Work

Table 12, Summary Recommendation #1

| #        | Summary Recommendations                                                                                                                                                                |
|----------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>1</b> | <i>Develop ways to provide Airmen with career-minded spouses options to reduce their hypermobility and increase assignment predictability without hurting their Air Force careers.</i> |

Source: Author's Original Work

## Support Spouse Career Continuity

In addition to reducing the hypermobility of Airmen, the Air Force should also ensure efforts to support spouses' careers are focused on the right targets. Chapter 1 described a career as one in which personal fulfillment was the goal. For some careers, this is independent of the employer and may be independent of the status of the individual. However, for others, employees bond with their employers and develop a shared identity – like Airmen do with the Air Force. Still others measure career success by increases in responsibility and status via promotion opportunities. Yet, limiting spouses to lateral mobility, by its nature, limits their promotability, an experience a few of the participant spouses faced. These characteristics are just some of which distinguish a person's perception of having a career versus a job. As a result, efforts to improve spouses' careers must address both employment portability *and* career continuity.

|     |                                                                                                                                                    |
|-----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| #2A | <i>Build upon existing foundational employment portability efforts in order to improve Air Force spouse <b>career continuity and security</b>.</i> |
|-----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

In order to do improve spouse career continuity, the Air Force should build upon the employment portability efforts of Joining Forces and other initiatives. As shown in the beginning of this chapter, these efforts to date have improved *employment* portability through better license portability, unemployment eligibility, and more important, have helped many military spouses get hired and re-hired at new locations.<sup>28</sup> These changes are improving one basic element of career continuity, the ability for lateral mobility.<sup>29</sup> However, employment portability in the form of lateral mobility without the possibility of upward mobility yields career stagnation, per Table 13 below. Upward mobility means promotion and is almost always a function of experience and tenure, so improving experience and tenure (possibly with one employer) of Air Force spouses may help their promotion potential. In addition to increasing continuity with one employer, this will also improve career security for Air Force spouses. Career security, meaning the knowledge that the Airman's relocations will *not* adversely affect the spouse's career, is

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<sup>28</sup> Employment portability means the ability to be re-employed at a new location, not necessarily with the same employer and not necessarily within the person's desired career.

<sup>29</sup> Lateral mobility in this recommendation means the ability to move between locations (and maybe between employers) following an Airman's change of station.



critical to reducing some of the adverse stress effects on the spouse, family, Airman, and workforce. The goal for the Air Force should be career security in which its spouses are no more likely to have to leave their employer and career than a non-military, non-hypermobile person.

Table 13, Today's Career-Employment Portability Spectrum

Current Situation

Current Efforts Aimed at Getting Here

What Our Spouses Need

| Long-term Career Situation:                        | Unemployed: Lost Career (employment immobility) | Job: Lost Career (employment mobility) | Career Collapsing (employment portability) | Career Decay (employment portability) | Career Stagnation (career portability) | Career Continuity | Career Security   |
|----------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Employment Situation                               | Unemployed                                      | Employed                               | Employed                                   | Employed                              | Employed                               | Employed          | Employed          |
| Relation of new employment to desired career field | None                                            | Unrelated                              | Related but Not Desired                    | Similar or Not Desired                | Same or Desired                        | Desired           | Desired           |
| Employer at new location                           | None                                            | Any                                    | Related but not desired                    | Related but not desired               | Same or Desired                        | Same or Desired   | Same or Desired   |
| Type of career move                                | None                                            | Downward                               | Lateral or Downward                        | Lateral or Downward                   | Lateral or Downward                    | Lateral or Upward | Lateral or Upward |
| Prospect for upward mobility                       | None                                            | None                                   | None                                       | None                                  | None                                   | Some              | Yes               |
| Career security                                    | None                                            | None                                   | None                                       | None                                  | None                                   | Some              | Yes               |
| USAF effect on career                              | Devastating                                     | Devastating                            | Major                                      | Significant                           | Some                                   | Little            | None              |

Source: Author's Original Work

To improve career continuity, the Air Force will likely need to improve spouses' continuity within employers, something that is outside its direct authority. Thus, the Air Force should leverage its partnerships with Joining Forces and other political action efforts to improve military spouse career continuity and career security by (1) working with employers to improve retention of military spouses (with a particular employer)



across relocations, (2) working with employers to improve promotion rate for deserving military spouses by reducing both promotion discrimination and the structural foundations of promotion discrimination, and (3) working with lawmakers on tax incentives for companies that relocate and/or promote military spouses. These incentives should be *greater* than incentives for simply hiring a military spouse because it is likely better for the spouse's career to be relocated and/or promoted than simply to be re-hired.<sup>30</sup>

Also, Joining Forces has been successfully addressing licensing portability, and the Air Force should continue supporting Joining Forces in addressing remaining license portability limitations. Lawmakers may also consider standardizing federal unemployment benefit eligibility for spouses who lose work because of a military move, although most (44) states already have this unemployment eligibility in place.<sup>31</sup> This will not only help those spouses who work a job for money, but may provide incentive for employers to relocate their Air Force spouse employees. It is reasonable to assume a nationwide or global employer would rather keep a productive employee in the company instead of just paying unemployment for a person. Also, although this research only partly examines overseas employment, the Air Force should further explore ways to allow spouses to overcome career disruptions through overseas moves. Examples include improving on-base career employment opportunities by improving the GS spouse preference program. Also, the service should explore off-base career employment possibilities such as international license portability and work-Visa / Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) limitations. Career *continuity* (and ultimately career security) should be the Air Force's goal for all its spouses.

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<sup>30</sup> One possible concern about existing challenges to companies to meet hiring goals (i.e. hire 100,000 more veterans and military spouses by 2015) is that companies may abuse the metric in order to avoid relocating spouses. For example, if Company X has an Air Force spouse employee about to relocate, the company can either (1) relocate the spouse within the company and get no credit for Joining Forces or (2) allow the spouse to quit and then rehire the spouse at the new location and *do* get credit for hiring a military spouse. The company may choose the latter, to the detriment of the spouse who may have to undergo the employment search process, interviews, emotional strain, etc. One way to avoid this is to create a greater incentive for relocating military spouses than for hiring one.

<sup>31</sup> Department of Defense, "Issue 2: Facilitate Military Spouse Transition through Licensure Portability and Unemployment Compensation."

|     |                                                                                                            |
|-----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| #2B | <b><i>Definitely</i></b> explore and address the claims of hiring discrimination against military spouses. |
|-----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

According to participant spouses, some civilian employers discriminate against military spouses due to their hypermobility. According to the Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF) 2014 study, 41 percent of respondent spouses would *not* tell a potential employer that they are a military spouse.<sup>32</sup> Although it is difficult to prove discrimination without evidence from inside employers, at least one participant was a hiring authority for her company and confirmed that the company would have discriminated against her if the company was aware she was a military spouse. However, even if the discrimination is only perceived (and not real), it still has a detrimental effect on the person being discriminated against. Pavalko, et al found a link between perceived workplace discrimination and emotional distress, a correlation which this study also observed in the focus group participants.<sup>33</sup>

The Air Force can address this recommendation in a few different ways. First, the Air Force should (possibly via Joining Forces) work with government and civilian research agencies to investigate the scope, scale, and legal precedent for the issue. Existing law could give a spouse grounds for an equal opportunity discrimination lawsuit.<sup>34</sup> Second, the Air Force should also work with lawmakers to seek clarity on the intent of anti-discrimination laws and how they relate to military spouses. They may need clarification. This information is useful for lawmakers, employers, and military spouses. Knowing one's rights would also provide a sense of empowerment for spouses who fear discrimination.

Third, the Air Force should connect with employers at both the macro (via Joining Forces) and at the local levels (via base-level spouse employment support personnel) to help employers reduce the *perception* of discrimination. They can ensure their hiring managers are aware of the perception and ways to ensure military spouses feel they have

<sup>32</sup> Maury and Stone, *Military Spouse Employment Report*, 69.

<sup>33</sup> Eliza K. Pavalko, Krysia N. Mossakowski, and Vanessa J. Hamilton, "Does Perceived Discrimination Affect Health? Longitudinal Relationships between Work Discrimination and Women's Physical and Emotional Health," *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 44, no. 1 (March 1, 2003): 18–33.

