

# Military

spousal/partner  
employment:  
*Identifying the barriers  
and support required*

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# Acknowledgements

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# Foreword

At the Army Families Federation (AFF), we have long been aware of the challenges that military families face when attempting to maintain a career, or even just a job, alongside the typically very mobile life that comes with the territory. We are delighted to have been given LIBOR funding to further explore the employment situation that many partners find themselves in, and very grateful for the excellent job that the **Warwick Institute for Employment Research** have done, in giving this important area of work the impetus of academically driven evidence it needed to take it to the next level.

Being a military family is unique and being the partner of a serving person is also unique; long distances from family support, intermittent support from the serving partner, and a highly mobile way of life creates unique challenges for non-serving partners, especially when it comes to looking for work and trying to maintain a career. This report gets to the heart of how these barriers affect the lives of military partners, and provides important information on what is needed to help improve the situation.

The report also highlights the importance of differentiating between a job, and a career. 70 per cent of respondents interviewed for this research have changed career path since becoming a military partner. This is interesting to us and supports our belief that many non-serving partners are 'underemployed', but nevertheless choose to remain in work because of the need to maintain some sort of identity, as well as for any financial concerns.

It's extremely important that policy makers recognise the barriers to military partner employment that we've identified in this report, and work with us to implement some of the recommendations to improve the situation. We know from previous research and official surveys such as FAMCAS, that partner employment is crucial for the retention of our serving personnel.

Our organisation is working hard to do what we can to enable military partners to maintain reasonable employment, so, as recommended in this report, we are currently in talks with stakeholders and a national recruitment agency to build a 'one stop' employment platform that will bring together jobs available with covenant signatories, and the support on offer from other organisations to help military partners to get back into work.

I'd like to thank the **Warwick Institute for Employment Research** and **QinetiQ** for working with us on this vital piece of research.

**Sara Baade, Chief Executive, Army Families Federation, June 2018**

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# Acronyms

AFC	Armed Forces Covenant
AFF	Army Families Federation
BFRS	British Forces Resettlement Service
CO	Commissioned Officer
CTP	Career Transition Partnership
DRM	Defence Relationship Management
DERS	Defence Employer Recognition Scheme
FAMCAS	Tri-service families continuous attitude survey
JNCO	Junior Non-Commissioned Officer
LFS	Labour Force Survey
MOD	Ministry of Defence
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
OR	Other Ranks
SCO	Senior Commissioned Officer
SFA	Service Family Accommodation
SNCO	Senior Non-Commissioned officer
WO	Warrant Officer

# Executive summary

## Overview

The Institute for Employment Research at the University of Warwick, and QinetiQ, were commissioned by Army Families Federation in September 2017 to analyse the factors shaping the employment of military spouses/partners and to formulate recommendations for effective support services.

## Background

Research over many years has shown that women with young children often face barriers to employment, which include the costs of formal childcare, long full-time working hours in the UK and prevailing attitudes towards gender roles which mean that the majority of childcare and domestic work is undertaken by women. However, military spouses/partners, the majority of whom are women, are particularly constrained in their employment decisions. This research set out to address the following research questions:

- What is the employment status of military spouses compared to those in civilian couples?
- Are military spouses disadvantaged in finding and maintaining employment by their partners' service and, if so, in what ways?
- Do military spouses want to work and why?
- Are the employment decisions of military spouses based on personal choice or due to factors that make obtaining and/or maintaining paid employment unappealing, undesirable or untenable?
- What support do military spouses receive to help them get into work and what do they consider to be appropriate help to get them into - and stay in - employment?

## Methodology

The research involved five separate phases of data collection, undertaken between October 2017 and April 2018:

- A review of relevant literature, both from the UK and overseas, and current employment statistics to compare employment among civilian and military spouses/partners;
- 14 key stakeholder interviews;
- An online survey of military spouses/partners (1,491 valid responses);
- 32 telephone interviews with military spouses/partners;
- A short online survey of employers (38 valid responses).

Data from all five phases were analysed and key themes were identified by the researchers at a data workshop in April 2018.

## Key Findings

Although similar proportions of civilian and military spouses are in employment, military spouses/partners often choose 'portable' jobs such as nursing, teaching and childminding, allowing them to transfer more easily if posted elsewhere. Self-employment also appears to be gaining in popularity among military spouses/partners.

Childcare is a major stumbling-block for spouses/partners seeking work because of living apart from extended family members and having to take on the majority of childcare while the serving person is posted or working long and unpredictable hours. Living overseas restricts childcare options even more, with many spouses/partners finding childcare difficult to find or limited in scope. Military spouses/partners also have to make difficult choices around accompanying the serving person overseas, recognising the employment restrictions and longer-term career implications that this often entails.

The main barriers to military spousal employment centre around childcare; postings and deployment; ability to keep up with training and professional development; lack of (re)training opportunities; having to change career path; and MOD reluctance to support military spouses/partners and the general military culture.

Commonwealth spouses and those with young children appear to face more difficulties and challenges in gaining and maintaining employment; spouses/partners with higher qualifications face more barriers in maintaining a career.

63% of spouses/partners surveyed said that they had changed career path because of the military lifestyle (only 7% said they wanted to do so). The military maintains traditional views of spouses/partners as dependents: a lack of planning and organisation, alongside an assumption that military spouses/partners are always available for childcare responsibilities, act as further barriers to spousal employment.

Employer perceptions and practices are a major barrier to spousal employment and, as a result of bad experiences, many spouses/partners - and some stakeholders - believe that it is better not to disclose their partner's military background when applying. Employers themselves reported similar perceptions about the challenges of hiring military spouses/partners, including a lack of support with childcare, a likelihood that they will move, and 'patchwork CVs'. On the other hand, 30% of employers said that military spouse/partners show resilience and determination and 22% said that they are willing to go the extra mile in their work.

54% of all spouses/partners who were surveyed were unaware of support for them to find work: spouses/partners of JNCOs and ORs were least likely to be aware (20%), compared with 62% of the spouses/partners of Senior Commissioned Officers and 44% of Commissioned Officers. Only 10% of spouses/partners had attended a spousal support programme and again, spouses/partners of Junior NCOs and ORs were least likely to have done so. Of those who did attend, some felt that they were pitched too low, others that they were not held at the right time or that the length of the programme precluded them from attending. Satisfaction was lower with programme outcomes related to finding and maintaining work.

Military spouses/partners highlighted the need for varied support provision although similar proportions of all spouses/partners would like support with training and/or qualifications, and with the cost of childcare.

## Recommendations

Any changes made to provide greater equity of opportunity for military spouses/partners require the cooperation of the MOD, third sector support organisations and employers, and spouses/partners themselves. Recommendations are divided into 'quick wins' and 'longer-term changes':

### *Quick wins:*

- Introduce a new online jobs platform for spouses/partners (a one-stop shop).
- Provide information and dissemination of the benefits of new ways of working to employers.
- Require more evidence of adherence by employers to the Armed Forces Covenant and the Employer Recognition Scheme.
- Provide priority recruitment of military/spouses for military-related jobs.
- Introduce local university training partnerships for spouses/partners to undertake (re)training.
- Target any advertising of employment support programmes to specific groups of spouses/partners.

### *Longer-term changes:*

- Challenge the military culture.
- Provide paid/subsidised childcare for military families.
- Challenge employer stereotypes of spouses/partners.
- Introduce more tailored training programmes and initiatives for different groups of spouse/partners.
- Target overseas spouses/partners for support.

# Recommendations

There are many employment barriers which apply equally to military and civilian spouses/partners, such as the high costs of formal childcare in the UK, partners' jobs which may involve long hours and/or travel, and a lack of local labour market opportunities. However, military spouses/partners are particularly constrained in their employment-related decision-making. We argue that there are many things which can be changed to provide greater equity of opportunity for military spouses/partners (it is recognised that not all spouses/partners want to work, either within the military or the civilian population, but military spouses/partners should be better supported). These recommendations are outlined below and involve the cooperation of the MOD, third sector support organisations and employers, as well as spouses/partners themselves. These recommendations are divided into 'quick wins' and 'longer-term changes' in recognition that some of these recommendations will require a change in attitudes and behaviours, whereas others require a degree of 'pulling together' and better resourcing.

## Quick wins

**A new online jobs platform (one-stop shop):** Although spouses/partners want to work and are generally resourceful in their job-searching, there was a lack of awareness of available support programmes and 'joined-up thinking' amongst current support services. We recommend the introduction of a free online jobs platform and information centre, a 'one-stop shop' where employers, other stakeholders and spouses/partners can easily access up-to-date information about jobs and local employers/employees, and can also be sign-posted to other support services; this would need adequate resourcing and a willingness on the part of interested parties, including key stakeholder organisations and spouses/partners themselves, to make it work. To ensure it is comprehensive and useful, this platform would need to: signpost to vacancy websites and suppliers of career advice and guidance; link to local education and training providers; provide online resources to help with CV and application writing; signpost to services and programmes aimed at the Armed Forces community. With open data and Application Programming Interfaces (APIs), it is now possible to draw in information and data from a variety of sources to populate a platform, such as, in the UK, the Universal Jobmatch for vacancy data and LMI for All for labour market information.

**Information and dissemination of the benefits of new ways of working:** Most employees are no longer looking for a 'job for life' and are increasingly likely to take on work which suits their (other) interests and responsibilities, e.g. child or eldercare, leisure, work-life balance choices, etc. Remote working/home working and more flexible, short-term contracts are becoming easier alternatives for many employees, which should help military spouses/partners by increasing their employment options. Employers (including the MOD) need to be clearly shown that these new ways of working can provide a 'win-win': employers do not need to provide a desk and other office space and resources for remote workers (IT support should be provided) and short-term contracts mean that the employer can anticipate turnover and put contingencies in place. Spouses/partners earn an income and gain new skills. It is acknowledged that the MOD has recently introduced the Armed Forces Flexible Working Act (March 2018) and this will help in instilling a greater acceptance of flexible working among military personnel. In addition, a new jobs platform should include information on the benefits and availability of IT training for spouses/partners, jobs which can be done more easily from home and/or on short-term contracts.

**More evidence of adherence to the Armed Forces Covenant (AFC) and the Employer Recognition Scheme:** Many of those employers who signed up to the AFC and the Employer Recognition Scheme were aware of the benefits of hiring military spouses/partners, and accepted that they might not stay in post indefinitely. There were concerns from stakeholders that some employers who were signing up to the AFC and/or gaining ERS awards were not doing enough to support spouses/partners. We recommend that the ERS award-holders are vetted over the longer-term and that the criteria for attaining a Gold award include specific, quantifiable evidence of continued support (e.g. that a number of spouses/partners have been offered paid internships or jobs per year; numbers will depend on size of employing organisation).

**Priority recruitment of military/spouses for military-related jobs:** The MOD is also a major employer and could do more to provide job opportunities to spouses/partners. We recommend that any military-related jobs should be advertised first on the new jobs platform and in the various Families' Federations newsletters and websites. If no military spouse/partner is suitable for the role, the job can then be advertised more widely. This applies to jobs both within the UK and overseas (except where national labour market regulations preclude this). All salaries should be commensurate with spouses/partners' skills and qualifications.

**Local university training partnerships:** Many spouses/partners wanted to (re)train but were limited in both the availability of relevant courses and the length of time that training courses took to complete, particularly if they were due to be posted. Currently universities are examining ways of widening participation among harder-to-reach groups (and are evaluated on their efforts in this respect), which includes offering courses on a distance learning basis, with online lectures and study materials. We recommend that this is a ready-made resource which the military could

use to the advantage of spouses/partners and simultaneously increase retention among their serving personnel, by entering into training partnerships with local universities and offering subsidised flexible training opportunities to spouses/partners.

**Targeted advertising of employment support programmes:** Evidence from the study shows that those married to someone in junior ranks are less likely to be aware of any employment support programmes and, as a result, are less likely to attend them. We recommend wider, more targeted advertising of support programmes to increase awareness and attendance. As there is a correlation between rank of the serving person and qualifications of spouses/partners (i.e. those with higher level qualifications are also more likely to be married to higher-ranked serving personnel and vice-versa), we also recommend that these targeted programmes take account of the stated support needs of lower-qualified spouses/partners (e.g. those with lower qualifications were more likely than those with higher qualifications to want support in returning to work; respondents who attended programmes were least satisfied with this kind of support, however).

## Longer-term changes

**Challenging the military culture:** The military culture continues to act as a barrier to spouse/partner employment. However, if the military wants to retain key personnel, it needs to do more to encourage and support spouses/partners into employment. Spouses/partners are resilient but better organisation and planning - and greater choice - of postings and, where possible, deployment, would help to alleviate some of the negative effects of moving overseas or within the UK. Simple changes could involve the inclusion of local jobs information and potential work restrictions in a moving pack before they arrive. We also recommend that the way that spouses/partners are referred to in policy documents and in common parlance should change: 'dependents' denotes an old-fashioned view of the role of spouses/partners and a lack of understanding that they may have jobs and careers, independent of the serving person.

**Provide paid/subsidised childcare for military families:** A major barrier to undertaking paid work for spouses/partners is the lack of available childcare in the UK and overseas and/or the costs of childcare in the UK. Spouses/partners are expected to be the main or only carer while serving personnel are away and are usually expected to respond to any family emergencies, even when the serving person is based locally. To alleviate some of the difficulties for parents with young children, we recommend that the MOD provides subsidised childcare for military families up to school age and then subsidises wraparound care for school-age children under the age of 12, where both partners are in paid employment.

**Challenging employer stereotypes:** Employer discrimination is a major barrier to spouse/partner employment. The various Families Federations and the DRM should look to engage more with employers and include a degree of 'education' around the skills of military spouses/partners and what they can offer to an employer in order to reduce any negative stereotypes (this could involve committed employers presenting their experiences to others and how they overcame any hurdles; a requirement to engage with other employers could be a criteria for a Silver or Gold ERS award). Encouraging employers to offer short-term paid internships (with a view to longer-term job opportunities, perhaps on a contract basis) would have the dual advantage of providing spouses/partners with vital work experience but would also serve to challenge any existing stereotypes of their commitment and competence.

**Introduce more tailored training programmes and initiatives:** There was evidence that many of the existing training programmes and initiatives were either not delivering the right kind of support in terms of content or were delivering it in a way which excluded many spouses/partners from attending. It is recognised that this represents a waste of resources and there needs to be a more tailored and targeted approach to encourage specific groups to attend (e.g. for younger spouses/partners with low level qualifications, training may need to be delivered online or on base with paid childcare during attendance – it is noted that some programmes were already delivering training in this way and other providers could learn from their experience).

**Overseas spouses/partners targeted for support:** The evidence showed particular barriers for those spouses/partners living overseas. Various initiatives could be introduced for these groups. We recommend that the military recognises the sacrifices that these spouses/partners have made in supporting the serving person and the difficulties they face in finding employment, both during the posting and after, because of gaps in their CVs: paid training should be provided for specific groups (e.g. basic Maths and English courses run on base; language courses for more well-qualified spouses/partners to demonstrate upskilling while abroad). While overseas, spouses/partners should also be offered career guidance support and advice, in anticipation of their return to the UK. For those spouses/partners coming from Commonwealth countries to the UK we recommend paid language training and functional skills training for those who need it. Certificates of attendance would demonstrate to potential employers that spouses/partners are keen to take on paid work and have taken active steps to upskill.