<sup>34</sup> "Prohibited Practices: Pre-Employment Inquiries and Marital Status or Number of Children."

equal opportunity. In addition, companies may be more transparent about their hiring process. This way if a military spouse is not hired because they are not the most qualified, they will have information that does not perpetuate a perception of discrimination. One simple way for employers to improve their own image is to stop asking potential employees whether they are military spouses, regardless of whether it is illegal. This is not to suggest that companies must or should do this, but only that *if* they did, it might improve the situation. Finally, the previous recommendation to incentive companies to relocate spouses would also reduce hiring discrimination, if only because spouses that are relocated do not need to interview again.

|     |                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|-----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| #2C | <i>Evaluate base-level spouse employment support programs to determine whether they are equipped to address career-specific needs.</i> |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|     | #2C.1                                                                                                                                  | <i>If they are, then improve the marketing of these services to Air Force dual-career families.</i>                                                                                                                                                                        |
|     | #2C.2                                                                                                                                  | <i>If they are not effective, then adjust Air Force employment support programs to include individual-focused support for career-minded spouses which begin at a spouse's notification of relocation and continues until the spouse's career is effectively relocated.</i> |

The first section of this chapter described the positive spouse employment support efforts of the Airman and Family Readiness Centers and associated programs. However, research indicates that in addition to environmental difficulties faced by career-minded spouses, Air Force Base-level spouse employment support programs may not be effective in addressing career-specific needs. This may be due to a focus on employment versus careers, it may be due to inadequate funding, it may be a problem localized to a few bases, it may be an outdated problem, or it may simply be a problem of perception on the part of the participants, among other possibilities. Regardless, a holistic examination of the efficacy and efforts of Air Force and associated programs is warranted. No matter how helpful a program may be, a program spouses do not trust or use is an ineffective program

A comprehensive assessment of spouse employment and career programs should explore a number of areas. The assessment should explore the efficacy of overcoming difficulties associate with hypermobility by *measuring the career outcomes of individual*

*spouses*. The assessment should also determine whether career support is lacking in favor of employment support.<sup>35</sup> Also, even if programs may be effective for a particular spouse, some are unaware of these programs or do not trust them due to previous experiences, as this study's participants noted. For example, if a program has significantly improved from five years ago, the Air Force may need to reconnect with or regain the trust of the program's target demographic.

In addition, there are at least tens of spouse career and employment support websites and programs available. Navigating these can be difficult, daunting, and a drain on already limited time resources. Simply providing a list of websites to spouses is akin to being transferred around on hold while waiting to speak to a customer service agent on the phone. This study's research participants were frustrated by such a practice in the past. If current efforts reflect this finding, the service has work to do.

Another way to help career-minded spouses is to do so prior to their relocation. For example, the Air Force could provide (or contract with) a service that begins the career continuity process as soon as the spouse learns of a relocation. One way to do this is to provide a person to help negotiate with the employer to relocate the spouse.

To fully address spouse-side career continuity (i.e. working around hypermobility), the Air Force should develop a program that takes a spouse from the point at which the spouse receives notification of impending relocation all the way to the spouse having employment with a desired employer (maybe the same one) at the new location within the desired career field with no effective break in their resume. At first glance, this seems costly and difficult. If further study proves it so, it only strengthens the argument to reduce the hypermobility of the Airmen. If a service with significant resources and reach cannot help a spouse maintain a career, how is the spouse expected to do it alone?

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<sup>35</sup> Both the case study and focus group confirmed that career-minded spouses make a distinction between a career and a job, particularly regarding the needs of the career-oriented spouse. Colloquially, the term *career* is often used interchangeably with *job*. The use of this term may be relative to one's position. i.e. it is possible that every career looks at employment that pays less or has less requirements as "just a job," and people wanting "jobs" may actually consider themselves having/wanting a career. If this is the case, the dichotomous career-job distinction should be reevaluated in further research.

Table 14, Recommendations 2A-2C

| #  | Recommendations                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2A | <i>Build upon existing foundational employment portability efforts in order to improve Air Force spouse <b>career continuity and security</b>.</i> |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| 2B | <b>Definitely</b> <i>explore and address the claims of hiring discrimination against military spouses.</i>                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| 2C | <i>Evaluate base-level spouse employment support programs to determine whether they are equipped to address career-specific needs.</i>             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|    | 2C.1                                                                                                                                               | <i>If they are, then improve the marketing of these services to Air Force dual-career families.</i>                                                                                                                                                                        |
|    | 2C.2                                                                                                                                               | <i>If they are not effective, then adjust Air Force employment support programs to include individual-focused support for career-minded spouses which begin at a spouse's notification of relocation and continues until the spouse's career is effectively relocated.</i> |

Source: Author's Original Work

Table 15, Summary Recommendation #2

| # | Summary Recommendations                                                                                                                            |
|---|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2 | <i>Build upon existing foundational employment portability efforts in order to improve Air Force spouse <b>career continuity and security</b>.</i> |

Source: Author's Original Work

### Address Anachronistic Cultural Concerns

One of the basic findings of this study is that research suggests the Air Force may have organizational and social cultures that are anachronistic and out of touch with current demographics. Whether it is the terms used to describe spouses or the implicit biases that favor traditional families over dual-career families, the Air Force should review and address policies and practices that are inconsistent and/or detrimental to some of its families. The following recommendations explore ways the Air Force can improve the situation for dual-career families.

|     |                                                                                                           |
|-----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| #3A | <i>Change the term “dependent” to “family member” or something more representative of modern spouses.</i> |
|-----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

The Air Force, and possibly the military in general, should change the term *dependent* to *family member*. When Airmen get married, they (and the Air Force) bring the new spouse into Air Force life in a number of ways; and the same thing happens when a one person in an existing couple joins the Air Force. The Air Force has many ways to bring these families into the fold, but they likely look different from different perspectives. For many, the Air Force generates a sense of pride and identity in the family knowing that their Airman is serving their country. For some spouses, however, this sense of pride is assaulted as outdated and insensitive organizational processes undermine their own identity. The use of the term *dependent* is one of those processes that needs to change.

The term *dependent* has existed for decades and is presumably based on a historical situation that implies financial dependence on the military member. Today, however, it is used for many other reasons to include base access, medical care, military pay, etc, many of which do not necessarily imply financial dependence. To the military, it is just a simple term that is deeply intertwined in all kinds of personnel systems, regulations, practice, policies, etc.

To a spouse, however, the term can be an attack on ones identity –“demeaning” – at least according to the participants in this study. Furthermore, the disdain for this term is not new; according to research from 1984, spouses then also viewed the term as

“irritating.”<sup>36</sup> Many of these spouses are not financially dependent on their Airmen except when the Air Force interferes with their ability to maintain a career. The term likely invokes resentment against the Air Force, as its own processes are what turned. Also, this distaste for the term may not only apply to career-minded spouses but also to spouses in traditional families. These spouses often contribute significantly to their families, and many contribute *everything* to the family with the exception of the paycheck. It is difficult for one to argue spouses like this fit the description of *dependent*.

To all types of spouses, the term is more than just irritating; it is a pervasive and constant reminder that Air Force culture considers them an afterthought. And to career-minded spouses, it reminds them that anything outside the traditional family is an outlier, unwelcome and forced to fit into an anachronistic mold. It is time to change the term.

|     |                                                                                                                                                          |
|-----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| #3B | <b><i>Definitely</i></b> explore the finding that spouses and their Airmen fear command retribution for a spouse’s lack of participation in unit events. |
|-----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

This study assumes that the Air Force does not support a practice of command retribution for a spouse’s lack of participation. It also assumes that the Air Force does not support a culture in which a spouse’s participation, or lack thereof, in unit events has any bearing on an Airman’s career. This may not be a valid assumption, but as the research showed, the expectation exists and negatively affects dual-career families. Thus, it is the position of this study that the Air Force needs to explore *and* open and enterprise-level dialogue about the role of family expectations in Airmen’s careers. Many spouses (and families) contribute significantly to the Air Force. There is even an award for the best command team – the General and Mrs. Jerome F. O’Malley Award. This award “recognizes the wing commander and spouse team whose contributions to the nation, the Air Force, and the local community best exemplify the highest ideas and positive leadership of a military couple in a key Air Force position.”<sup>37</sup> There may be a fine line between recognizing the outstanding and patriotic achievements of the winners of this award and fostering a culture in which a spouse is expected, indeed *pressured*, to attempt

<sup>36</sup> Warner, “The Air Force Wife—Her Perspective.”

<sup>37</sup> Gloria Kwizera, “Official Seeking Nominations for O’Malley Award,” *U.S. Air Force*, October 18, 2013, <http://www.af.mil/News/ArticleDisplay/tabid/223/Article/467315/officials-seeking-nominations-for-omalley-award.aspx>.



to imitate the high level of commitment that awards such as this exemplify. At least according to the participants in this study, a dialogue about these expectations is warranted.

Also, because this study did not directly test cultural expectations of commanders, the “expectation of spouses to participate” is an area for further study to determine (1) how widespread the *perception* of the expectation is, (2) is there actually an *expectation* or just a perception, (3) what causes the perception if there is no expectation, and (4) what causes this expectation? Accomplishing this recommendation will require further study, perhaps by RAND, the Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF), or other researchers. It is unlikely that a top-down inquiry will produce accurate results, which suggests an external Command-Directed Inquiry or Inspector General Inquiry may be appropriate.

|     |                                                                                                                                                                    |
|-----|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| #3C | <i>Further explore the claims the Air Force has a family schema that is not only detrimental to its dual-career families, but may be anachronistic in general.</i> |
|-----|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

One of the primary findings of this study’s research is the Air Force may have an anachronistic culture that is detrimental to its dual-career families. Because the research in this study was limited to seven couples who were of a relatively homogenous demographic, the Air Force would benefit from extending this area of study into different demographics – younger and older, enlisted families, traditional family-type, etc. In this study, all the Airmen were officer, male, and from Generation X (born between 1961 and 1981) and the spouses were all career-minded women.<sup>38</sup> Some research suggests that people from different generations have different conceptions of the role of the work-family relationship.<sup>39</sup> For example, comparing the US civilian population of today with that of 1992, a greater percentage of women expect to work full-time and men are more likely to expect a “50/50” model of shared responsibility in between home and work.<sup>40</sup> If the population from which the Air Force draws its recruits is changing, it is likely its

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<sup>38</sup> This definition of Generation X is just one of many, but most definitions use similar dates.

<sup>39</sup> Stewart Friedman, Is Work-Family Conflict Reaching a Tipping Point?, interview by Sarah Green, Podcast, accessed April 21, 2014, <http://blogs.hbr.org/2014/03/is-work-family-conflict-reaching-a-tipping-point/>.

<sup>40</sup> Friedman, Is Work-Family Conflict Reaching a Tipping Point?.



Airmen and their families (and their expectations) are changing as well. These demographic trends (among others) suggest a changing shape of the American family away from the “traditional” family and toward a more diverse family shape that includes a greater percentage of dual-earner and dual-career families. Existing military family research supports this proposition, but the Air Force (and the military in general) should specifically study whether its overall family schema is commensurate with current and future demographic realities. As this study suggests about dual-career families, a mismatch between family demographics and the organization’s family schema can lead to enterprise-level workforce problems. According to Harrell, volunteer expectations of spouses are not limited to Air Force spouses; her 2001 study of Army officers’ spouses found a strikingly similar situation within the US Army.<sup>41</sup> She categorized these “duties” as: Institutional activities; Morale, Public Relations, and Ceremonial Duties; Mentoring, Development, and Role Preservations; Entertaining and Socializing; and Unit and Readiness Support.<sup>42</sup> The DoD in general may consider having all services explore this culture and its relation to current and evolving family demographics.

To help guide these future studies, the Air Force should consider the following questions: Are there statistically significant groupings of different family shapes within the current Air Force population? Based on historical trends, including the demographics of recruiting pools and future personnel projections, what will the shapes of future Air Force families look like? In addition, the Air Force should further explore: What does the Air Force family schema look like? How well does this family schema represent and support its current and future family needs? As this study suggests, there already exists evidence of a mismatch for dual-career families; so what other mismatches exist? Is this mismatch indicative of a greater problem? Finally, as the next few sections of this chapter will discuss, the Air Force needs to determine what implications a schema-demographic mismatch has on the workforce and concepts of operational effectiveness, cost, and risk. A great amount of research on family demographics and preferences exists in various forms, including studies from the Institute for Veterans and Military Families,

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<sup>41</sup> Harrell, “Army Officers’ Spouses.”

<sup>42</sup> Harrell, “Army Officers’ Spouses,” 59.

and RAND, among others. Future studies would benefit from further exploration into these studies.

|     |                                                                                                                             |
|-----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| #3D | <i>Explore and circulate best practices for unit-level Key Spouse and family support programs, if not already doing so.</i> |
|-----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

This recommendation could be accomplished via top-down call for best practices or a competition; and competitions like this may already exist. As the focus group found, some units have reduced the expectation of leadership spouses by actively seeking enthusiastic volunteers for unit events from the spouses of junior Airmen. This practice, according to one participant couple, made a positive difference in the perception that certain spouses needed to volunteer for unit events. A practice such as this may reduce the perceived requirement for both leadership spouses and other spouses to *volunteer for* unit events, although it may not directly impact the perceived requirement to *participate in* (to be present) these unit events. The Air Force should explore and circulate practices that reduce negative effects on dual-career families. The US Navy has a program that may also be of use to the Air Force: the Ombudsman program. An Ombudsman is a paid, unit-level position with duties similar to that of a Key Spouse.

Also, although this practice seems positive on its face, positive effects on an Airmen's careers because of their spouse's efforts may be nearly as undesirable as negative ones. This is because a positive impact on an Airman's career generates incentives for such behavior, and if incentives are biased against dual-career families (or any family with a spouse who does not wish to participate), then the Air Force may be promoting a culture of discrimination that favors certain family types. Again, a culture such as this deserves an open dialogue about its place and shape in the Air Force. The next recommendation will address ways the Air Force could better understand its culture.

|     |                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|-----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| #3E | <i>Investigate claims that base agencies are unresponsive to dual-career family needs and whether base agencies should modify their practices to better support these families.</i> |
|-----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

A number of the participants described both structural and personality-driven incompatibilities between the practices of some base agencies and the needs of dual career families. One example was that a number of participants independently criticized medical facilities for their hours and their treatment of spouses. Another participant said that during the Year of the Air Force Family, the base provided “bounce houses” and “craft shows” instead of supporting its customers with longer customer service hours or improved customer support. The spouse participants suggested they would rather see customer service agencies open after the spouses’ work hours than see the base provide things of which they could not take advantage. These craft shows were likely spawned from the recommendations of a RAND study titled, “The Year of the Air Force Family: a 2009 Study of Active Duty Spouses.” Two of this study’s recommendations are to host craft shows on base and improve youth activities.<sup>43</sup> It is unknown why the survey question specifically surveyed arts and crafts use (this study makes no judgment on the survey design), but the apparent link between the study and the outcome may be a testament to the Air Force’s responsiveness to its families needs, assuming it has a clear picture of them. This is why this study recommends further inquiry into these topics. Of note, the same RAND study also recommended “[Improving] employment opportunities for civilian spouses.”<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Laura L. Miller et al., “Year of the Air Force Family,” Product Page, 2011, 47, [http://www.rand.org/pubs/technical\\_reports/TR879.html](http://www.rand.org/pubs/technical_reports/TR879.html).

<sup>44</sup> Miller et al., “Year of the Air Force Family.”