# 1. Introduction

Researchers have argued for many years over the so-called 'choices' that women, particularly those with young children, make with regard to work and family responsibilities and the resulting difficulties in maintaining or pursuing a career (e.g. Ginn, Arber, Brannen, Dale, Dex, Elias, Moss, Pahl, Roberts and Rubery, 1996; Hakim, 2000; Crompton and Lyonette, 2005). There are recognised problems in finding and maintaining jobs which provide a reasonable income, while also allowing a degree of flexibility in order to manage childcare and domestic responsibilities. In spite of the arguments over women's 'choices' or constraints, what is indisputable is that women's employment choices can be made easier or harder by a) attitudes and expectations, and b) policies and practices at EU, national, and organisational level, including the costs of childcare provision, as well as organisational recruitment, retention and flexible working policies and practices (Lyonette, 2015).

There is also evidence from the Army Families Federation (AFF) (2017) and other research (e.g. Blakely, Hennessy, Chung and Skirton, 2014; Dandeker, French and Thomas, 2005; Dandeker, French, Birtles, Wessely, 2006; Royal Airforce Families Federation, 2016; Stone, 2016) that UK military spouses/partners, the majority of whom are women, face additional difficulties in finding and maintaining paid work due to their mobility within the UK and overseas, living in rural areas with few employment opportunities and without easy access to good quality and affordable childcare. For example, in 2017 around a quarter of Service families had moved within the past 12 months, and 70 per cent of spouses had moved at least once in the past 5 years (Tri-Service Families Continuous Attitude Survey (FAMCAS), 2017). Furthermore, the qualifications of military spouses/partners (male and female) may not be accepted outside their home countries, they may be seen by potential employers as unreliable because of their high rates of mobility and they may also have difficulties in maintaining their skills and building work experience through periods of non-employment (research has shown that women who take extended periods of time out of the labour market find it more difficult to retain a career than those who take no time out or return shortly after having children; see, for example, Dex, Ward and Joshi, 2008). On the other hand, military spouses/partners have a variety of skills (e.g. resourcefulness, adaptability and communications) which are highly valued in today's labour market and negative stereotypes about military spouses/partners can exclude a potentially valuable group of employees from working (ENEI, 2017).



Employment of military spouses/partners

## 1.1. The focus of this study

This research was commissioned to provide AFF with an analysis of the factors shaping the employment of military spouses and to formulate recommendations for effective support services which would enable them to get and stay in employment. While previous initiatives have been introduced to assist spouses into employment, some have suffered from a lack of engagement by families<sup>1</sup>. This research aimed to find out why this was the case and what support military spouses really want. In carrying out this research, the following key research questions were addressed:

- What is the employment status of military spouses/partners compared to those in civilian couples?
- Are military spouses/partners disadvantaged in finding and maintaining employment by their partners' Service and, if so, in what ways?
- Do military spouses/partners want to work and why?
- Are the employment decisions of military spouses/partners based on personal choice or due to factors that make obtaining and/or maintaining paid employment unappealing, undesirable or untenable?
- What support do military spouses/partners receive to help them get into work and what do they consider to be appropriate help to get them into – and stay in – employment?

## 1.2. Report structure

The report is structured in the following way:

Section 1: Introduction

Section 2: Methodology

Section 3: Employment status of military spouses/partners

Section 4: Military spouse/partner decision-making

Section 5: Challenges and barriers to spouse/partner employment

Section 6: Employer perceptions and practices towards military spouses/partners

Section 7: Support for military spouse/partner employment

Section 8: Ways forward and looking ahead

Section 9: Overall conclusions.

Sections 3 to 8 draw together evidence from the literature review, secondary data analysis, interviews with stakeholders and military spouses/partners, plus evidence from the online surveys with military spouses/partners and employers.

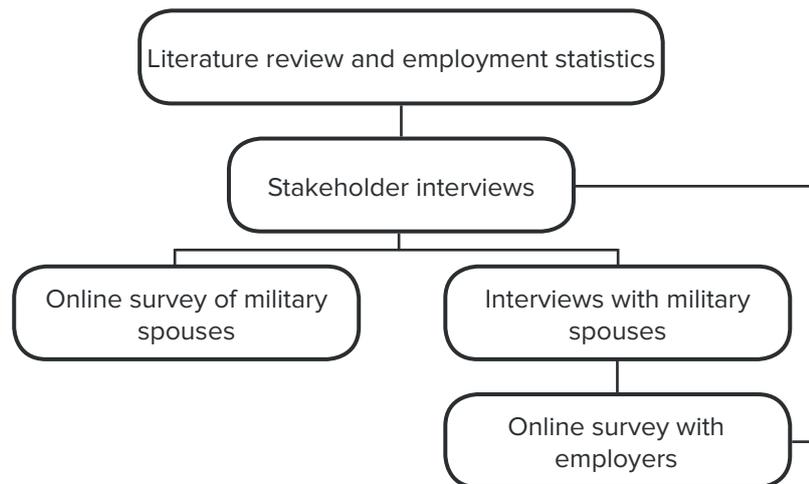
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1. As highlighted in the AFF Invitation to Tender document

# 2. Methodology

The study used a mixed-methods approach incorporating five elements (as outlined in Figure 1 below).

**Figure 1: Overview of methodology**



An overview of each element of the study follows. More information on the methodology is in Appendix 1.

## 2.1. Literature review and employment statistics

- 42 pieces of evidence on military spouse/partner employment were included in the review.
- Literature from the UK, Australia, Canada and the USA was assessed.

A systematic literature review was undertaken of evidence on the employment of military spouses/partners (employment is defined as full/part-time employment, self-employment and/or volunteering) living within and outside the UK. Seven academic databases and platforms were searched using a keyword search strategy. Of the 3,263 articles and reports screened by title and abstract, 81 full texts were reviewed and 42 included in the final review. In addition to reviewing information about spouses/partners' employment status, the review examined evidence on how military families make sense of spousal employment: how they negotiate it, how they feel about it, what problems they face and what support they need.

## 2.2. Qualitative interviews with key stakeholders

- 14 key stakeholder telephone interviews were conducted between January and April 2018.
- Questions were asked about spousal employment decisions and challenges; support offered and the success of support programmes; and future directions.

A total of 14 semi-structured, in-depth telephone interviews<sup>1</sup> were conducted with representatives from organisations experienced in providing employment/career support, particularly to military spouses, as well as interviews with representatives from relevant organisations such as the Ministry of Defence (MOD) and Job Centre Plus. The interviews provided a strategic view of the issues facing military spouses. Stakeholder interview questions were informed by the literature review and explored: the type of employment military spouses seek and obtain; the particular challenges faced by military spouses; the support requested by and provided to them; the success/impact of programmes designed to provide support to them; and future directions regarding support. Interviews with stakeholders lasted approximately 45 minutes; comprehensive notes were taken, typed up and the data was thematically analysed<sup>2</sup>.

## 2.3. Online survey of military spouses/partners

- The online survey of military spouses/partners ran from February to March 2018.
- The online survey received 1,491 valid responses from military spouses/partners.

1. Studies comparing telephone and face to face interviews have found no significant differences between the quality of the data captured: E.g. Sturges, J. E. and Hanrahan, K. J. (2004). Comparing Telephone and Face-to-Face Qualitative Interviewing: A Research Note. *Qualitative Research* 4: 107-118.

2. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within Data. Clarke, V., and Braun, V. (2014). Thematic analysis. In: *Encyclopaedia of Critical Psychology* (pp. 1947-1952). Springer New York.

An online survey was developed to understand more about military spouses/partners' experiences, expectations, barriers and enablers to employment. Given that some cohorts were considered difficult to reach (e.g. those outside the labour market or living abroad) a number of different communication strategies were used to gain access. For example, IER and QinetiQ contacted the organisations interviewed earlier in the study to ask them to advertise the survey on their websites, digital newsletters and forums. AFF and other stakeholders were asked to recommend additional forums for promotion, and research participants were also asked to forward details of the survey to any other relevant contacts.

## 2.4. Interviews with military spouses

- 32 interviews were conducted from January to March 2018.
- Participants were chosen to reflect the overall population as far as possible.
- Similar questions as the survey were asked, grouped around main themes: employment decisions, challenges, support, and future directions.

A total of 32 semi-structured telephone interviews were carried out with military spouses/partners living in the UK and overseas, focusing on employment decision-making and lived experiences<sup>3</sup>. All interviewees were offered a £15 gift voucher to thank them for their time. Interviews lasted approximately one hour and notes were taken, typed up and thematically analysed. Military spouses/partners of those from across the military hierarchy (Officers and Other Ranks) and the three Services were targeted. Due to the unanticipated high response from those willing to be interviewed, a sample reflecting the population was selected using the demographic information provided by those signing up. Data from participants differing in employment status (i.e. employee, self-employed, not employed, full-time/part-time work) and in personal circumstances (e.g. married/not, children/not, UK/ overseas-based, those with higher/lower qualifications, etc.) were captured.

The majority of military spouses/partners were female and as a result, these were over-sampled, whether employed or non-employed. However, in order to determine gender differences in the experiences of spousal employment, a small number of male spouses/partners were interviewed.

## 2.5. Short online employer survey

- The online survey of employers ran during March and April 2018.
- 38 valid responses were received.

A short, targeted online survey comprising a combination of 28 open and closed questions was administered during a five-week period. The aim of the survey was to explore the views of employers with regard to military spouse/partner employment. Questions gauged employers' views of support offered and required, policies and practices in place, behaviours and attitudes towards employing military spouses/partners, as well as any challenges faced. In total, 38 organisational representatives completed the survey. The survey link was distributed via AFF and other stakeholder networks. None of the questions required a 'forced' response so there are varying response rates for each question. Although not representative of all employers, the results provide useful insights into the views of employers on recruiting and retaining military spouses/partners. For more information on the organisations taking part, see Section 3.



3. Initial plans had been to conduct 25 interviews, but due to the overwhelming interest in the study (over 150 spouses contacted us for interviews in the first few weeks of advertising), the decision was taken to interview a further seven spouses/partners.

# 3. Employment status of military spouses/partners

## 3.1. Summary of findings

- Headline figures show that similar proportions of civilian spouses/partners and military spouses/partners are in employment, but these figures do not explain what kinds of jobs military spouses/partners are doing.
- 84% of military spouses/partners in the survey reported here want to work and a further 9% said they would consider work in the future.
- The majority of working military spouses/partners are employed in: Administrative and support service activities; Human health and social work activities; and Education.
- Those with professional qualifications were mostly employed in Education, and Human health and social work activities (these were often teachers or nurses).
- ‘Portable’ jobs such as nursing, teaching and childminding were popular choices for spouses/partners; some of these jobs also allow locuming or agency work, providing spouses/partners with the opportunity to transfer more easily if posted elsewhere.
- Self-employment amongst military spouses/partners appears to be gaining in popularity.

## 3.2. Introduction

This section outlines the current employment status of military spouses/partners and what kinds of jobs they are working in, using a combination of relevant literature, survey findings and interviews with stakeholders and spouses/partners. This section is a starting point for the rest of the report, which delves deeper into the barriers and challenges to employment faced by spouses/partners, as well as the support required for gaining and maintaining employment.

Recent research by AFF (2017) reported that military spouses/partners continue to face barriers to employment and access to affordable training to upskill. This is similarly reported in the US Military Family Lifestyle Survey (Blue Star Families, 2017) where 43% of active duty spouses reported that military spouse employment is a concern.

A number of international studies of the Armed Forces Community reported that military spouses/partners are more likely to be unemployed than civilian counterparts, particularly when comparing educational attainment and level of experience (Bonura and Lovald, 2015; Bradbard, Maury and Armstrong, 2016; Dernberger, 2017; Lim and Schulker, 2010; Whitby and Compton, 2018).

This confirms earlier data which found a decline in employment rates of military spouses/partners, as well as in the number of hours worked (Cooke and Spiers, 2005). Later research using data from the US Family Life Project confirms this (Hosek and Wadsworth, 2013). The most recent analysis of 2010 US national survey data reported that the position of military spouses/partners in the labour market continues to decline (Whitby and Compton, 2018).

Although military spouses/partners are likely to be overeducated for their job and underemployed, some researchers (e.g. Lim and Schulker, 2010) point out that underemployment does not mean that spouses/partners are dissatisfied with the military lifestyle. Recent research by the MOD (2017) reports that 60% of military families responding to FAMCAS are satisfied with their quality of life. Interestingly, in Australia, an online survey of 289 military spouses/partners found that those in employment had lower levels of distress and better well-being and quality of life (Trewick and Muller, 2014). This was found to be mediated by a range of military benefits. It concluded that spouse/partner employment is significant to the serving person’s retention, readiness and well-being.

There is much international evidence that military spouse/partner earnings are adversely affected as a result of being part of the Armed Forces community (Booth, 2003; Bradbard, Maury and Armstrong, 2016; Burke and Miller, 2016, 2018; Hisnanick and Little, 2015; Hosek, Kavanaugh and Miller, 2006; Lim, Golinelli and Cho, 2007; Little and Hisnanick 2007; Meadows, Griffin, Karney and Pollak, 2016; Runge, Waller, MacKenzie and McGuire, 2014). This evidence suggests that this is the result of career disruption, lack of work experience, tenure and seniority due to relocation. Burke and Miller (2016, 2018) reported that US military spouses/partners’ earnings decline during the first year of moving with the serving person by approximately 14%. Spouses/partners were found to continue to have low earnings two years after relocating. Longitudinal research using the US Social Security Administrative and military data suggests that spouses/partners continue to have low earnings over the longer-term, especially those who relocated every two to three years (Burke and Miller, 2018). Bradbard and colleagues (2016) also found significant differences in earnings when comparing education attainment: military spouses/partners with a doctorate were found to earn less than half a civilian counterpart, and those with a degree earned \$15,000 less per year.

Whilst Booth (2003) also reported that military spouses/partners have significant earnings gaps compared to civilian spouses/partners due to relocations, he concluded that loss of income and the earnings gap is also the result of local labour markets where military bases are located. He suggested that military bases in the US are often located in isolated and rural areas with a lack of public transport. This is also supported by more recent research on US military spouses/partners' earnings by Hisnanick and Little, (2015). They confirmed that military spouses/partners' earnings are lower than civilians and that both male and female military spouses have low earnings as a result of a combination of factors (such as labour market conditions and demand-side issues) (Hisnanick and Little, 2015). Overall, the study suggested that job support, job matching or employer-hiring incentives would be useful in increasing retention and job satisfaction.