Table 16, Recommendations 3A-3E

| #  | Recommendations                                                                                                                                                                     |
|----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 3A | <i>Change the term “dependent” to “family member” or something more representative of modern spouses.</i>                                                                           |
| 3B | <i><b>Definitely</b> explore the finding that spouses and their Airmen fear command retribution for a spouse’s lack of participation in unit events.</i>                            |
| 3C | <i>Further explore the claims the Air Force has a family schema that is not only detrimental to its dual-career families, but may be anachronistic in general.</i>                  |
| 3D | <i>Explore and circulate best practices for unit-level Key Spouse and family support programs, if not already doing so.</i>                                                         |
| 3E | <i>Investigate claims that base agencies are unresponsive to dual-career family needs and whether base agencies should modify their practices to better support these families.</i> |

Source: Author’s Original Work

Table 17, Summary Recommendations #3 and #3.1

| #          | Summary Recommendations                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>3</b>   | <i>Change the term “dependent” to “family member” or something more representative of modern spouses.</i>                                                                                                 |
| <b>3.1</b> | <i>Explore and address claims an anachronistic organizational culture exists that is not only detrimental to dual-career families, but may be misaligned with current and future family demographics.</i> |

Source: Author’s Original Work

### Mitigate Effects on Families and Spouses

The most effective way to address the negative effects and implications of spouse career disruptions is to eliminate their causes. However, as some of the causes are deeply rooted in organizational culture and may take time to change, it is important to minimize the negative effects while awaiting the causal chain to catch up. Also, because of this study's limited scope and small sample size, the Air Force should work with experts in the field to further study the scale and depth of these effects within the greater population. The following recommendations provide suggestions for improvement as well as focus areas for future studies.

|     |                                                                                                                                 |
|-----|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| #4A | <i>Study the conditions that reduce the stress effects (both acute and chronic) of career disruptions on Air Force spouses.</i> |
|-----|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Sarah (of the case study) made the comment that the quality of the European assignment helped offset the stress from being unable to pursue her career.<sup>45</sup> She also said that at some point, she “just accepted” the fact she would have to make serious sacrifices in her career and that once she accepted this, life was easier for her. It will be useful to answer questions such as: Is this effect (stress reduction) temporary or permanent? Would being stationed in a desirable place on a consecutive assignment offset the negative effects of career loss during the second assignment? Or, is a desirable (but non-career) assignment just considered acceptable if it is just a short sabbatical? The phenomenon of stress-reduction deserves further study to determine: 1) what the conditions are that reduce this stress, 2) whether the Air Force can help other spouses mitigate their stress, and 3) whether these conditions have a role in the Air Force's incentive structure for its Airmen.

|     |                                                                                                                                                      |
|-----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| #4B | <i>Further explore the effect of the dual-career status on couples who have and are trying to have children, and work to support these families.</i> |
|-----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

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<sup>45</sup> All references to Sarah in this section refer to this case study; Anonymous Airman and Spouse, Case Study Interview held at Air University, Maxwell AFB, AL.

The research shows children (having them and trying to conceive them) are another constraint on a person's (and a families) resources that competes with careers. The obvious difficulty in trying to conceive children while geographically separated is one challenge faced by participants in this study. If a couple lives apart (as a commuter couple) to attempt to pursue two careers, this accordingly increases their challenges in having children. Some may argue this is a problem of their own doing, yet without the Air Force-induced hypermobility, the family would have been more able to pursue both careers and conceive children at the same time. And, although Airmen who are deployed or stationed in unaccompanied tours face the same challenges conceiving children, the family separation in those situations is obvious and recognized by the Air Force. In commuter couples, the Air Force has almost no way of tracking or knowing this family separation, with two exceptions. Either the Airman's commander may know the Airman is in a commuter couple, or in the case of an overseas assignment, an Airman must notify the Air Force if their spouse is not living with them so that the Air Force can *reduce their pay*.<sup>46</sup> More common are families that already have children and have difficulty pursuing two careers because of Air Force-related time requirements, both unpredictable and predictable. As one participant spouse said pointedly: "Do I want a career or do I want children? Because with his job the way it is (regarding unpredictability and time constraints), I can't realistically have both."

This recommendation is in two parts: action and exploration. To reduce the effects on families with (and wanting) children, the Air Force should consider the recommendations to reduce families' incentives to become commuter couples. Because one major reason couples do this is to pursue two careers, one that must relocate and one that is geographically fixed, addressing these problems via recommendations 1 and 2 will help alleviate this problem. To further explore this situation, the Air Force should conduct focused research to answer the following questions: What are the impacts on a family and its members surrounding difficulties with conception? What are the ways the Air Force can support geographically separated families that are attempting to conceive? some of these concerns, the Air Force should but also on the difficulties these couples

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<sup>46</sup> The pay reduction comes in the form of receiving a lower Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) rate since Airmen who have spouses living with them receive a higher COLA.

face. A number of studies identify childcare as a significant concern for spouses seeking employment, so this seems a worthy area of further study as well.<sup>47</sup>

|     |                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|-----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| #4C | <i>Improve counseling for unmarried (and married) Air Force dual-career couples on challenges of, and methods for, managing the difficulties of USAF dual-career family life.</i> |
|-----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

This study suggested that the process of becoming an Air Force dual-career family happens in a number of ways and is often a path paved with uncertainty. USAF dual-career families come to being in many forms: an Airman marries a civilian career-minded spouse, one spouse of a civilian dual-career family joins the Air Force, the spouse of an Airman chooses to pursue a career, or one spouse of a dual-Airman couple leaves the service in pursuit of a civilian career. The challenges faced by these families are similar, but their knowledge bases regarding the difficulties faced by USAF dual-career families are different. Even the USAF dual-career families formed when one Airman of a dual-Airman family said they were unaware of the scale of difficulty they would face. To address this knowledge gap will require further research on the subject of dual-career families in the USAF. The Air Force should use modern research to inform existing marriage counselors on the subject. These counselors include medical, chaplain, and contract employees such as those of the Military Family Life Consultant program (MFLC). Also, some or all of these counselors may have significant experience in the subject of dual-career challenges and the Air Force should capitalize on the knowledge of these experts. The counseling should not only discuss expected challenges, but also successful strategies for managing the possible emotional and family-related conflict likely in a USAF dual-career family. Another possibility is to connect these spouses in a base-sponsored network or support group, as Sarah suggested. This support group could be chaired by one of the counselors, such as an MFLC, or it could be entirely spouse run. Strengthening families will strengthen the Airmen and spouses facing the challenges of dual-career life.

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<sup>47</sup> Greentree et al., 2012 *Military Family Lifestyle Survey: Comprehensive Report*; Maury and Stone, *Military Spouse Employment Report*.

|     |                                                                                                                        |
|-----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| #4D | <i>Further explore and address the financial impact of Air Force-induced career disruption on dual-career families</i> |
|-----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

The Air Force should explore and address (through reimbursement or by offering services at no cost) the expenses of portability that include relicensing, continuing education, testing, resume preparation, job search, etc. MyCAA is a good example of a program that offset the costs of relicensing and continuing education, but due to funding limitations, it only applies to the spouses of junior Airmen. The Air Force should reconsider this limitation, or if budget concerns are excessive, it may reconsider limiting the demographic by something other than rank, such as what services are reimbursed. The Air Force could also partner with internal and external organizations such as the Air Force medical community, DODDs, etc to determine whether they have internship programs available to spouses that may satisfy continuing education or experience requirements. Also, resume preparation and job search costs can become excessive; some Airman and Family Readiness Centers and online career support services offer programs such as these, but research shows some spouses distrust their quality. As a result, the Air Force should evaluate these programs, as suggested in recommendation #2C, and if they are adequate, advertise and reconnect with spouses who may have had a poor experience in the past. Second, as recommendation 2A suggests, lawmakers should consider adjusting federal unemployment eligibility regulation to ensure a nationwide standard for eligibility of military spouses when work is lost in conjunction with a military change of station.