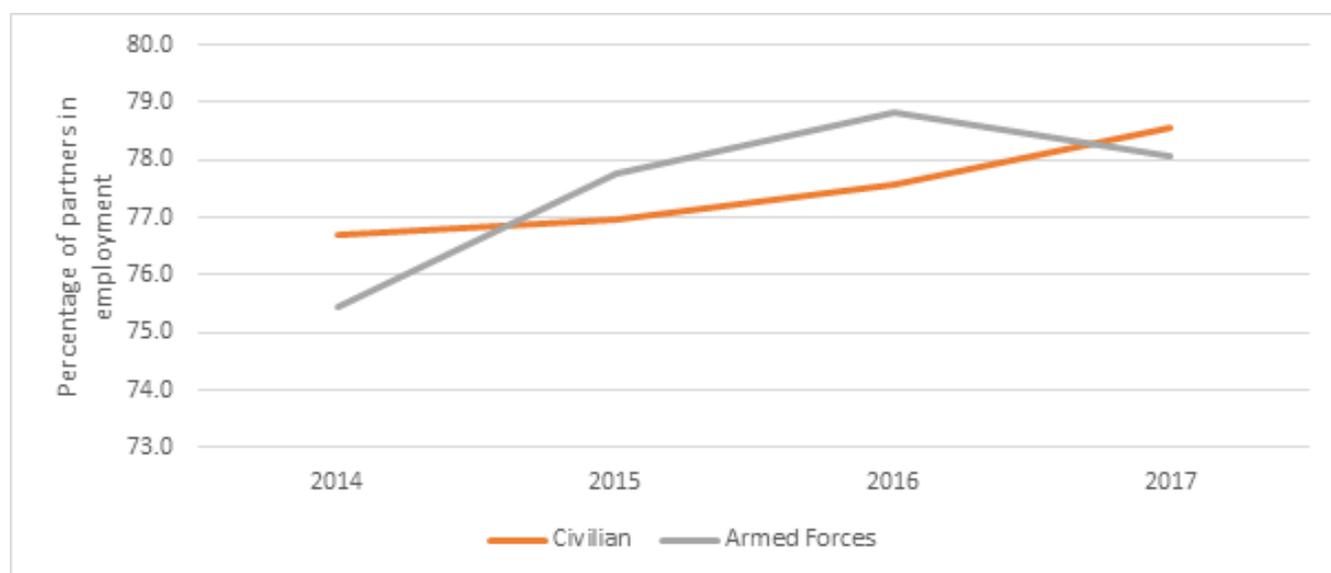
### 3.3. UK employment statistics on spouses/partners

There are few quantitative surveys which allow the characteristics of Armed Forces households to be analysed. The Labour Force Survey (LFS) is the largest regular survey of the population. The LFS is a survey of random households, selecting one person in a household to be surveyed in five successive quarterly waves which allows us to compare the percentages of spouses/partners of 'heads of household' in the Armed Forces and in civilian employment who were employed, unemployed or 'inactive' (Table 1, Figure 2, Figure 3, Figure 4)<sup>1</sup>.

**Table 1: Employment status of spouses/partners of male heads of households (percentages)**

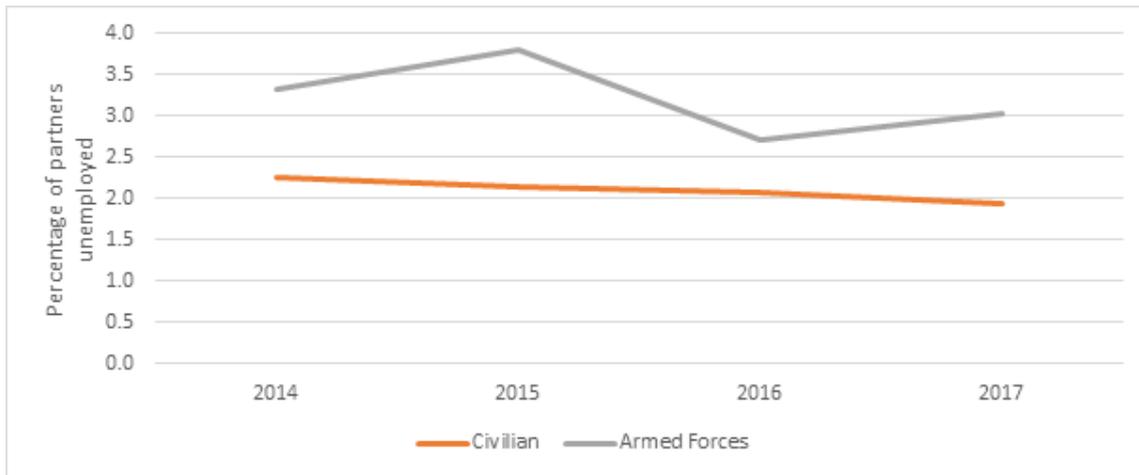
	2014	2015	2016	2017	2014-17
<b>Civilian spouses/partners</b>					
Employed	76.7	77.0	77.6	78.6	77.5
Unemployed	2.2	2.1	2.1	1.9	2.1
Inactive	21.1	20.9	20.4	19.5	20.4
<b>Armed Forces spouses/partners</b>					
Employed	75.4	77.8	78.8	78.1	77.5
Unemployed <sup>2</sup>	3.3	3.8	2.7	3.0	3.2
Inactive <sup>3</sup>	21.2	18.5	18.4	18.9	19.2

**Figure 2: Percentage of spouses/partners employed**

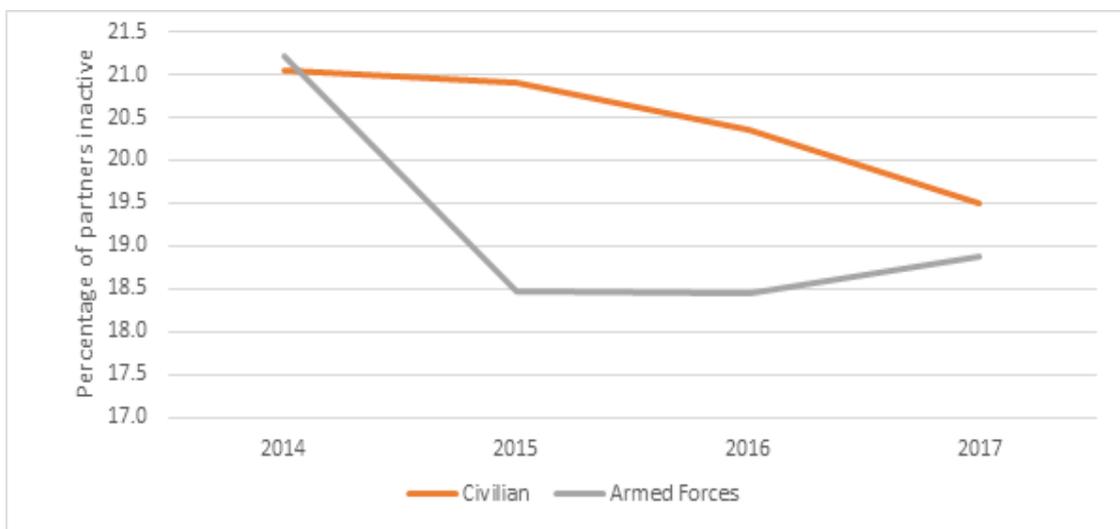


1. Because the number of female Armed Forces heads is small, the following information is produced for male heads of household only.  
 2. 'Unemployed' includes those who are not currently in employment but are actively seeking work (e.g. ILO states that the unemployed are those who have actively sought work in the previous four weeks and are available to start work within the next fortnight; or out of work and have accepted a job that they are waiting to start in the next fortnight).  
 3. 'Economically inactive' varies by defining body but tends to refer to those who are neither employed nor unemployed, and may include discouraged workers (those who say they would like a job but are not actively looking), students, carers of children and elderly people, etc.

**Figure 3: Percentage of spouses/partners unemployed**



**Figure 4: Percentage of spouses/partners economically inactive**



For male heads of household, there is little difference between those working in the Armed Forces and civilians in terms of the percentage of households in which all members were employed. This percentage was increasing over time for both civilian and Armed Forces heads and tended to be higher for the latter. However, the percentage of households which included unemployed persons was slightly higher for Armed Forces heads.

The headline findings from the LFS provide some (limited) information about employment status of military spouses/partners. Before moving on to the more detailed employment status information provided by spouses/partners responding to the online survey and interviews, the following sub-sections outline the achieved samples for the project surveys and interviews with spouses/partners and the survey with employers. Some limited comparisons with other data sources are also provided in order to highlight any major differences which may be the result of sample bias.

## 3.4. Research participants

### 3.4.1. Demographic profile of spouse and partner survey respondents

An overview of the demographic profile of the military spouses and partners responding to the survey are presented below. For more demographic information, see Appendix 3.



#### Gender

- 96% female
- 4% male

#### Age

- 47% 30-39 years
- 25% 40-49 years
- 23% 20-29 years



#### Of those with caring commitments:

- 80% had children under 16 years
- 10% had children over 16 years
- 5% had elderly person/people



#### Education

- 42% had attained a degree, higher degree and/or a professional qualification, while only 1% reported having no qualifications



#### Service of serving person

- 83% were in the Army
- 7% RAF
- 6% Royal Navy
- 1% Royal Marines

#### Rank of serving person<sup>1</sup>

- 33% were with Juniors Non-Commissioned Officers (JNCOs) and Other Ranks
- 32% Warrant Officers and Senior Non-Commissioned Officers (SNCOs)
- 20% Commissioned Officers
- 14% Senior Commissioned Officers



#### Current location and type of accommodation

- 65% lived in Service Family Accommodation (SFA) in the UK
- 13% lived in SFA overseas



#### Living arrangements

- 14% owned their home (with or without a mortgage)
- 88% live with their spouse or partner

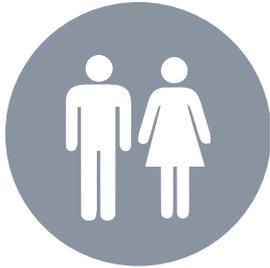
#### Relocation

- 69% had moved up to 5 times due to their spouse or partner's military commitments
- 10% had moved 11 times or more

<sup>1</sup>. For more information on how Rank is defined see Appendix 2.

### 3.4.2. Demographic profile of spouse/partner interview participants

An overview of the demographic profile of the military spouses and partners interviewed are presented below.



#### Gender

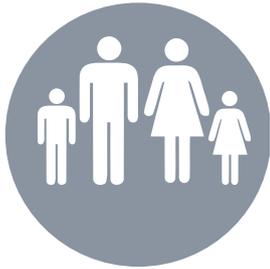
- 30 female
- 2 male

#### Age

- 24/32 aged 30-49 years

#### Ethnic group

- 28/32 White



#### Marital status

- 29 married
- 3 cohabiting

#### Caring commitments:

- 25 with children
- 7 no children



#### Education

- 21/32 had attained a degree, higher degree and/or a professional qualification



#### Service of serving person

- 25 Army
- 4 RAF
- 3 Royal Navy

#### Rank of serving person

- 14 were with Senior Commissioned Officers or Commissioned Officers
- 7 Senior Warrant Officers and SNCOs
- 10 JNCOs and Other Ranks



#### Current location

- 23 UK-based
- 9 overseas



#### Living arrangements

- 26/32 lived with serving spouse all the time

### 3.5. Profile of organisations responding to the employer survey

Those employer representatives who responded to the survey indicated that their organisation was based in the following industries, including:

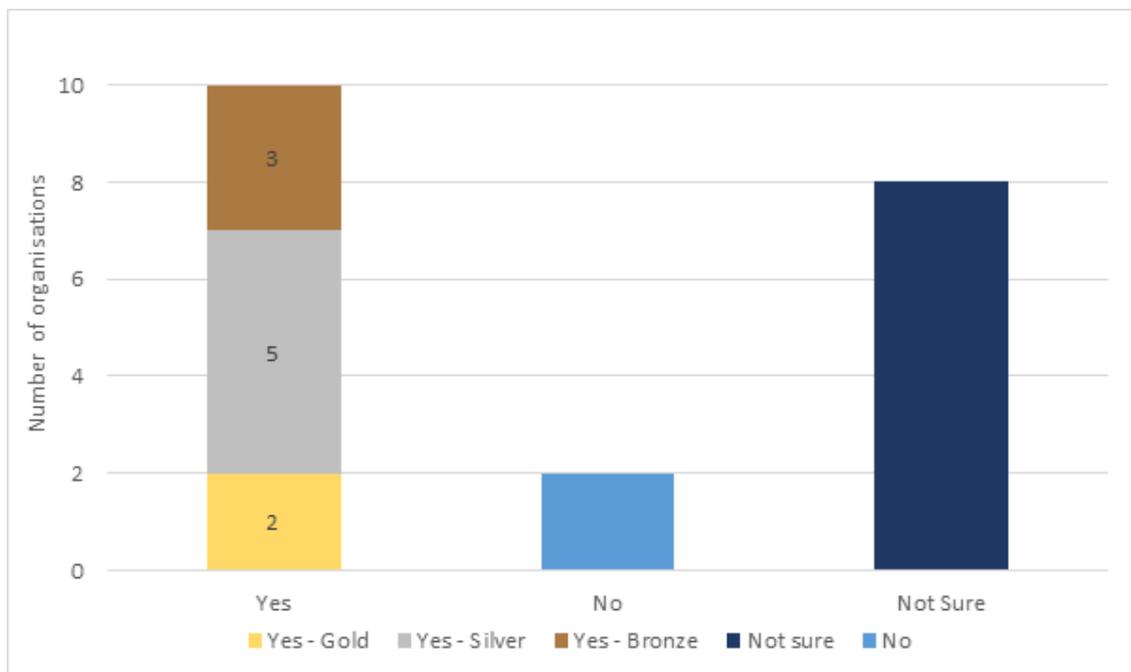
- Education (21%, n=8);
- Transport and storage (16%, n=6);
- Administration and support services (11%, n=4);
- Human health and social work activities (11%, n=4);
- Construction (8%, n=3);
- Public administration and Defence, compulsory social security (8%, n=3);
- Agriculture, forestry and fishing (5%, n=2);
- Information and communication (5%, n=2);
- Accommodation and food service activities (5%, n=2);
- Professional, scientific and technical activities (5%, n=2);
- Administrative and support services (5%, n=2);
- Financial and insurance services (3%, n=1);
- Real estate activities (3%, n=1).

Eighteen organisations were in the public sector, 16 in the private sector and three in the third sector (37 organisations responded to this question). The majority of organisations had links to the UK Defence sector (57%) and/or were located near a military base (54%). Fifteen organisations responding to the survey employed over 2,000 people.

Half of the organisations responding to the question had signed up to the Armed Forces Covenant (AFC) (n=19), whilst 9 had not and 10 were unsure. The 19 respondents who were not part of the AFC, or were unsure, were asked if they planned to sign up to the AFC in the future; only one organisation confirmed that they would whilst most were unsure (n=14).

Organisational representatives were also asked whether they had signed up to the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme (ERS) and, if they had signed up to the scheme, what ERS award they held (Gold, Silver or Bronze). Ten organisations reported that they were part of the scheme, two were not and eight were unsure. Of those confirming that they were part of the scheme, two had achieved the Gold award, five Silver and three Bronze (see Figure 5).

**Figure 5: Defence ERS membership and award held**



Based on 20 responses.