Table 18, Recommendations 4A-4D

| #  | Recommendations                                                                                                                                                                   |
|----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 4A | <i>Study the conditions that reduce the stress effects (both acute and chronic) of career disruptions on Air Force spouses.</i>                                                   |
| 4B | <i>Further explore the effect of the dual-career status on couples who have and are trying to have children, and work to support these families</i>                               |
| 4C | <i>Improve counseling for unmarried (and married) Air Force dual-career couples on challenges of, and methods for, managing the difficulties of USAF dual-career family life.</i> |
| 4D | <i>Further explore and address the financial impact of Air Force-induced career disruption on dual-career families.</i>                                                           |

Source: Author's Original Work

Table 19, Summary Recommendation #4

| # | Summary Recommendations                                                                                   |
|---|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 4 | <i>Explore and address dual-career work-family conflict and its effects on USAF dual-career families.</i> |

Source: Author's Original Work

### **Assess and Reduce Impact to USAF Mission and Workforce**

In addition to the effects of dual-career family challenges, the Air Force workforce faces impacts to its effectiveness, risk, and cost. Airmen who are stressed at work as a result of their spouses' career-related challenges may make errors during critical missions, training or combat. Also, Airmen afraid of telling their supervisor that they should not fly that day because of family-related issues increase the risk to the mission and reduce a commander's ability to assess and manage risk. Finally, the Air Force trains Airmen, sometimes at great cost; if these Airmen leave the service (even in part) because of dual-career family difficulties, the dollar cost of the Air Force workforce increases. Studying and addressing the relation between performance and retention issues and dual-career family challenges will improve the Air Force workforce.

|     |                                                                                                                                                                            |
|-----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| #5A | <i>Study the relationship between family stress (specifically work-family conflict of dual-career difficulties) and mission-related performance of dual-career Airmen.</i> |
|-----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

The research indicates Airmen feel stress as a result of the difficulties their spouses face in pursuing a career. As a well-studied facet of work-family conflict, crossover (of stress) and the resulting stress feedback loops (see figure X) may raise the emotional stress levels of Airmen to one that impacts mission performance. Despite the Airmen's claims of compartmentalization, NASA researchers acknowledged a correlation between life stress and work performance (specifically aircraft accidents in US military pilots).<sup>48</sup> In addition to long-term concerns such as retention and career decisions, short-term impacts such as stress-related accidents and decision-making problems can have major consequences. High operations tempo, mission-related stress, and family-related stress add to an already stressful occupation (military service); if the Air Force can reduce one of these sources of stress, it may improve the quality of its workforce and reduce the associated risk.

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<sup>48</sup> James A. Young, *The Effects of Life-Stress on Pilot Performance* (Moffett Field, CA: NASA Ames Research Center, December 2008), [http://humanfactors.arc.nasa.gov/flightcognition/hottopic/download/Young\\_TM2008\\_215375\\_final.pdf](http://humanfactors.arc.nasa.gov/flightcognition/hottopic/download/Young_TM2008_215375_final.pdf).

|     |                                                                                                                                                                  |
|-----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| #5B | <i>Study and address the finding that Airmen are afraid of acknowledging family-related stress to their supervisors (for fear of being a “limiting factor.”)</i> |
|-----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

As in recommendation #5A above, research indicates family-related stress may affect Airmen’s performance at work. If further study indicates it is a significant factor in mission-related performance, the Air Force should have a way to identify and address this factor. One Airman in the study described an expectation to hide any possible family-related issues, as it seemed unacceptable to him to bring family issues to work. If Airmen such as this refuse to report family-related stress because of cultural expectations, commanders with a false impression of their Airmen’s stress level have a reduced ability to accurately assess and manage risk within their units. If future research finds a negative stigma associated with reporting family-related stress, the Air Force should find ways to eliminate this. A commanders’ ability to assess and manage risk in operational missions is critical to successful operations.

|     |                                                                                                                                                                              |
|-----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| #5C | <i>Study how strong the relationship is between Airmen’s career decisions (following development vector as well as staying in the Air Force) and their spouses’ careers.</i> |
|-----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

The research indicates that Airmen, when making career-related decisions, consider the effects of that decision on their spouses’ careers. Some Airmen have chosen to stray from their optimal development vector, others to leave the service entirely. If the spouse’s career plays a major role in an Airman’s career decisions, the Air Force would benefit from understanding the relationship between the effects of Air Force life on the spouse’s career and an Airman’s career decisions. In order to study this relationship, the Air Force will need to conduct assessments of Airmen’s in-career decisions (such as pursuing assignments in accordance with professional development vectors) and their retention decisions. To explore in-career decisions, the Air Force should conduct qualitative analysis of any demographic of interest, whether it be dual-career families in general or Airmen of a certain career field that also are in dual-career families. These studies should ask Airmen why they strayed from or followed their professional development vector to see if dual-career concerns affected their decisions. The same

types of studies will be useful for retention-related questions, as the next recommendation (#5D) will discuss.

|     |                                                                                                                  |
|-----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| #5D | <i>Ensure exit surveys explore whether, why, and which Airmen leave the service due to dual-career concerns.</i> |
|-----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

If Airmen in dual-career families tend to be in undermanned career fields or otherwise of interest to Air Force retention efforts, understanding and addressing their dual-career concerns will improve retention efforts. Existing research supports these suggestions. Heilmann found that family satisfaction with the Air Force was a stronger predictor of officer retention than work-related experiences.<sup>49</sup> And, as noted in Chapter 1, Stahl found family stability to be a primary retention factor for the Airmen in his study.<sup>50</sup> These studies indicate there is a link worth studying between the family and retention decisions.

The Air Force already has the data on whether it wants to retain these Airmen (because it presumably knows most of what it needs to know about current retention needs), but it needs to understand the retention decisions of Airmen *and families* who leave the service. Surveys and qualitative studies in which the research participants are still on active duty provide skewed data, as intent to leave is not the same as actually having left. Unfortunately, some research suggests exit surveys may not collect enough or the right type of data to answer such questions. According to one spouse who recently departed the Air Force, existing exit surveys are “more of a guilt trip than a real fact-finding device. They ask questions like: do you think you’ll have better health care on the outside than you did in the Air Force.”<sup>51</sup> Although this study did not corroborate this former Airman’s experience with existing surveys, her comments suggest the Air Force may need to review its exit survey practices.

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<sup>49</sup> Sharon G. Heilmann, John E. Bell, and Gavain K. McDonald, “Work—Home Conflict A Study of the Effects of Role Conflict on Military Officer Turnover Intention,” *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies* 16, no. 1 (August 1, 2009): 85–96.

<sup>50</sup> Stahl, “Blunting the Spear: Why Good People Get Out.”

<sup>51</sup> Anonymous Spouse, Discussion, interview by John Paul F. Mintz, April 9, 2014.

|     |                                                                                                                                                        |
|-----|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| #5E | <i>Adjust retention incentive structure to add assignment preference to the list of existing options for Airmen targeted for retention incentives.</i> |
|-----|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Due to the earning potential of spouses, many Airmen would likely prefer control over their next few assignments than any monetary bonus. The 2013 Aviator Retention Pay was as high as \$25,000 per year for nine years (a total of \$225,000). Yet, Sarah, the pharmacist, said she could make as much as \$100,000 per year. In a case like this, if the Air Force gave a couple some direct control over the locations in the years remaining in the Airman's career, it would significantly improve the financial incentive to the couple, increase the spouse's ability to maintain her career, retain the Airman on active duty, and could save the Air Force \$225,000 in retention incentives. For example, the Air Force could allow an Airman like this to select from the list of upcoming assignments (provided they meet the eligibility criteria) before continuing with the standard assignment match.<sup>52</sup> This provides a tangible cost-benefit analysis for the Air Force: would the Air Force be willing to allow an Airman to choose his assignment(s) instead of letting the Air Force Personnel Center assign it to him in order to save \$75,000 (one 3-year change of station worth of retention pay)? One would think so. In fact, the Air Force could apply such a retention incentive option to any target retention demographic. This cost-saving method would be especially useful in a time of fiscal tightening.

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<sup>52</sup> Precedents already exist for a program such as this in the junior enlisted ranks. One example, a program called Base of Preference (BOP) exists for first term Airmen and "is a reenlistment incentive...[and]...is an incentive for other Airmen to continue an Air Force career." The Air Force should consider a similar program for officers and more senior enlisted personnel also; "Assignments, Incorporating through Change 2, 8 June 2012," A2.1.