### 3.6. Data comparisons

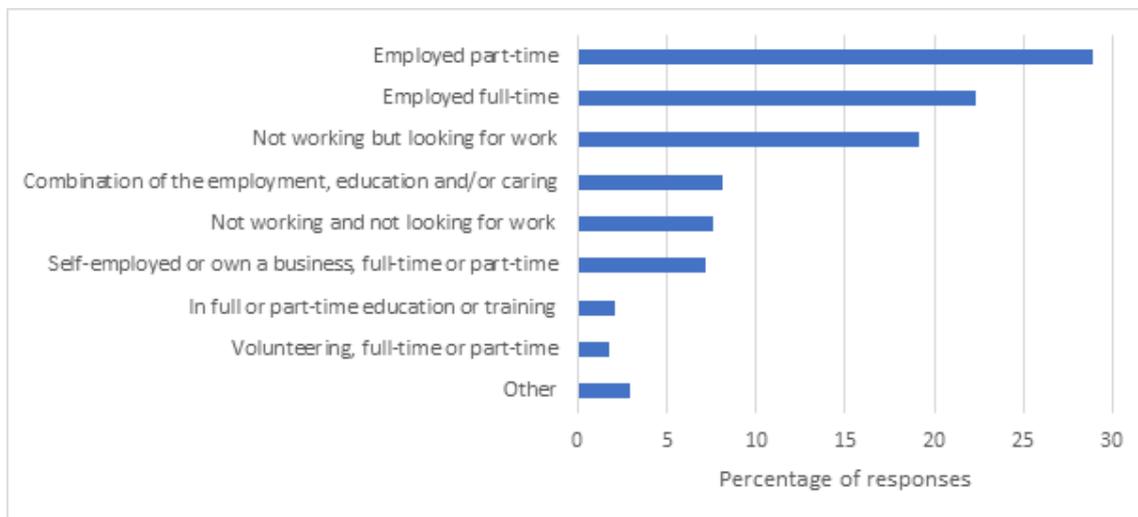
The research samples demonstrate a good spread of participants, in terms of age, rank of serving person, qualification levels, gender, marital status and childcare responsibilities. Some employment data comparisons with the latest annual Families Continuous Attitude Survey (FAMCAS) and the recent Scottish Spouses Employment Survey are provided below. FAMCAS aims to represent the views of the spouses of all Regular trained Service personnel: 2017 survey results were based on 7,145 valid responses, representing an overall response rate of 25%, and the Scottish Spouses Employment Survey (Stone, 2016) was based on 198 responses.

- Only 58% of the online survey spouses/partners were in paid work (i.e. as an employee or self-employed, but not including volunteering), in comparison with 74% in the FAMCAS survey (although our responses included 8% who answered ‘a combination of the above’ which may increase the overall numbers in employment). Around 55% of respondents in the Scottish spouses’ employment survey were in employment in 2016. Although it is not feasible to divide survey spouses/partners by Service due to low numbers in some groups, FAMCAS data shows that Army spouses/partners have lower rates of employment than other Service spouses/partners; however, this gap has narrowed in recent years.
- 22% of the online survey spouses/partners were in full-time employment and 29% in part-time employment (this compares with FAMCAS results showing 43% in full-time and 25% in part-time employment). Of those not working, 84% said they would like to work, either full-time (30%) or part-time (54%), similar to the Scottish survey which showed that 79% of those currently not working would like to do so. Only 8% of the survey respondents said that they were not in work and not looking for work, suggesting that the majority of military spouses do want to work.

### 3.7. Employment status of military spouses/partners

Figure 6 shows the proportion of survey respondents in employment. Those reporting ‘other’ were on maternity leave, engaged in a caring role, or wanted to work, but were unable to work due to deployment location.

**Figure 6: What is the employment status of spouses/partners surveyed?**



Based on 1,459 responses.

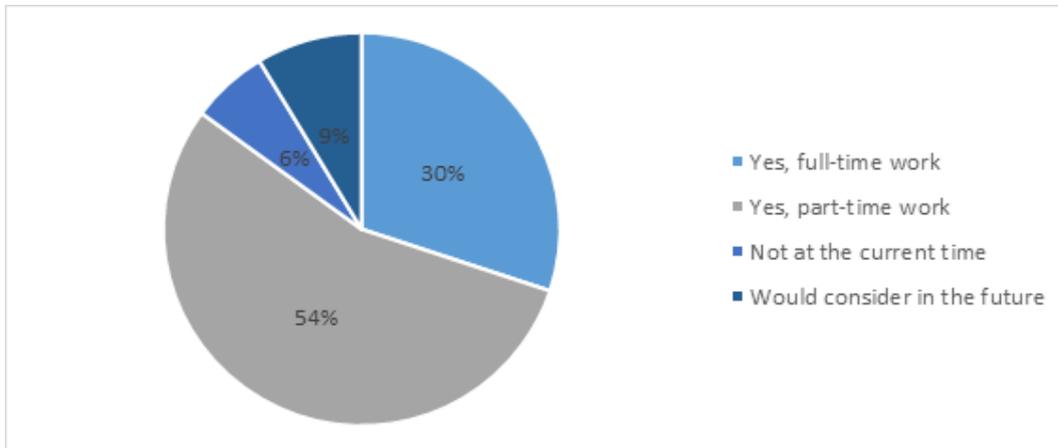
Those spouses/partners who were not working stated that they were not working because of:

- Deployment location;
- Lack of available jobs or jobs in chosen field;
- Recent and imminent deployment;
- Full-time care;
- Cost or lack of childcare;
- Lack of experience;
- Unable to provide recent references;
- Waiting for work visas and employment checks.

Those who were 'not in work' were also asked if they would like to work:

- The majority of spouses/partners reported that they wanted to work full-time (30%) or part-time (54%) (Figure 7).
- Nine per cent reported that they would consider working in the future and only 6% stated that they did not want to work at the current time.
- Higher proportions of spouses/partners of JNCOs and Other Ranks (ORs) (23%), and Warrant officers and SNCOs (16%) reported that they would like to work part-time, compared with spouses/partners of Senior Commissioned Officers (8%) and Commissioned Officers (8%).

**Figure 7: Do non-working spouses/partners want to work?**



Based on 529 responses.

Although the headline employment statistics in Section 4.2 show us that similar proportions of military spouses/partners and civilian spouses/partners are in work, what these data do not tell us is what kinds of jobs the spouses/partners of military personnel are doing:

- Are they commensurate with their qualifications and work experience?
- Are spouses/partners satisfied with their work and are there opportunities for progression?
- Have they had to change career because of the military lifestyle?
- How do they feel their career has progressed, in comparison with their civilian counterparts?

The following sub-sections describe in more detail the kinds of jobs that spouses/partners are engaged in.

### 3.8. What jobs are military spouses/partners doing?

A previous study from the US reported that military spouses/partners engaged in work were employed in Office and Administrative support roles (20%), Sales and related occupations (14%) and Education, training and library roles (12%) (Bradbard, Maury and Armstrong, 2016). Earlier research in the US with over a thousand spouses/partners found that career choices were often the same as civilian counterparts (Harrell, Lim, Castaneda and Golinelli, 2004).

In our study, spouses/partners who were in employment were asked what work they did (see Figure 8). Supporting the 2016 US findings, the top three industries reported by spouses/partners included:

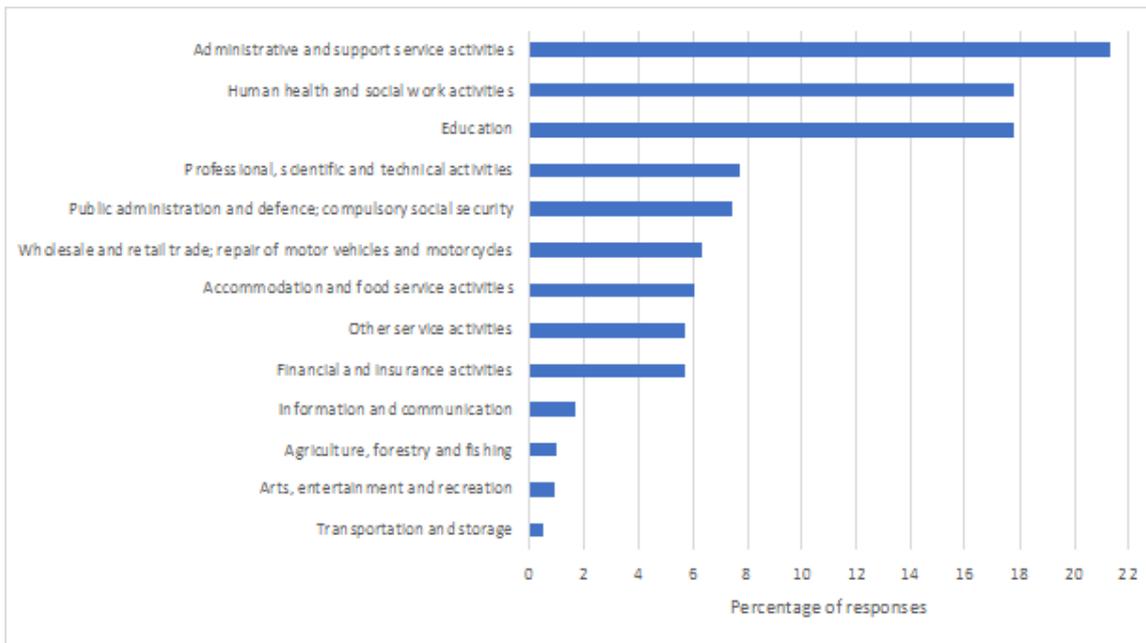
1. Administrative and support service activities: 21%.
2. Human health and social work activities: 18%.
3. Education: 16%.

Within these industries, spouses/partners reported undertaking a variety of roles, including:

- Administrative roles, business support roles (such as HR), personal assistants;
- Nurses, radiographers, doctors, health care assistants, dentists, pharmacists, social workers; and
- Teachers and head teachers, lecturers, adult tutors, pre-school education workers, learning support assistants, childcare workers<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Although not directly comparable, analysis of the Skills and Employment Survey of 2012 showed that a large proportion of working women in the UK are in Public Administration, Health and Education (43% of part-time and 47% of full-time working women).

**Figure 8: What industry do spouses/partners work in?**

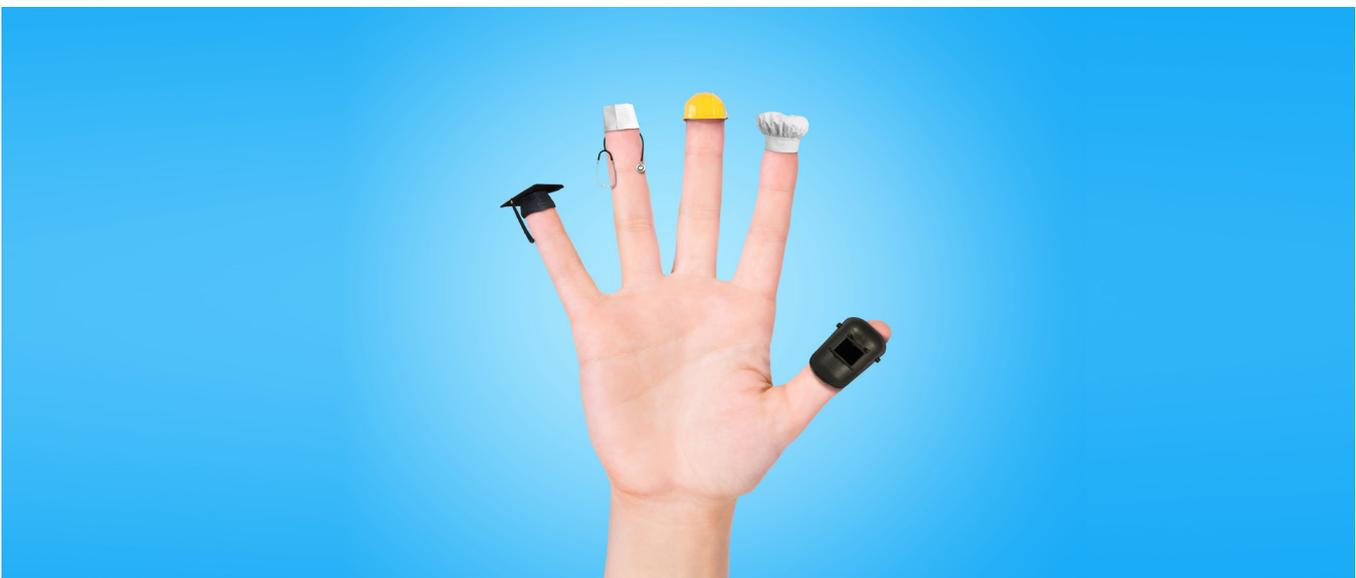


Based on 583 responses.

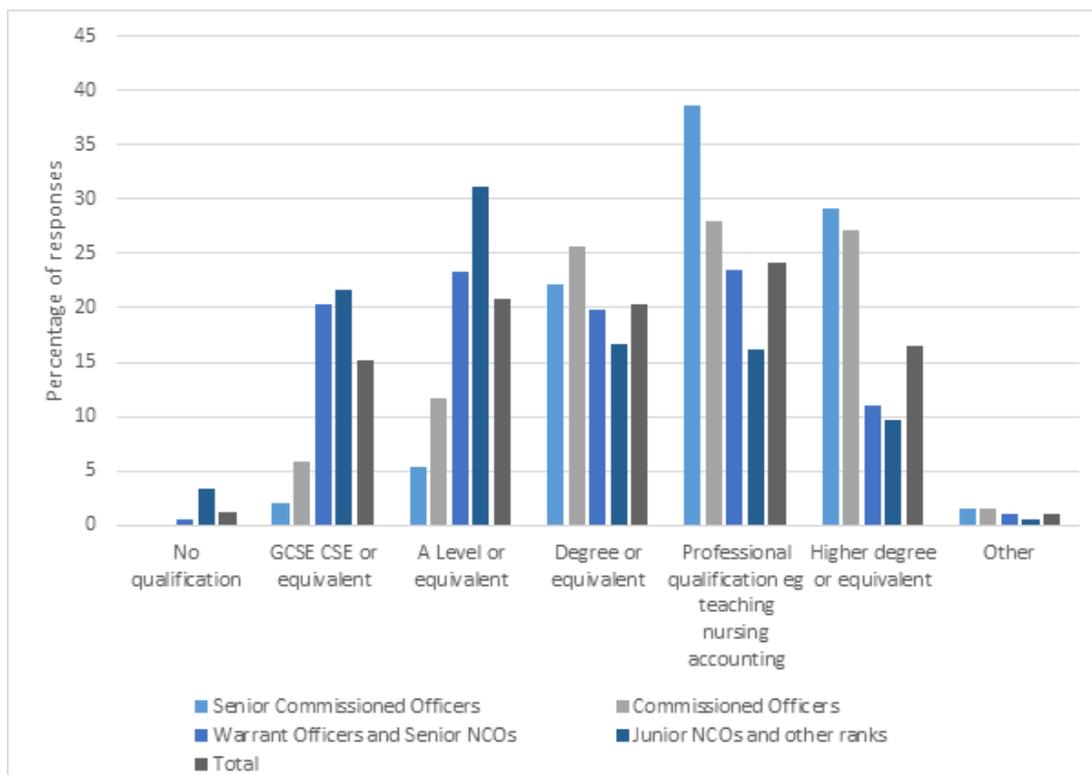
Stakeholders also added that popular work options among spouses/partners are retail, care, teaching, teaching assistants, admin and cleaning; these are usually local and can provide some flexibility (e.g. if during school hours). On the other hand, garrison jobs are usually ‘stop-gap jobs’; they can provide spouses with some work if the garrison is in a remote area and if the spouse/partner does not drive. Other stakeholders commented that self-employment is becoming a more popular choice among military spouses/partners, especially for those who move a lot and/or need flexibility for childcare. However, they pointed out that self-employment is often not straightforward.

### **3.8.1. Differences by rank of serving person and by qualifications of the military spouse/partner**

Spouses/partners responding to our survey were well-qualified, with 41% having attained a degree, higher degree or professional qualification. Spouses/partners of higher ranking serving personnel had attained higher levels of qualification (see Figure 9). This is also supported by a recent study of 147 military spouses/partners in the US (Ott, Morgan and Akroyd, 2018) who used an online survey to examine the education, career goals and influences of military spouses/partners. They were also found to be well educated, with most having attained a degree with career goals in health, business and education. Although their career goals were based upon their fields of interest, they often fitted with family responsibilities. It was suggested that spouses/partners often desire flexible careers and want to gain ‘portable’ qualifications to ensure they can find employment in different locations. As we will see later in the report, so-called ‘portable’ career decisions do not always work out as planned.



**Figure 9: What is the qualification profile of spouses/partners by Rank of serving person?**



Based on 1,284 responses.

In examining survey responses by partners' rank, respondents were more likely to be employed in:

- Administration and support service activities or Education activities (Senior Commissioned Officers or Commissioned Officers);
- Administrative and support service activities (Warrant Officer and Senior NCOs);
- Human health and social work activities (Junior NCOs and ORs).

When examining the qualification level of respondents:

- Those spouses/partners who had attained a degree or equivalent were mostly employed in Administrative and support service activities;
- Those with professional qualifications were mostly employed in Education, and Human health and social work activities (these were often teachers or nurses).

Interviewees were also asked about their job choices. One commented that nursing, teaching, accounting, childminding, nursery nurse, etc. are jobs that can 'travel with you'. Another interviewee mentioned that military spouses commute to do these 'transferable' or portable jobs (Ott et al. 2018): 'We have people that commute two hours for each day to go to those jobs, so people tend to go where the job is'. Some of these people work for agencies (social work) or work as locums (nurses): this helps when they know they will have to move for a new posting.

Those located overseas were mostly employed in Administrative and support service activities. This is similar to those in the UK, but spouses/partners also worked in Education, Human health and social work activities, and Professional scientific and technical activities. In spite of its popularity as a job for military spouses/partners, it is interesting to note that those in Administration and support service activities were more likely to report that in the future they would be looking for a different job.

To sum up, the headline figures on military spouse/partner employment show that similar proportions of civilian spouses/partners and military spouses/partners are in employment, but do not tell us what kinds of jobs military spouses/partners are doing. The vast majority of spouses/partners in the survey want to work or would consider working in the future. Most of those in work are employed in: Administrative and support service activities; Human health and social work activities; and Education. Military spouses/partners often choose 'portable' jobs such as nursing, teaching and childminding, allowing them to transfer more easily if posted elsewhere, although certain visa restrictions and local labour market policies still prevent many from working in their chosen field. Self-employment appears to be gaining in popularity among spouses/partners, again allowing a degree of employment 'portability'.

# 4. Military spouse/partner decision-making

## 4.1. Summary of findings

- The majority of military spouses/partners have three major decisions to make when considering their life choices: these are decisions around childcare, relationship with the serving person and employment (employment often comes last in the decision-making process and involves a high degree of sacrifice and compromise for many spouses/partners).
- Childcare options were more limited for military spouses/partners as they were usually away from extended family members and had to take on the majority of childcare, especially if their partners were deployed or posted. If living overseas, childcare options were either difficult to find or limited in scope; spouses/partners of older children at boarding school in the UK had to factor in time to visit their children.
- Spouses/partners also had to consider their relationship with the serving person and (crucially) whether to 'stay or go' with them on postings. Again, this often depended on decisions relating to family stability and wellbeing, although for some this was linked to maintaining their career.
- The decision to work tends to come last, although most spouses/partners wanted to work and their motivations to work were similar to civilian spouses/partners (e.g. to contribute to the family income; to do something for themselves; to avoid isolation, etc.).
- Few military spouses/partners planned to stay in their current job and a high proportion planned to do some training and/or update their skills; very few planned not to work at all.
- 68% of spouses/partners surveyed reported that they were 'very satisfied' or 'satisfied' with their job overall.
- Spouses/partners were most dissatisfied with the opportunities to progress in their job (38%) and with their pay (37%), in terms of it being commensurate with their skills and experience.
- Those spouses/partners with a professional qualification (such as certificates in teaching, accountancy, etc.) were most satisfied with their opportunities for progression.

## 4.2. Introduction

A significant theme across the study was the decision-making processes of military spouses/partners, which is explored further in this section. Analysis of the evidence from the military spouse/partner interviews and survey highlighted that decisions related to childcare, relationship with the serving person and employment were hugely important and often involved compromise.

International evidence suggests that decision-making is becoming better understood. For example, a large Australian survey study reported that the most significant consideration for a spouse/partner when deciding whether to accompany the serving person was being able to remain in employment (Brown and Wensing, 2016). Fifty-five per cent of the 3,500 spouses/partners said that their employment was a key consideration. However, there were noted differences by rank, with 44% of enlisted and other ranks spouses/partners considering their own work as important, compared with 66% of junior officer spouses/partners.

Another Australian study focused on 23 female military spouses who had accompanied their spouse/partner on an overseas posting which lasted more than one year (Biedermann, 2017). The aim of the study was to explore experiences of overseas postings and four key themes were identified: sacrifices for the good of the family, adjustments to a new environment, plus support and resilience. One of the sacrifices for the family was the impact on spouse/partner's career and identity. All of the participants in the study stated that they had to leave their job in order to take the posting, but believed it was a sacrifice in order to be a 'good wife'. Relying on the serving person financially was reported to be challenging, negatively affecting the spouse/partner's identity. However, spouses/partners were found to have resilience, which enabled them to adapt to their new environment.

Finally, a recent US study of 22 military spouses/partners explored their experiences and perceptions of military family life (Borah and Fina, 2017). Spouses/partners reported that continuous relocation had negatively affected their ability to attain a higher education qualification and gain employment. Specifically, spouses/partners talked about not being able to attain career goals and growth. Whilst the study was small, it was argued to be indicative of military spouses/partners' perceptions more generally. The authors proposed that programmes and services should take into account the whole family as a system in order to effectively deliver support.

The following sub-section reports on the decision-making of spouses/partners in the study, whilst also drawing on international evidence on military spouses/partners.

### 4.3. Three main decisions: Childcare, Relationship with the serving person and Employment

Interviews with spouses/partners and with stakeholders showed that decisions taken by military spouses/partners are not always proactive and based upon choice, but are in fact often reactive, with spouses/partners having to make the best of their current situation. Three key themes emerged from the interview and survey data: Childcare; Relationship with the serving person; and Employment. These are described in more detail next.

#### 4.3.1. Childcare

Spouses/partners have to make decisions around childcare when they are (usually) the main carer, the serving person is frequently away and they have limited access to extended family support due to postings.

A number of previous studies report on the importance of childcare and support for military spouses/partners (Blakely, Hennessy, Chung and Skirton, 2012; Borah and Fina, 2017; Brown and Wensing, 2016; Dimiceli, Steinhardt and Smith, 2010; Royal Airforce Families Federation, 2016). A UK study of 50 military spouses/partners found that 90% with children wanted to be in employment or education (Dandeker, French, Birtles and Wessely, 2006). Lack of childcare and local employment opportunities were barriers to finding and maintaining work. A large-scale survey of 1,417 UK military spouses/partners reported that the provision of childcare was vital to supporting their employment opportunities (Royal Air Force Families Federation, 2016). However, the costs of childcare and availability remained an issue affecting spouses/partners' employment and the ability to access full career opportunities and/or employment that reflected their qualifications and skills. This was also noted in a US childcare survey of 1,028 military families undertaken in 2004 (Zellman, Gates, Moini and Suttrop, 2009) which found that high-quality childcare is provided, but provision and access were variable; as a result, needs were not being met by the US Department of Defense. The Australian Defence Survey of 3,500 military families reported that spouses/partners who had not accompanied the Service person were more positive as their children were able to stay in the same school and keep their support networks (Brown and Wensing, 2016). The education of their children was more likely to be reported to be important to spouses/partners of senior officers than enlisted and other ranks. Spouses/partners also reported that it was difficult to re-establish support networks after being away.

Similar issues related to childcare needs and provision were found in this study, although some felt that there was little difference between military and civilian spouses:

*'Childcare is the big one. Even for civilians, job continuation is difficult if on maternity leave, etc. You need to be in a job at 16 hours per week to qualify for free childcare. This is not just specific to military spouses.'*

Others reported on military-specific childcare issues, e.g. in Germany there are fewer nursery places due to the large number of refugees; nurseries attached to camps are not full-time, so military spouses find it harder to get jobs that fit with available childcare. For those with older children remaining in the UK, spouses/partners said that they needed to take unpaid leave to visit them in boarding school. A spouse with young children spoke about decisions based on quality of life for the family:

*'Quality of life for the kids and me – they need me a bit more – there's no granny, no friends. When I had the job I had to be home by 6 pm, it was really stressful. So [in terms of employment] there are options, but just how workable those options are and how it impacts on my kids not having me around – it took [older child] a long time to settle here.'*

#### 4.3.2. Relationship with the serving person

Spouses/partners also have to make decisions about their relationship with the serving person, particularly in relation to accompanying them or not on postings, which in turn affects employment opportunities. There is some international evidence reporting on the challenges and impact of the military lifestyle on relationships. For example, Australian military spouses/partners in a recent survey identified a number of challenges to living away from the serving person (Brown and Wensing, 2016). Missing their partner (75%), feelings of living separate lives (65%) and the serving person missing family more than expected (58%) were the top three challenges identified. Previous research with 13 military spouses, who had accompanied the serving person overseas, examined the impact of such postings and how spouses/partners adapted and adjusted to challenges (Blakely, Hennessy, Chung and Skirton, 2014). It was found that spouses/partners who had left a job and become financially reliant on the serving person had experienced a loss of autonomy, but some had grown in confidence as a result of the overseas experience. Greater self-confidence was also reported by UK military spouses/partners as a result of relocations (Dandeker, French, Birtles, Wessely, 2006). A large study in the US of military spouses/partners found that self-confidence and self-efficacy were greater in employed spouses/partners, however (Trogakos, Bull, Green, MacDermid and Weiss, 2007).

In our study, survey respondents mostly lived with their partners all or most of the time, apart from when on deployment or training (88%), whereas 10% said for some of the week only and 2% lived apart; 65% lived in Service Family Accommodation (SFA) in the UK and 13% were currently living overseas. Spouses spoke of the challenges of maintaining a job whilst accompanying their partner:

*'I lost my job when I had to move with my husband – it seemed better to start my own business. I won't move with my husband any more – it's a better way of doing it, that's what we think now.'*

Another woman with three older children stated that she went into teaching, thinking it would be easy relocating, but her husband was away regularly on tours and they *'decided not to put the children into childcare all the time'*. She described herself as one of *'a rare breed of wives who are not working'*; a situation that is *'not common'*. She and her husband had *'very limited time together'* anyway with his postings and tours. Together, they decided on boarding school for their children to provide greater stability. This was common amongst the military spouses/partners interviewed and those who responded to the survey.

### 4.3.3. Employment

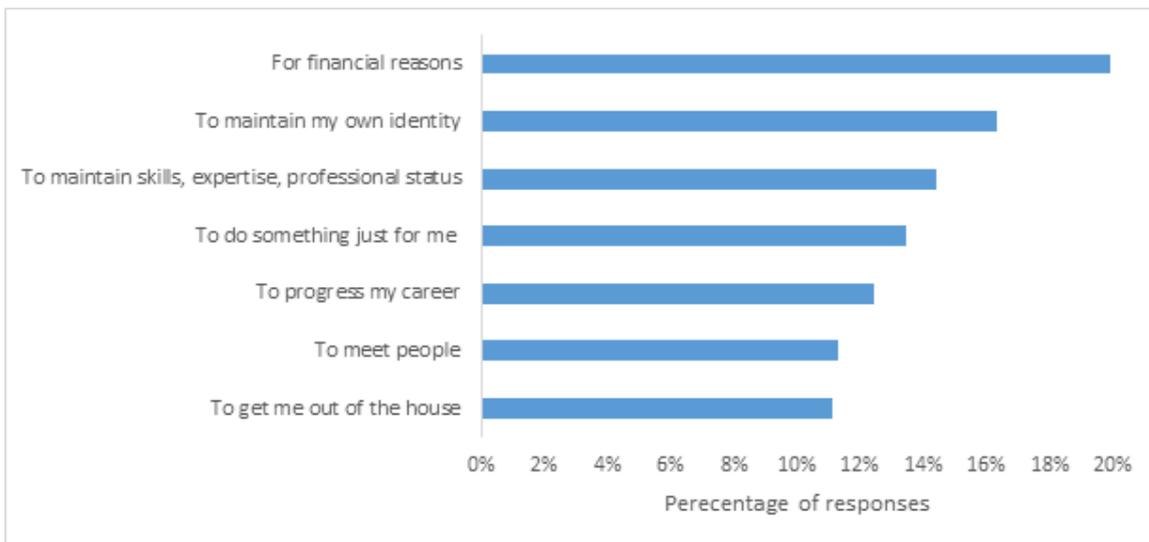
#### Motivations for working

Employment decisions among spouses/partners (both in the survey and the interviews) were often based on available opportunities after the needs of children and the serving person had been considered and often involved a level of sacrifice and compromise. Motivations for working vary among military spouses/partners, as demonstrated in previous research. A study of over 1,000 US military spouses/partners reported that 75% who were employed or looking for work did so for financial reasons (Harrell, Lim, Castaneda and Golinelli, 2004), findings which correlate with those of our survey: 20% said they worked for financial reasons; 18% to maintain their own identity; and 16% to maintain skills, expertise and/or professional status (see Figure 10). Spouses/partners also said (in the open text boxes) that:

*'I would like to work for a career, but we don't get posted in one place long enough for me to complete a university degree and we are never posted near a university either. Basically, as wives, we are unable to have any dreams.'*

Others spoke about ensuring a pension for the future and contributing to society. A couple of the spouses/partners said it was important to work because they are role models for their children and they want to instil positive values about working women.

**Figure 10: What are spouses/partners' reasons for working?**



Note: Respondents were able to select multiple answers.

The majority of interviewees said they worked because they had *'always worked'*, *'I've worked pretty much my entire life'*. A lot of the spouses/partners said that they worked for financial reasons: to support their family, contribute to the household income, afford to go on holiday and not be dependent on their partner. However, for many, work afforded more than just financial reward. A lot of the spouses/partners said that it provided them with a sense of purpose and structure. It is worth noting that overall, the reasons spouses gave for working did not differ from the reasons stated by many civilian spouses for working, as reported in the literature.