Table 20, Recommendations 5A-5C

| #  | Recommendations                                                                                                                                                              |
|----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 5A | <i>Study the relationship between family stress (specifically work-family conflict of dual-career difficulties) and mission-related performance of dual-career Airmen.</i>   |
| 5B | <i>Study and address the finding that Airmen are afraid of acknowledging family-related stress to their supervisors (for fear of being a “limiting factor.”)</i>             |
| 5C | <i>Study how strong the relationship is between Airmen’s career decisions (following development vector as well as staying in the Air Force) and their spouses’ careers.</i> |
| 5D | <i>Ensure exit surveys explore whether, why, and which Airmen leave the service due to dual-career concerns.</i>                                                             |
| 5E | <i>Adjust retention incentive structure to add assignment preference to the list of existing options for Airmen targeted for retention incentives.</i>                       |

Source: Author’s Original Work

Table 21, Summary Recommendation #5

| #           | Summary Recommendation                                                                                                                                 |
|-------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 5           | <i>Further explore the relationship between the challenges faced by USAF dual-career families and the impact on the USAF workforce.</i>                |
| 5.1<br>(5E) | <i>Adjust retention incentive structure to add assignment preference to the list of existing options for Airmen targeted for retention incentives.</i> |

Source: Author’s Original Work

### **Summary of Recommendations**

This chapter puts forth recommendations for how the Air Force may explore and address ways to modernize its family schema to embrace dual-career families. Although a number of efforts exist to improve the situation of military spouse employment portability, the conflict between the hypermobility of Airmen and the relative immobility of spouses' careers still remains. Thus, the Air Force should not only develop ways to reduce the hypermobility of Airmen, but also work with the existing initiatives to increase the career continuity of Air Force spouses by build upon the positive results to improve spouse employment portability. Also, the Air Force should explore and address the findings that it has an anachronistic culture that is detrimental to its dual-career families. The service should also find ways to reduce the effects of Air Force-related career difficulties on its families and mitigate the impact these difficulties have on the Air Force workforce. The following tables provide a detailed list of these recommendations.



Table 22, List of Recommendations (1A-4D)

| #  | Recommendations                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|----|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1A | <i>Develop ways to provide Airmen with career-minded spouses options to reduce their hypermobility without hurting their Air Force careers.</i>                                                                                                                                 |
| 1B | <i>Develop ways to improve assignment predictability for Airmen with career-minded spouses.</i>                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| 1C | <b>Definitely</b> <i>explore the finding that some Airmen do not feel they can be honest with their commanders and Air Force Personnel Center regarding assignment concerns.</i>                                                                                                |
| 1D | <i>Explore the finding that there appears to be an unstated expectation of unlimited commitment from Airmen and their families.</i>                                                                                                                                             |
| 2A | <i>Build upon existing foundational employment portability efforts in order to improve Air Force spouse career continuity and security.</i>                                                                                                                                     |
| 2B | <i>Definitely explore and address the claims of hiring discrimination against military spouses.</i>                                                                                                                                                                             |
| 2C | <i>Evaluate base-level spouse employment support programs to determine whether they are equipped to address career-specific needs.</i>                                                                                                                                          |
|    | 2C.1 <i>If they are, then improve the marketing of these services to Air Force dual-career families.</i>                                                                                                                                                                        |
|    | 2C.2 <i>If they are not effective, then adjust Air Force employment support programs to include individual-focused support for career-minded spouses which begin at a spouse's notification of relocation and continues until the spouse's career is effectively relocated.</i> |
| 3A | <i>Change the term "dependent" to "family member" or something more representative of modern spouses.</i>                                                                                                                                                                       |
| 3B | <b>Definitely</b> <i>explore the finding that spouses and their Airmen fear command retribution for a spouse's lack of participation in unit events.</i>                                                                                                                        |
| 3C | <i>Further explore the claims the Air Force has a family schema that is not only detrimental to its dual-career families, but may be anachronistic in general.</i>                                                                                                              |
| 3D | <i>Explore and circulate best practices for unit-level Key Spouse and family support programs, if not already doing so.</i>                                                                                                                                                     |
| 3E | <i>Investigate claims that base agencies are unresponsive to dual-career family needs and whether base agencies should modify their practices to better support these families.</i>                                                                                             |
| 4A | <i>Study the conditions that reduce the stress effects (both acute and chronic) of career disruptions on Air Force spouses.</i>                                                                                                                                                 |
| 4B | <i>Further explore the effect of the dual-career status on couples who have and are trying to have children, and work to support these families</i>                                                                                                                             |
| 4C | <i>Improve counseling for unmarried (and married) Air Force dual-career couples on challenges of, and methods for, managing the difficulties of USAF dual-career family life.</i>                                                                                               |
| 4D | <i>Further explore and address the financial impact of Air Force-induced career disruption on dual-career families.</i>                                                                                                                                                         |

Source: Author's Original Work



Table 23, List of Recommendations Continued (5A-5E)

| #  | Recommendations Continued                                                                                                                                                    |
|----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 5A | <i>Study the relationship between family stress (specifically work-family conflict of dual-career difficulties) and mission-related performance of dual-career Airmen.</i>   |
| 5B | <i>Study and address the finding that Airmen are afraid of acknowledging family-related stress to their supervisors (for fear of being a “limiting factor.”)</i>             |
| 5C | <i>Study how strong the relationship is between Airmen’s career decisions (following development vector as well as staying in the Air Force) and their spouses’ careers.</i> |
| 5D | <i>Ensure exit surveys explore whether, why, and which Airmen leave the service due to dual-career concerns.</i>                                                             |
| 5E | <i>Adjust retention incentive structure to add assignment preference to the list of existing options for Airmen targeted for retention incentives.</i>                       |

Source: Author’s Original Work

Table 24, List of Summary Recommendations (1-5.1)

| #           | Summary Recommendations                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|-------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1           | <i>Develop ways to provide Airmen with career-minded spouses options to reduce their hypermobility and increase assignment predictability without hurting their Air Force careers.</i>                    |
| 2           | <i>Build upon existing foundational employment portability efforts in order to improve Air Force spouse <b>career continuity and security</b>.</i>                                                        |
| 3           | <i>Change the term “dependent” to “family member” or something more representative of modern spouses.</i>                                                                                                 |
| 3.1         | <i>Explore and address claims an anachronistic organizational culture exists that is not only detrimental to dual-career families, but may be misaligned with current and future family demographics.</i> |
| 4           | <i>Explore and address dual-career work-family conflict and its effects on USAF dual-career families.</i>                                                                                                 |
| 5           | <i>Further explore the relationship between the challenges faced by USAF dual-career families and the impact on the USAF workforce.</i>                                                                   |
| 5.1<br>(5E) | <i>Adjust retention incentive structure to add assignment preference to the list of existing options for Airmen targeted for retention incentives.</i>                                                    |

Source: Author’s Original Work

## Conclusion

The research in this study found evidence that the Air Force should modernize its family schema to embrace its dual career families. It should institute this change through a serious re-assessment of its assignment practices, by refocusing career support efforts on career *continuity* of its spouses by capitalizing on existing foundational efforts to increase employment portability, and by taking a hard look at its own social and organizational cultures.

To support this proposition, it is useful to break it down into its parts. As for the premise, the research demonstrated that the USAF has a family schema that does not, at least for the participants, embrace the dual-career nature of their families. It conflicts both organizationally and culturally. The Air Force's organizational assignment practice of hypermobility is devastating to some spouse's careers. These spouses seek personal fulfillment, advancement, and a sense of identity from their careers. Hypermobility attacks all of these. Socially, the Air Force has a culture that in some cases expects a spouse to participate in events that the participant spouses found conflicted with their career schedules, conflicted with their sense of self, and was overall anachronistic. In these terms, the spouses felt there may be a difference between the generation of the existing culture and their own generation. Thus, the Air Force's family schema indeed did not fully embrace the dual-career families in the study. The next step is to answer the *should* part of the research question.

## Answering *Why*?

*Should* the USAF modernize its family schema to embrace dual-career families? Determining whether the USAF *should* is a subjective endeavor to which there are many approaches. The introduction to this study named at least four. First, the incompatibility between dual-career/dual-earner families and military life is decades old and has seen what appears to be little progress. Some would argue this decades-old problem deserves a fresh look and a reinvigorated effort. Second, leadership has said the USAF *should* embrace dual career families. To be fair, both the leadership and leading spouses are addressing the entire military and corporate community in support of military spouse

employment, but the USAF is a key part of this community and thus has a key role in tackling the problem. Third, as a result of its own practices, the Air Force may be inadvertently distressing its own workforce. It seems likely the Air Force has no intention to purposefully target its dual-career families, but involuntary neglect and organizational ineptitude cause harm just the same. Higher cost, higher risk, and lower effectiveness are conditions that, if associated with dual-career family challenges, need to be addressed immediately. Fourth, the Air Force has a moral obligation to its families who sacrifice so much in support of their nation. Air Force spouses wait up late hours, move their families across the globe, and wonder if their Airmen will return safe from their latest deployment. Some of these spouses pursue careers, and deserve the same level of support from the USAF as other families (although maybe a different *type* of support); the country expects it. In all, these reasons suggest a look at the *should* question through a more familiar framework: the Air Force Core Values.