*'We needed the extra income – my earnings were the fun money – we had three children – clothes and toys and ballet lessons and scouts – so I took the jobs that were available.'*

*'I need the structure of going to work and having something to do.'*

Having something that was their own and separate from the other roles they fulfilled was particularly important for spouses/partners, as well as bolstering their self-esteem. For those with professional qualifications, working was essential to maintain their professional qualifications. For others, having and developing a career of their own was also an important factor:

*'...just for my own development I wanted to carry on what I wanted to do which was to pursue [job title] career...'*

A number of the spouses/partners said that one of their main reasons for working was social support and to make friends (away from a military environment), as well as avoiding isolation. This was often viewed as important for those moving to a new area where they did not know anyone.

Stakeholders were also asked why spouses/partners work and, while many of the reasons were similar to civilian spouses, they also highlighted some military-specific differences:

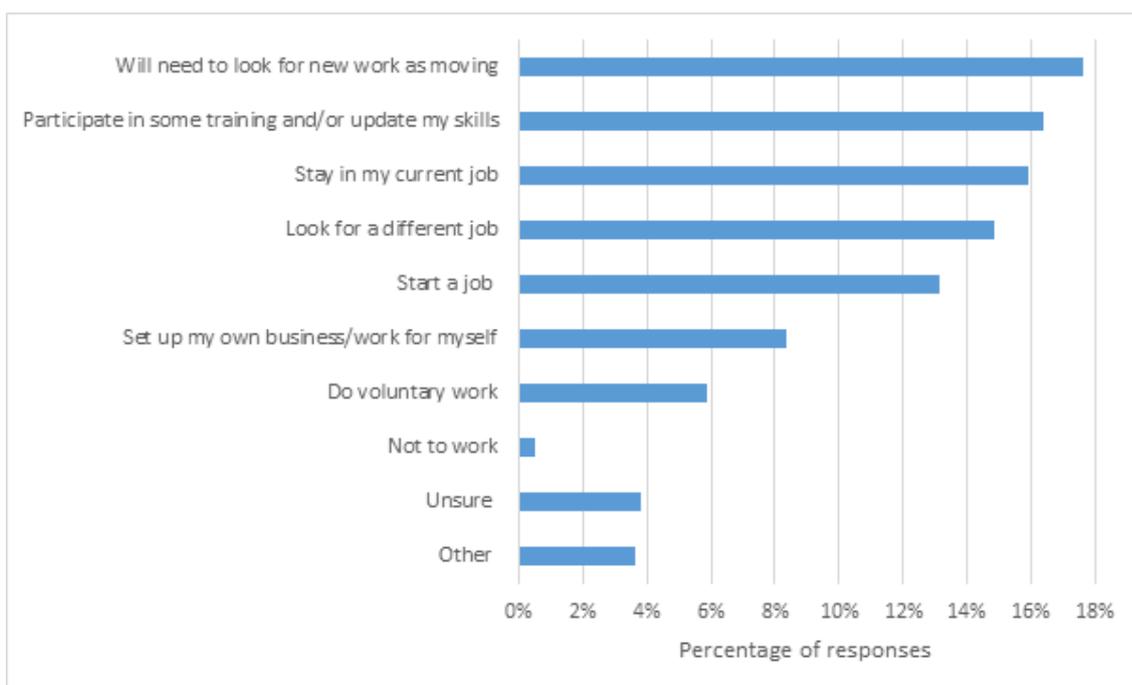
- **To maintain their identity:** *'Desperate to have something for themselves'*; it was recognised that spouses/partners do a lot of 'compromising' when the serving person is away; so maintaining an identity through employment is also about having something for the future when the serving person retires;
- **Connecting to the outside world:** *'Living on patch can be a bit of a goldfish bowl. Work can provide an external interest, get outside the wire. The Services can be 'all-consuming'.*

### Future plans for work

Spouses/partners were asked about their future plans for work (see Figure 11):

- Only 16% planned to stay in their current job;
- 18% reported that they will need to look for new work as they were moving;
- 16% planned to participate in some training and/or update their skills;
- 15% planned to look for a different job;
- 8% planned to set up their own business or work for themselves.

**Figure 11: What are spouses/partners' plans for work in the future?**



Note: Respondents were able to select multiple answers.

Those spouses/partners who were unsure of their future plans spoke of the uncertainty around the timing and location of the next deployment or posting. Other plans were based on the completion of an educational qualification or training course. Plans for the future were explored by rank of the serving person:

- 33% of the spouses/partners of Warrant Officers and SNCOs, and 37% of spouses/partners of JNCOS and Other Ranks (ORs), planned to participate in some training and/or updating of skills in the future, compared with only 15% of spouses/partners of Senior Commissioned officers and 15% of Commissioned officers.

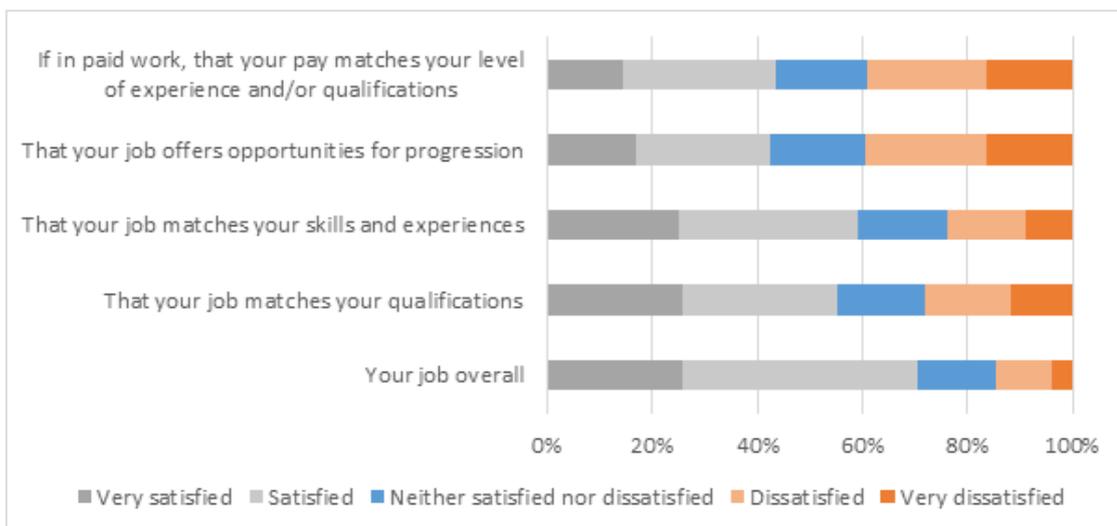
There were also notable differences in future plans of spouses/partners by qualification level:

- Spouses/partners who had attained higher level qualifications were more likely to report that they planned to stay in their current job and wanted to progress;
- Those who had attained a professional qualification reported that they wanted to progress, undertake CPD or engage in further learning.

### Job satisfaction

In the survey, spouses/partners were asked how satisfied they were with various aspects of their job. Interestingly, a high proportion of spouses/partners reported in the survey that they were ‘very satisfied’ or ‘satisfied’ with their job overall (68%), but 38% were dissatisfied with their opportunities for progression and 37% that their pay matched their level of experience and/or qualifications (see Figure 12)<sup>1</sup>.

**Figure 12: Are employed spouses/partners satisfied with their pay, progression and job match?**



Based on 830 responses.

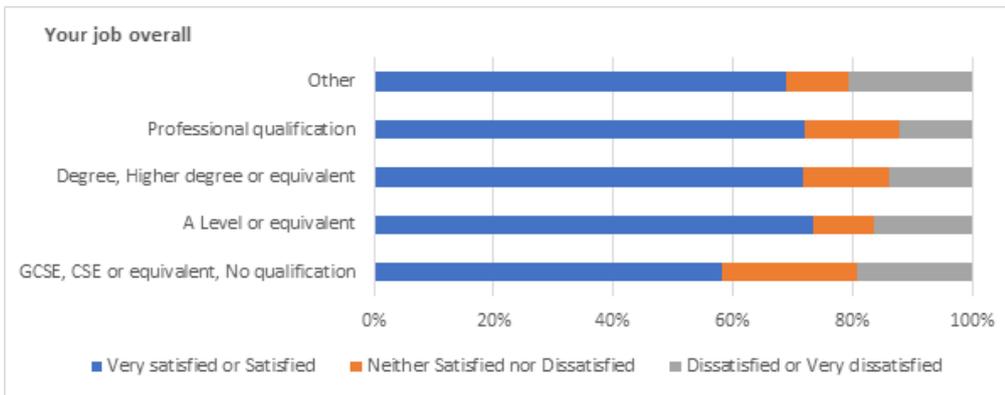
When satisfaction with different aspects of a job were considered in terms of spouses/partners’ qualification level, there were some interesting variations:

- Those with A Levels or equivalent (74%), or a degree or higher degree (72%), or a professional qualification (72%) were more likely than those with lower qualifications to report that they were ‘satisfied’ or ‘very satisfied’ with their job overall (see Figure 13);
- Those with professional qualifications (62%), A Levels or equivalent (62%), or a degree or higher degree (60%) were more likely than lower-qualified spouses/partners to report that they were ‘satisfied’ or ‘very satisfied’ that their skills and experiences match their job (see Figure 14);
- Those with ‘other’ qualifications (often reported to be industry/job specific qualifications associated with their role) had the highest satisfaction in terms of their job matching their qualifications (59%) (see Figure 15);
- 47% of those with professional qualifications reported that they were ‘satisfied’ or ‘very satisfied’ that their job offered opportunities for progression, the highest proportion of all groups (see Figure 16);
- Around 50% or less of spouses/partners in all groups reported that they were ‘satisfied’ or ‘very satisfied’ that their pay matches their level of experience and/or qualifications (see Figure 17).

1. Although data is not directly comparable, the Skills and Employment Survey data of 2012 show that 87% of part-time and 83% of full-time working women were very satisfied or satisfied with their job.

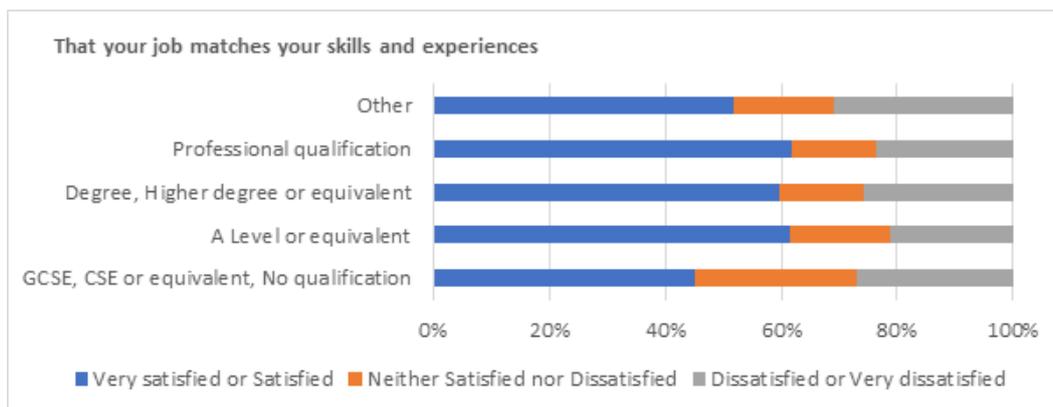
Stakeholders said that 'careers are difficult'; better-salary jobs are 'out of reach' and a lot of spouses 'have to subjugate their career'. Many spouses are 'under-employed' and will take any job if it is paid: this can lead to 'resentment' and a lack of fulfilment' among spouses.

**Figure 13: Are employed spouses/partners satisfied with their job overall?**



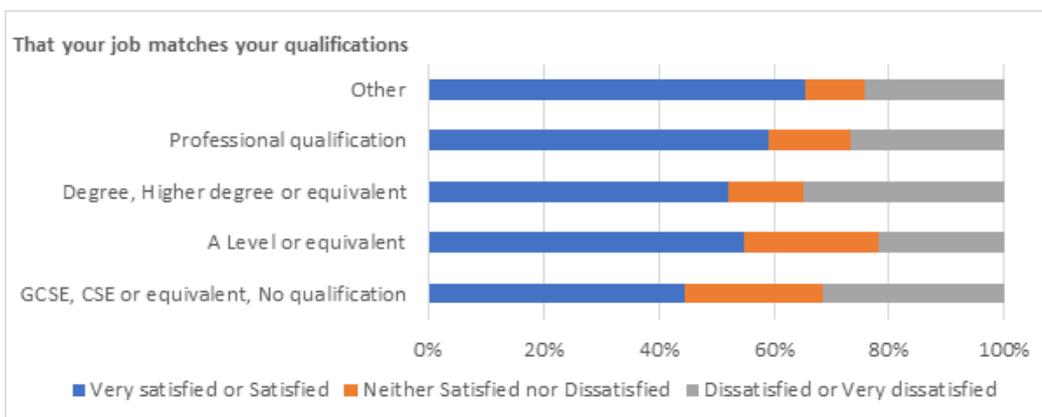
Based on 786 responses.

**Figure 14: Are employed spouses/partners satisfied that their job matches their skills and experience?**



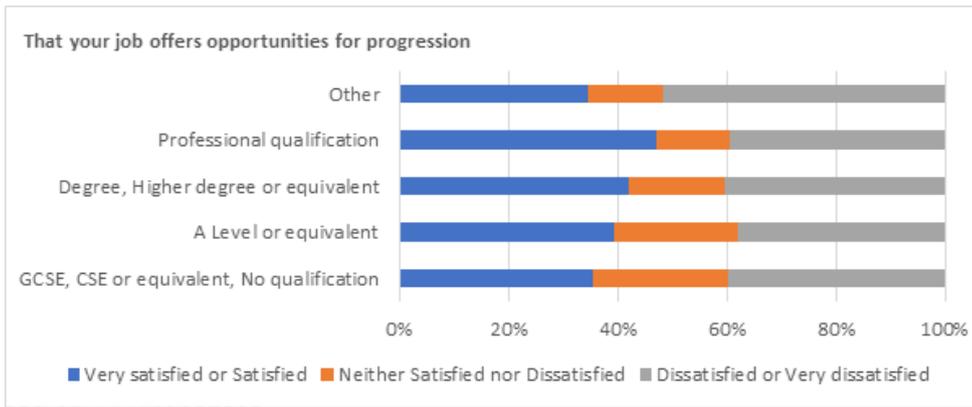
Based on 784 responses.

**Figure 15: Are employed spouses/partners satisfied that their job matches their qualifications?**



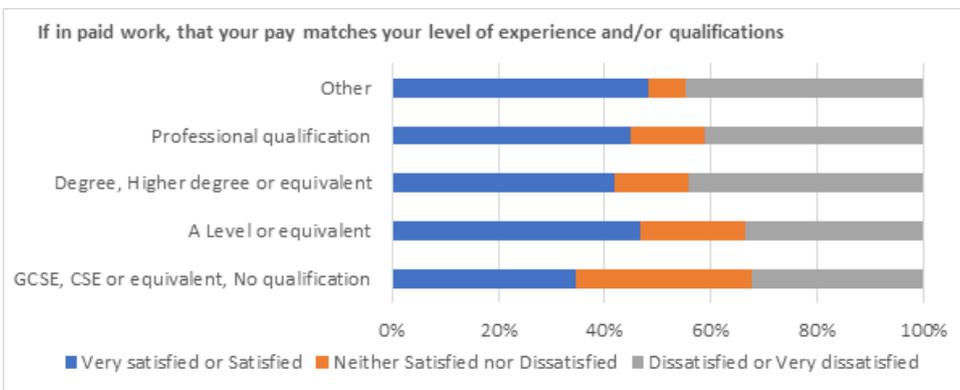
Based on 781 responses.

**Figure 16: Are employed spouses/partners satisfied that your job offers opportunities for progression?**



Based on 773 responses.

**Figure 17: Are employed spouses/partners satisfied that your pay matches your level of experience and/or qualifications?**



Based on 758 responses.

#### 4.4. Case Study 1: Belinda and Sarah

The following case study draws together two stories of military spouses/partners who are professionally qualified teachers. The case studies here and later in the report examine: the local context and family background; the local education system; qualifications; reasons for working; current employment status and future aspirations; impact of military lifestyle on decisions; plus relationships and support. The case studies also include individualised recommendations to support their engagement and participation with the labour market. The three case studies represent individual examples of the lifecourse decisions and compromises made by many of the military spouses/partners taking part in the study.

BELINDA	SARAH
<b>Belinda and Sarah are both professionally qualified teachers in their forties.</b>	
<i>Location and family background</i>	
Belinda’s husband is a Senior NCO in the Army and has served for over 15 years. After becoming tired of constant relocations due to changes in postings, Belinda and her husband bought a house in Scotland to provide family stability (they have two children). However, due to his current posting, Belinda’s husband is not able to live at home and commutes on a fortnightly basis.	Sarah’s husband is a LE Officer in the Army who has served for over 30 years. They are currently living together in another EU country in privately rented, MOD paid accommodation “off patch” (not enough housing available). They have not always lived together: in prior postings her husband has served both ‘married accompanied’ and ‘married unaccompanied’ to provide stability to Sarah and their two children, enabling Sarah to continue her employment in the UK whilst her husband was abroad.

<i>Education/qualifications</i>	
Six years ago Belinda obtained her PG Certificate in Education, believing that gaining a professional qualification would enable her to get a job. However, the subject she teaches is not taught in Scottish schools and she has been advised that she would need to gain a new qualification in order to teach; she felt that this was not financially viable at present.	Sarah left school with GCSEs and joined the Civil Service. She gained a City and Guilds adult teaching certificate. She is bilingual and is currently working in four jobs.
<i>Reasons for working</i>	
Belinda wants to work to contribute to the household income but also to provide her with her own identity and a sense of self-worth. Belinda is frustrated not to be able to teach as she has worked hard to gain her qualification and there are teaching opportunities available in the area.	Sarah works because she likes the independence of working and having her own money; she could not just 'do nothing'. Like Sarah, her mother was also a working military spouse who didn't always do the job she wanted but whose income helped the family to have holidays.
<i>Employment status and aspirations</i>	
Currently Belinda is working in a part-time role (20 hours a week) but is about to start a new full-time role working on community development projects on a one year contract. Although it does not use her teaching qualification she feels it is a good fit with some of her previous jobs, working with young people and children's services. Belinda has accepted that she needs to be open to different types of jobs (not just teaching), but would ideally like to be in a role where she can build a career, progress and develop her skills through training and not constantly have to re-invent herself to stay employed.	Sarah is content with her current employment status: the hours fit around her daughter's schooling and the roles enable her to maintain her professional qualifications. In the future she would like to work part-time and study for her Master's. Despite relocations, Sarah feels that she has been 'lucky' enough to find work (both paid and voluntary) that has been interesting and helped her further her career. She has worked mainly in school and education environments but has also undertaken cleaning jobs when they were struggling with school fees. Sarah has established a number of community groups and served on various committees, including PTAs, wives' clubs etc.
<i>Impact on career, family life and wellbeing</i>	
Gaining and maintaining employment has been a challenge for Belinda because of regular relocations. Belinda does not cope well with moving and this has resulted in a lot of anxiety for her. Over the past 12 years, Belinda has had seven jobs. Belinda believes that potential employers make assumptions about her as a military spouse and are less likely to employ or invest in developing her once in a role. Another challenge Belinda and her husband face is childcare: their children are young (one is pre-school age) and they live in a rural area of Scotland, away from family support. While her husband is deployed, Belinda is essentially a single parent.	Sarah has found teaching to be a portable qualification which has been useful in finding work. However, she has faced a number of barriers in maintaining employment, such as last minute changes to her husband's postings. As a result, Sarah has learnt not to hand in her notice until her husband has received confirmation of his posting. She also believes that her grade and pay do not match her responsibilities in one of her current jobs (she has been told that her husband earns enough, therefore her pay is sufficient). Despite this, she thinks that some of the barriers she faces, such as childcare issues, are no different to those of civilians whose spouses work away.
<i>Support</i>	
Although Belinda is aware that support is available for military spouses in finding employment, she feels the support is not consistent and varies according to location/posting and finances available. Living off patch, she expects to receive less support (and does), but she also found living on patch can be quite isolating if at work all day. Although she has sought help from some services, they have not proved helpful.	Sarah is aware that support is available for military spouses in finding employment. In the past she has sought help from employment support programmes for military spouses but has not found them particularly helpful. However, she also said that she was given some great advice when on a course about how to present her jobs, professional experience and skills in her CV. She thinks this has helped her get work. She says it is hard to remove military connections, but she presents this as a positive.

Summary and recommendations for Belinda	Summary and recommendations for Sarah
<p>Belinda has found constant relocations a challenge, both personally and professionally. She obtained a professional qualification, believing it would make her more employable, but this has not been the case. Based on Belinda's experiences she would benefit from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educating employers to help them understand what military spouses can bring to an organisation.</li> <li>• Support from the MOD with childcare, providing Belinda with more flexibility to work, particularly when her husband is deployed.</li> <li>• More consistent employment support provided to spouses, which is not location-dependent.</li> <li>• MOD support with gaining additional qualifications to maintain employment in her chosen field.</li> <li>• Access to career guidance to explore her skills, qualifications and experience in order to understand the range of employment opportunities available.</li> </ul>	<p>Sarah has been proactive in gaining and maintaining employment. She has been willing to upskill herself and has sought opportunities to further her career. However, she has also taken on roles simply to financially support her family. Based on Sarah's experiences she would benefit from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More support from the MOD in enabling her to work and to receive a decent salary, including a cultural shift in attitudes, e.g. not making assumptions about her husband's pay and her reasons for working.</li> <li>• Education support (to enable her to undertake her MA), e.g. the ability to transfer enhanced learning credits from the serving person to their spouse.</li> <li>• Greater targeted support from the MOD for spouses living overseas (e.g. pre-posting packs with information on available childcare, the local job market, job sites and any restrictions, etc.; language/other courses during the posting; upskilling or retraining opportunities before returning).</li> </ul>

To sum up, most military spouses/partners have three major decisions to make when considering their life options: these are decisions around childcare, relationship with the serving person and employment (with employment decisions often coming last in the decision-making process and involving a high degree of sacrifice and compromise for many). Childcare is a major stumbling-block for spouses/partners and often entails limited options because of being away from extended family members and having to take on the majority of childcare. Living overseas restricts childcare options even more, with many spouses/partners finding childcare difficult to find or limited in scope; a popular option for many spouses/partners of older children is to send children to boarding school in the UK if posted. Relationships with the serving person also entail some crucial decision-making, particularly whether or not to accompany the serving person or not when posted. For those with children, this is often intertwined with decisions relating to family stability and wellbeing, although for some this was linked to maintaining their career. The decision to work often came last for spouses/partners, although motivations to work were similar to civilian spouses/partners. Few military spouses/partners planned to stay in their current job and a high proportion planned to do some training and/or update their skills; very few planned not to work at all. Around two thirds of spouses/partners reported that they were 'very satisfied' or 'satisfied' with their job overall but were most dissatisfied with the opportunities to progress in their job and with their pay being commensurate with their skills and experience.



# 5. Challenges and barriers to spouse/partner employment

## 5.1. Summary of findings

- The main identified barriers and challenges to military spousal employment centre around: a) Childcare; b) Location – postings and deployment; c) Ability to keep up with training and professional development; d) Lack of (re)training opportunities; e) Having to change career path; and f) MOD reluctance to support military spouses and general military culture.
- Certain groups of spouses/partners appear to experience greater challenges than others, e.g. Commonwealth spouses and those with young children; spouses/partners with higher qualifications faced more barriers in maintaining a career.
- 63% of spouses/partners surveyed had changed career path because of the military lifestyle, with only 7% survey saying that they wanted to change career path.
- Spouses/partners of lower ranks were more likely to report that they had to change career because of the military lifestyle (66% Warrant officers, SNCOs, JNCOs and ORs, compared with 35% of Senior Commissioned Officer and Commissioned Officers' spouses/partners).
- The military maintains traditional views of spouses/partners as dependents and prioritises the careers of its personnel; a lack of planning and organisation, alongside an assumption that military spouses are always available for childcare responsibilities, act as further barriers to spousal employment.

## 5.2. Introduction

Although there are existing barriers to employment for all spouses/partners, especially women who take on the majority of childcare and domestic work, there are additional barriers and challenges to employment for military spouses/partners; these are explored in this section.

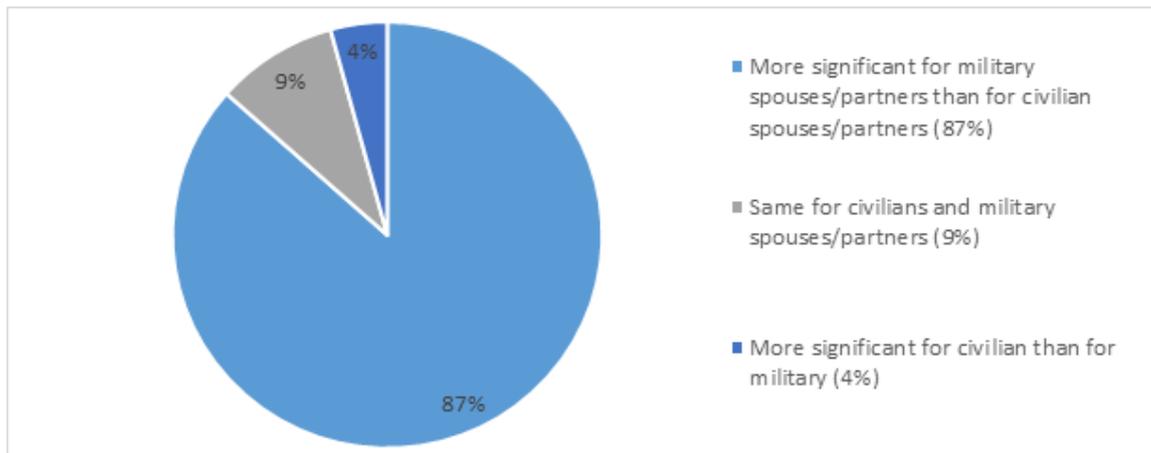
There is much evidence to suggest that military spouses/partners find it difficult to complete educational qualifications, engage in other learning and professional development activities and transfer certificates (Dandeker, French, Birtles, Wessely, 2006; Dimiceli, Steinhardt and Smith, 2010; Hosek, Asch, Fair, Martin and Matlock, 2002; Little and Hisnanick 2007). A study of 50 UK military spouses/partners interviewed about their experiences of deployment found similar results (Dandeker et al., 2006). It was reported that the majority of spouses/partners believed that the serving person's career had had an adverse impact on the opportunities and type of work available to them. Similarly, interviews with 1,102 US military spouses/partners from eight different locations provided evidence of the negative impact of the military lifestyle on spousal employment. Castaneda and Harrell (2008) reported that almost two-thirds of spouses/partners stated that being a member of the Armed Forces community had negatively affected their work opportunities, as a result of relocations, deployment of the serving person, childcare difficulties and employer bias. Spouses/partners of lower ranks were least likely to report a negative impact.

This section begins by outlining study participants' views on the differences between civilian and military spousal barriers to employment, stakeholder views on barriers and challenges and also any particular barriers for different groups of military spouses/partners. The main identified barriers and challenges to military spousal employment are shown to centre around: childcare; location – postings and deployment; ability to keep up with training and professional development; lack of (re)training opportunities; having to change career path; and the MOD reluctance to support military spouses and the general military culture. Employer perceptions and practices are also a major challenge to military spousal employment but will be covered in more detail in Section 6.

## 5.3. Differences between military and civilian spouses

When asked whether the challenges to finding and maintaining employment are different for military spouses/partners when compared to civilian spouses/partners, 87% of study respondents stated that the challenges for military spouses/partners are more significant (see Figure 18).

**Figure 18: Are challenges to finding and maintaining employment different for military spouses/partners when compared to civilian spouses/partners?**



Based on 1,316 responses.

Interviewees also overwhelmingly thought that military spouses/partners faced greater challenges:

*'It can be harder. No family network nearby [grandparents for additional childcare]...can't count on my husband who is often away.'*

*'You move every 2 years, that's the big one really. Even if you stay in the UK you are moving from Scotland to Anglesey and Norfolk.'*

#### 5.4. Stakeholders' views on barriers and challenges

Stakeholders were asked about the challenges in gaining and/or maintaining paid employment, in comparison with spouses/partners in the civilian population. Responses were very similar to those of the spouses/partners and included:

- Postings and relocations leading to a 'patchwork CV';
- Hard to retain a career and/or seniority if moving regularly;
- Difficulties with getting children into childcare or good schools with regular moves;
- Extended families do not usually live close by to help with childcare;
- Overseas postings can mean working visa restrictions or language difficulties;
- Some UK postings can be remote and/or have difficult labour market conditions;
- Spouses have often married young and many do not have good qualifications;
- Military culture (the Services come first and work hours are very fixed; traditional attitudes); unpredictability of serving personnel's location and ability to help;
- Negative perceptions of employers about postings, commitment, and lack of local support with childcare.

#### 5.5. Barriers for particular groups of spouses/partners

In response to a question which asked whether particular groups faced additional challenges, several interviewees said that Commonwealth spouses faced greater challenges to employment because they lacked English language proficiency and there are no special language training opportunities available. Commonwealth spouses also have to pay for their own visa when they come to the UK.