“The Air Force bases [its] core competencies and distinctive capabilities on a shared commitment to three values: *Integrity first, Service before self, and Excellence in all we do.*”<sup>1</sup> Spouse career difficulties raise questions about the application of these core values by both the Airman and by the Air Force.

The Airman may struggle applying the core values in the tension between family and service. *Integrity first* may be difficult for Airmen who feel they must maintain an attitude of unlimited commitment, even though they know they (and their spouse) do not want to take the assignment that will end the spouse’s career. *Service before Self* – as an alliteration of the culture of unlimited commitment, this begs the question: what is service and what is self? Service to one’s country? Service to one’s family? Also, does “self” include one’s family? Should it then say “Service before self and family?” The comments of the participant Airmen absolutely support this disturbing contention. Finally, Airmen embody *Excellence in All We Do*. Does that mean the Airman only strives for excellence as an Airman or should the Airman also strive to be an excellent husband, wife, father, or mother? Can an Airman be an excellent marriage partner to a career-minded spouse? If the Airman is also putting *the Service* (USAF) before Self, the

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<sup>1</sup> “About the Air Force: Our Mission (Core Values) - Airforce.com,” accessed March 26, 2014, <http://www.airforce.com/learn-about/our-mission/>.

answer seems to be “no.” These core values have an inherent tension in them; but do Air Force organizational and cultural anachronisms challenge some Airmen’s ability to embody the core values simply because they have a career-minded spouse? If so, the Air Force has a negative bias: either against its dual-career families or its own core values. This *should* change.

The next question asks whether the core values apply to the Air Force as an organization. Is the Air Force honoring *Integrity First* when it says it is committed to honoring its social compact with the spouses who serve? Spouses give up their homes, move every few years, raise children while their Airmen are deployed, attend unit functions, and wait by the door to see if their Airman is coming home. They ask for little in return. Some career-minded spouses are asking for a little support navigating the challenges of military family life. However, most need nothing from the Air Force except for it to stop interfering with their career. The Air Force should answer these calls. Also, is the Air Force honoring its social compact with the nation? The service has an unspoken duty to uphold (and indeed, set the example for) American values. The Air Force led changes to obvious demographic biases such as racial integration (as the brilliant Tuskegee Airmen proved) and on women in combat (as many outstanding female aviators have shown) but drug its feet along with the rest of the military on the more nuanced LGBT integration.<sup>2</sup> However, by harming the careers of many of its spouses (95% of whom are women), the Air Force is contributing to the stubborn and unwelcome wage and leadership gaps between US men and women.<sup>3</sup> Does the Air Force *as an organization* put Service before [it]Self? If “Self” is the Air Force as an organization and “Service” means taking the best care possible of its Airmen and their families, one could argue the Air Force puts ease of personnel management (the cause of Airmen’s hypermobility) above Service (ensuring the well-being of *all* of its families). As a result, the Air Force as an organization does not seem to embody Service before Self. Most evident, the Air Force does not seem to exhibit Excellence in All We Do, at

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<sup>2</sup> However, the military services are also currently addressing a sexual assault problem, which may be an extreme and troubling manifestation of an anachronistic view of the role of the female in a male-dominated military culture, although that contention is beyond the scope of this study. Also, the military did not allow openly LGBT members until this decade, long after society had embraced them and only when forced to by civilian leadership.

<sup>3</sup> Maury and Stone, *Military Spouse Employment Report*, 3.

least in its cultural and organizational practices. Apparent expectations of submissive, unlimited personal and family commitment challenge any contention of excellence in command culture. By continuing to allow cultural anachronisms to pervade Air Force command and social climates, the service may harm its families (its dual-career ones, at a minimum), weaken its workforce, and as result, may add unnecessary costs to the taxpayer. The Core Values should apply to the Air Force as an organization; and, in terms of taking care of all of its Airmen and families, it may not be doing so. This study thus concludes that the Air Force *should* modernize its family schema to embrace dual-career families. But how might it institute this change?

### **Summary of Recommendations**

The USAF should take a multi-faceted approach to modernizing its family schema. First and foremost, the service should conduct serious re-assessment of its assignment practices, specifically regarding the hypermobility of its Airmen. The Air Force should also refocus its own efforts on improving the career continuity of its spouses by building upon existing efforts to improve spouse employment portability. It should conduct further research into the findings that it has anachronistic social and organizational cultures. Also, the USAF *must* investigate and address the disturbing findings regarding discrimination of both spouses and Airmen. Lastly, the study recommends the service explore the link between dual-career family challenges and USAF workforce implications.

To improve the geographic stability and predictability for career-minded spouses, this study strongly recommends the Air Force reconsider the sacred cow of its assignment process: the hypermobility of its Airmen. This hypermobility – a change of station every one to three years – is the central cause of the difficulties dual-career families face. Other challenges, such as hiring discrimination, promotion discrimination, licensing challenges, financial difficulties, family strain, and emotional stress are all direct and indirect effects of hypermobility. Without these effects, the resulting impacts on the USAF workforce will be minimized. In order to reduce hypermobility, the USAF should consider a number of different approaches. It should consider improving Airman choice, predictability, and stability through greater Total Force Integration, a recommendation

that would allow the Airman on- and off-ramps throughout a career without the long-term career penalty of the current system. The USAF should also consider in-place telework assignments or other voluntary assignment limitation programs similar to the Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP). Another option is that the service can, as Tim Kane suggested in *Bleeding Talent*, completely reevaluate its assignment system in favor of a civilian-style decentralized hire and fire construct. The service may also improve assignment predictability by increasing time between assignment notification and relocation for dual-career Airmen or by notifying Airmen of follow-on locations prior to their departure for short (<2 year) assignments such as Professional Military Education. Finally, it could help dual-career Airmen and save money if it gave dual-career Airmen who were targeted for retention pay an option for direct choice of assignments (versus a wish-list—ADP) instead of paying out hundreds of thousands of dollars in pay. Their spouses may make this up anyway. These recommendations for reducing hypermobility may address the root cause, but other recommendations may also help the overall situation for dual-career families.

The USAF should work with the Joining Forces Initiative to improve the career continuity for its spouses by building on the excellent and foundational employment portability work of Joining Forces and similar efforts. Because career continuity may be at least partly tied to a specific employer, and employers are not always willing or able to relocate spouses to their Airmen's new locations, spouses often must find new employment. The existing efforts to increase employment portability through re-hiring initiatives and license portability provide a good foundation upon which to build. However, career continuity is the goal as it increases financial and career-related security, removes the need for job searches, and increases the probability of upward mobility (promotion). To increase continuity, the USAF and Joining Forces could incentivize companies to relocate military spouses with their Airmen. They may also consider a furlough instead of a firing/quitting situation so that the spouse may be an internal, preferential hire if the assignment aligns with a company location. The USAF and Joining Forces may also work with lawmakers to create tax incentives for employers to hire, re-hire, relocate, transition to telework, and/or promote military spouses similar to the tax incentives in place for hiring veterans. If the Air Force can build on the

outstanding efforts of existing spouse employment and career support initiatives, it will be well on its way to addressing some of the structural conflict between dual-career families and USAF assignment practices.

The USAF must explore and address the findings that an anachronistic and damaging cultural environment may exist, both organizationally and socially. As an obvious manifestation an anachronistic organizational culture, the term *dependent* offends a number of career-minded spouses. This term has been called demeaning by all kinds of spouses for decades; a 1984 article in *Air University Review* noted the participant spouses found the term “irritating.”<sup>4</sup> This study recommends changing the term *dependent* to something less offensive such as *family member*. Also, the USAF should consider exploring claims of excessive social pressure on spouses to participate in unit function, among others. One way to do this is via unit climate assessments, although surveys may not provide the full picture. This survey recommends conducting focus groups on the subject to further explore the claim that the USAF has an anachronistic culture that offends spouses. Surveys may also help determine the scale of the problem. The Air Force should also explore whether base support agencies are responsive to the needs of working families. Respondents in both the case study and the focus group voiced this concern without any prompting and independently. The service will do well by its dual-career families if it explores ways to modernize its organizational and social cultures.

In addition, three very concerning findings deserve “must-do” recommendations, independent of the study’s main focus on dual-career families. The Air Force must explore and address the claims of corporate hiring discrimination against its spouses. It must also explore the finding that spouses and their Airmen may fear command retribution for a spouse’s participation in unit events and should immediately eliminate this problem where it exists. Finally, the Air Force must explore the finding that a culture of stoic dishonesty exists in which Airmen do not feel they can be honest with their commanders (or with Air Force Personnel Center) regarding assignment concerns and should find ways to eliminate this problem in whatever form it exists as soon as possible.

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<sup>4</sup> Warner, “The Air Force Wife—Her Perspective.”



Finally, the study recommends a few general areas for further research regarding the link between dual-career family challenges and USAF workforce implications. The Air Force should study the finding that Airmen experience an expectation of unlimited commitment from the Air Force, particularly regarding families, and specifically regarding dual-career families. Service members already volunteer to put their life on the line to serve their country, it seems unnecessary to hold their daily lives and family lives for ransom. In a related recommendation, the finding that there is a cultural stigma associated with reporting (or requesting concessions for) times when family interferes with work. As one focus group participant noted, Airmen may not want to be “that guy that brings [family issues] in to the squadron.”<sup>5</sup> The extent to which work-family conflict affects the work performance of Airmen, both in general and specifically regarding dual-career families, deserves further study as well. If family considerations add stress to Airmen that interferes with their performance on the job, airborne or on the ground, the Air Force needs to know this and address it. No commander wants a jet flown by a distracted pilot or maintained by an over-stressed maintainer. Along the same lines, the USAF should study the link between spouse careers, dual-career families, and the career decisions of Airmen. If Airmen are choosing assignments out of line with their professional development vector, the Air Force may be underdeveloping its talent. Also, if Airmen are leaving active duty due to spouse career considerations, this information will be useful to Air Force retention efforts. This may motivate the final recommendation, that the Air Force adjust its retention incentive options for dual-career Airmen that meet existing retention demographics. Some of these Airmen may rather choose their next few assignments, or remain in place, rather than receive huge bonuses. Giving the family some control over their lives may outweigh the financial considerations of current retention incentives. Accordingly, dual-career families typically face significant loss of financial potential throughout an Air Force career. Although the participants said they were not primarily concerned about money, in an era of shrinking budgets and compensation reform, the Air Force may consider how reducing the financial burden on its dual-career families might help the service fiscally.

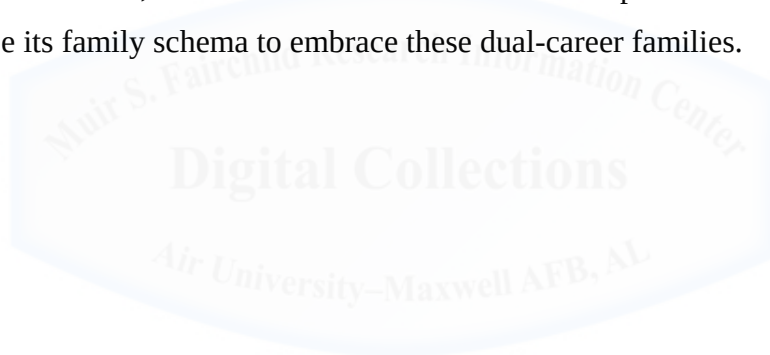
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<sup>5</sup> Focus Group conducted in Deer Creek Clubhouse, Montgomery, AL.



### The Final Word

The Air Force's people – its Airmen and their families – are its most precious, diverse, and important resource. As the American pool from which these Air Force families come changes, so too do the demographics of Air Force families themselves. The Air Force, however, has not effectively modified its organizational and social construct to support its diverse family demographic, specifically its dual-career families. Frequent changes of station (hypermobility) upend the careers of Air Force spouses and organizational and social cultures attack the identity and resources of these career-minded spouses. As a result, these spouses feel undersupported, underappreciated, and overstressed which harms the spouses, strains their families, stresses their Airmen, and ultimately affects the Air Force workforce. Good Airmen leave the service, families are torn apart in divorce, and Airmen's mission-focus is disrupted. The Air Force needs to modernize its family schema to embrace these dual-career families.



## Definitions

AFSC – Air Force Specialty Code; an identifier for the Airman’s career field.

Airman – the Air Force member in a dual-career family.

Barrier – the incompatibility of a dual-career family with USAF demands. A barrier exists when the combination of demands of the USAF, the family, or the person exceeds the person’s capacity to meet those demands.

Career - “a field for or pursuit of consecutive progressive achievement especially in public, professional, or business life.”<sup>6</sup>

Career continuity – the ability for a person to maintain a career and employment across geographic moves while retaining some prospect for upward mobility, even if in the future.

Career portability – the ability for a person to maintain employment within a career field similar to their desired one, but with no prospect for upward mobility.

Career security – the ability for a person to pursue a career that is unhampered by an Airman’s relocation (whether it means the spouse’s career is mobile or the Airman is immobile).

Commuter Couple – a couple that lives in two separate geographic locations in order to pursue two geographically separated careers.

Dual-Career Collocated – a couple that is able to pursue two careers while being geographically collocated (living together)

Dual-Career family - a family in which the couple has two people who have, are pursuing, or desire a career.

Dual-mil – a family in which the couple has two people who are both military members. See also *join-spouse*, *joint-spouse*, and *mil-mil*.

Employment immobility – the inability for a person to attain employment (at all) after a geographic relocation.

Employment mobility – the ability for a person to reattain some type of employment (not necessarily related to their career) in the new geographic location.

Employment portability – the ability for a person to reattain employment in a related but not desired career field, but with only lateral or downward mobility.

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<sup>6</sup> “Career.”

Family schema – the *family schema* is the overarching term that includes (1) the organizational and cultural assumptions about the characteristics of a family, (2) the resultant and associated organizational processes that affect the family, and (3) the cultural and organizational expectations of a family.<sup>7</sup>

Headwind – a difficult but surmountable challenges which may combine with the barriers and hurdles, or may just continually make life a little more difficult.

Hurdle – an impediment to the dual-career family that may be overcome with significant effort, advance planning, extra costs, and lucky timing.

Hypermobility – the condition that describes the frequent, sometimes unpredictable geographic relocations of an Airman that the Airman typically has little control over when, whether, and to where they and their family will go.

Job – work for pay, typically not associated with emotional fulfillment. Employment.

Join-spouse – the process by which the USAF attempts to station two military members who are married to each other. Sometimes colloquially used as an adjective to describe a family in which the couple has two people who are both military members. See also *dual-mil*, *joint-spouse*, and *mil-mil*.

Joint-spouse – A technically incorrect colloquialism referring to the process by which the USAF attempts to station two military members who are married to each other. Sometimes used as an adjective to describe a family in which the couple has two people who are both military members. See also *dual-mil*, *join-spouse*, and *mil-mil*.

Lateral mobility – the ability for a person to go to a different job/position that is not a promotion, but not a demotion. i.e. staying at the same level.

Mil-mil – a colloquial term to describe a family in which the couple has two people who are both military members.

Spouse – the civilian spouse of an Airman who has, desires, or is pursuing a career (unless modified in context)

*stress outcomes* – measurable, tangible results of stress in a person or by a person. Often used because a person's level of stress is difficult to measure directly.

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<sup>7</sup> The reason part (2) says “that affect the family” instead of “that consider the family” is because if processes exist that affect the family without consideration of the family, this fact alone is an important characteristic of the schema.

Trailing spouse – a spouse who is relocated as a result of his or her spouse’s job relocation. In this study, generally the civilian spouse of an Airman.

Vertical mobility – the ability for a person to get a promotion.

Work-family conflict stress – stress created in a person, or in a family, as a result of work-family conflict.



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