Others said that mothers of young children faced particular problems, e.g. access to good quality and affordable childcare is a challenge. The following example came from a spouse living in a military base in Cyprus:

*'After lunch the children are not separated by age group [in the nursery on the camp] and my little one has just turned one, so I didn't feel comfortable with him being with four year olds. The nursery is not designed for full-time working parents. It's designed for mums who want to have a bit of a break.'*

A number of interviewees felt that military spouses/partners with higher level educational qualifications face greater challenges in finding and maintaining employment, for instance: *'People with professional qualifications, because you're kind of specialised. The living abroad bonus doesn't really compensate them for the loss of a proper income.'*

Spouses with higher level qualifications reported that they had to move down a couple of rungs on the career ladder every time they moved to a new area and started a new job, even if their qualifications matched the new job. The following spouse was talking about where she saw herself in five years' time:

*'It really depends on what happens – we will probably move back to NI and there are fewer jobs and different [social work] organisations. I have to go back to the start if I go back to social work – I'm not sure I have the mental energy.'*

Stakeholders were also asked if some groups faced greater challenges in gaining or maintaining employment than others. In addition to those outlined above by interviewees, their responses focused on location (i.e. some of the barriers for overseas spouses and those living in remote UK areas) and regular moves. There were also some reported differences by the serving person's rank and service. Responses included:

- Spouses/partners going overseas (spouses are often advised beforehand to treat it 'like a holiday' because they are unlikely to gain employment);
- Those living on remote UK bases; Northern Ireland retains some security angst (some 'no-go areas');
- Navy spouses less likely to move - two main bases - so more able to maintain a home and career; the Army and RAF were noted to be very different;
- Officers more likely to move around and spouses were expected to move with them;
- Partners (v spouses) unable to access SFA, so more likely to need a second salary;
- Those who are self-employed and/or run their own business have to gain a business licence to trade 'outside the wire'; with Brexit, trading in Europe may become more difficult.



**Employment**  
barriers and challenges

## 5.6. Childcare

When asked about the challenges in finding and maintaining a job, four of the top five responses from spouses/partners participating in the survey related to childcare (including the costs, availability and lack of support) (see Table 2).

**Table 2: What are the challenges faced by spouses/partners in finding and maintaining a job?**

Challenges in finding and maintaining a job	Percentage
I don't have family support with childcare	17%
My spouse or partner's postings and deployment	15%
I can't afford the cost of childcare	12%
My spouse or partner is unable to assist with care responsibilities	11%
There is a lack of childcare available	8%
I have a lack of confidence	7%
I live overseas so there is a lack of opportunities for work	6%
I have a lack of experience, skills or expertise	5%
I live in a remote location in the UK	4%
I am not able to keep up with the training/professional development requirements of my profession	4%
I have a lack of qualifications	3%
My qualifications are not recognised in another geographical location (in the UK or overseas)	2%
I live overseas and there are visa restrictions or restrictions due to local government agreements or memorandum of understanding (MOU)	2%
I have not faced any challenges	2%
I do not have access to transport	2%

Spouses/partners (in the open text boxes of the survey) also spoke of the challenges of being a parent/carer with a serving person:

*'I am unwilling to send my children to before and after school/holiday clubs as they already see very little of their father. I want them to have a consistent parent.'*

*'Even now I have to have a very FLEXIBLE [sic] and accommodating employer to enable me to work from home and office and juggle children in Boarding school with drop off / pick-ups at exeats / end of terms etc. This in itself is a full-time job and there is no way I can rely on my serving husband to do these tasks as Army job always has last minute changes!'*

## 5.7. Location – postings and deployment

Limited opportunities for spousal employment during postings is recognised in the literature as a particular stressor (Blakely, Hennessy, Chung and Skirton, 2012; Dimiceli, Steinhardt and Smith, 2010). A systematic review undertaken by Blakely and colleagues (2012) examined evidence on the impact of overseas postings on accompanying military spouses – sometimes referred to as the 'trailing spouse' or 'tied migrant'. The review concluded that military spouses experience more challenges and stressors than civilian spouses, with overseas postings being particular challenges. The review found evidence that employed spouses were more likely to adapt well to a new posting and be less socially isolated. However, Australian military partners/spouses participating in the recent families' survey reported that re-establishing employment was the most difficult thing to do after relocation (Brown and Wensing, 2016). A study of UK military spouses/partners found that those who were overseas believed that they would be in work if they were in the UK (Dandeker, French, Birtles and Wessely, 2006). However, several reported that the informal support found in and around military bases was beneficial to maintaining work.

Some of our respondents had also found it difficult to get a job due to their location, either within the UK or overseas. One interviewee talked about the challenges of moving to a new area: *'When new in an area you are at a disadvantage and learning where everything is, it can be really hard. Also not knowing anybody is difficult.'*

Other spouses/partners taking part in the survey also spoke (in the open text boxes) about the challenges of moving and how this had affected their employment choices:

*'The delay in recognising my qualification.'*

*'My pre-spouse career involved specific skills and training and the opportunities are only in certain locations. So, I have skills and am highly trained, but not in something I can move around with. I lack the right skills for employment that I can move with.'*

*'Since performing overseas postings and returning to the UK, I am deemed out of date, lacking in current skills, no current referees.'*

Other spouses/partners spoke about having to learn to adapt their skills:

*'I have faced challenges, but they have not been insurmountable. Going on an overseas posting unexpectedly offered me the opportunity to put my skills developed as a solicitor to use in a completely different context.'*

For those living overseas, it appears more difficult to access CPD courses. Some interviewees reported that they would travel to do a course, but longer distances presented a barrier: *'When we lived in Germany I could fly back to the UK if I wanted to do a course, but with the children it's not possible and the journey is longer from Cyprus as well, it takes 5 hours'*

When in a different country, spouses/partners also have to comply with complex, bureaucratic rules. The processes which lead to the permission to work can be lengthy, and the following example is from a spouse living and working on a military base in Cyprus:

*'We have to apply for business licence here – you have to pay a set fee to get the paper work done. It took a long time. It's all done through the military, you go to the civil servants on camp. The amount depends on whether you work from home or you move around. It's a yearly fee [and] you can't work while you are waiting for it. It took about 8 months for the licence to come through.'*

Differences were noted by service and rank of the serving person. For example, those in the Army are considered to move around more than those whose spouse/partner is in the RAF. One spouse stated that *'My husband's Infantry. They are deployed more and move more; they get it harder. I don't think it's easy to generalise across the services'*

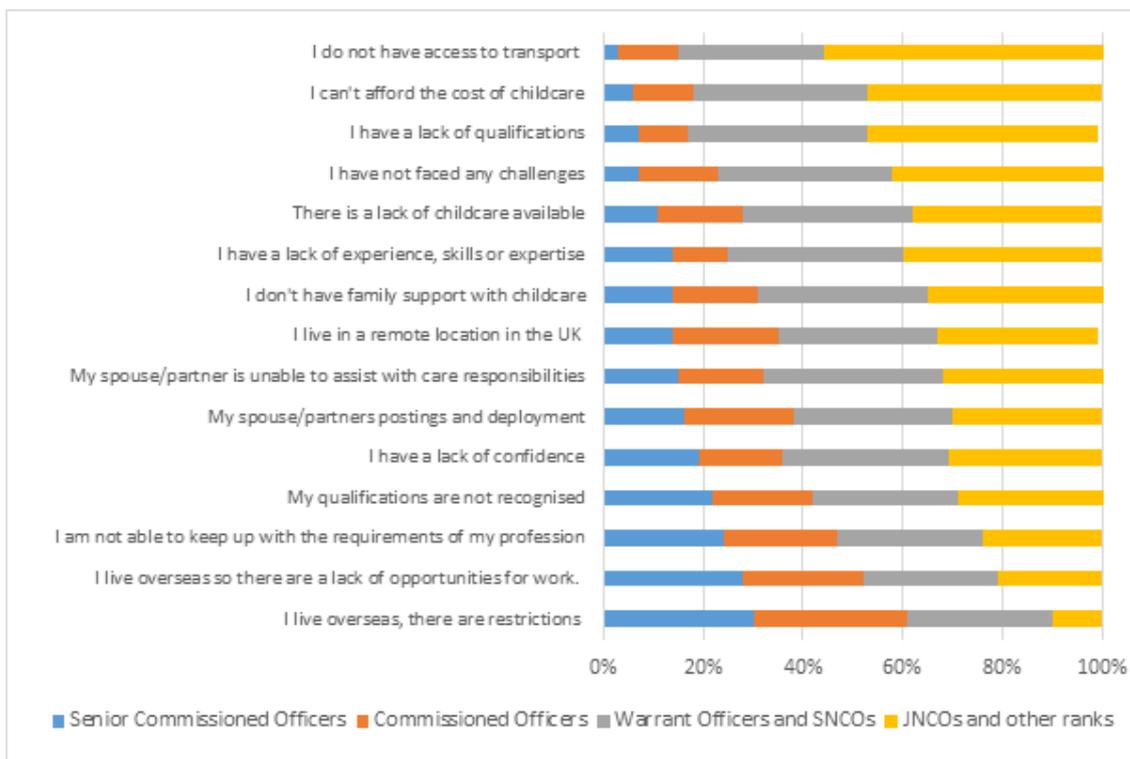


## 5.8. Ability to keep up with training and professional development

The ability to keep up with training and professional development requirements of their profession was reported often by spouses/partners, regardless of the serving person's rank (ranging from 23% of spouses/partners of Commissioned Officers to 29% of Warrant Officer and SNCOs' spouses/partners) (see Figure 19). Another challenge was qualifications not being recognised in another geographical location which was reported by 30% of spouses/partners of JNCOs and ORs, plus 29% of spouses/partners of Warrant Officers and SNCOs (see Figure 19). Those with a professional qualification were particularly likely to report being overseas as a challenge. One self-employed spouse told us: *'Self-employment means that I have to pay for CPD and I don't work on that day so I don't get paid.'*

Lack of transport, which would make it difficult to access training, was a particular issue for spouses/partners of JNCOs and ORs (57%). Those with lower qualifications (A Level or equivalent and below) were more like to report that having a lack of qualifications was a challenge to finding and maintaining employment.

**Figure 19: What are the challenges faced by spouses/partners in finding and maintaining a job by Rank of serving person?**



Based on 4,970 responses. Please note respondents were able to select multiple answers.

## 5.9. Limited (re)training opportunities

Only one previous study was found that considered the educational needs of military spouses/partners (Gleiman and Swearingen, 2012). Undertaken in the US with military spouse students, the authors suggest that the challenges and stressors they face in participating in higher education should be better addressed. They propose more flexible admission policies, situating students' learning in their experience, building in support for self-directed learning and fostering a sense of community with group work activities. Another US study of employment gaps between military spouses and their counterparts reported an earnings gap, particularly for those with lower educational attainment levels (Meadows, Griffin, Karney and Pollak, 2016). The authors suggest that those with low attainment levels need to be supported in learning and provided with career guidance to help improve their position in the labour market.

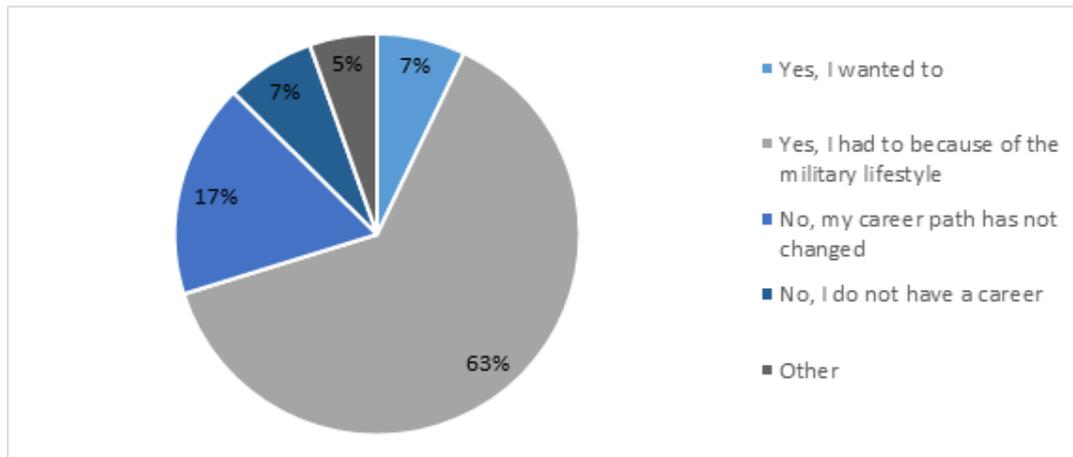
Several spouses/partners in our study reported on a lack of training opportunities. One young spouse from a non-British background had recently moved to the UK and was working in a low-level job on patch. She reported that she would prefer to work full-time (8-5) in a 'good job'. She wanted to study some more (functional skills), but these were only available in a 'learning centre'. She planned to continue with her current job until she found something better, however.

## 5.10. Having to change career path

Seventy per cent of spouses/partners reported that they had changed career path since becoming a military spouse/partner: 63% reported that they had had to change career path because of the military lifestyle (see Figure 20) and of these, only 7% said that they had wanted to. Only 17% reported that their career path had not changed.

Spouses/partners of lower ranking military personnel were more likely to report that they had to change career because of the military lifestyle (66% Warrant officers, SNCOs, JNCOs and ORs, compared with 35% of Senior Commissioned Officer and Commissioned Officers' spouses/partners). Comparable numbers within all groups reported that they had changed career and wanted to.

**Figure 20: Has spouse/partner career paths changed or not because of military lifestyle?**



Based on 1,372 responses.

Most survey respondents reported that the military lifestyle was not 'compatible' or 'sustainable' with a career, particularly if they had a family. A few respondents spoke of career change as a positive experience – diversifying; adapting skills and experience to a different role; having the opportunity to retrain for a new career; and thinking about transferability of skills sets:

*'Initially to keep my brain moving, I did an Open University degree, which I extended into a Master's. Now I'm trying a new career path, as a writer for UK based magazines. Thereby not breaking the 'no local working for spouses' rule.'*

The top 3 reported reasons on how working life had been affected by the serving person's job were:

1. I had to give up a job/more than one job: 30%.
2. I haven't been able to work or continue working in my chosen field: 17%.
3. I am behind my civilian peers in terms of career progression: 17%.

Only 2% of spouses/partners reported that their working life had not been affected.

Spouses/partners also explained in the interviews how their working life had been affected and the longer-term impact:

*'Although I am behind my civilian peers (I am a solicitor by background and I gave it up to go on an overseas posting) I love what I do now and I only have this job because of both being a solicitor and the job I did whilst overseas.'*

One non-working graduate living abroad spoke of how her career had been affected by the military lifestyle:

*'I feel like I'm going backwards and I feel when I go back home and try to find work my CV's a mess and I've taken so many steps backwards that I think it'll be really hard to pick up at a higher level again. And of course you lose your confidence along the line.'*

## 5.11. MOD reluctance to support military spouses and general military culture

Previous research of UK military spouses/partners reported both positive and negative effects of being part of the military (Dandeker et al., 2006). Some highlighted that the military culture and the non-negotiable elements of the job were difficult, but most accepted this was part of the culture and accepted the lack of control. However, a fifth talked about the positive effects of being part of the Armed Forces community citing tax breaks, good medical care, subsidised schooling and social status of spouses/partners' rank.

A recent critical policy review of Canadian Armed Forces' policies and programmes aimed at supporting military families was undertaken to better understand the military's reliance on spouses/partners (Spanner, 2017). It is suggested that the military spouses/partners undertake domestic labour, suspend their careers and relocate when asked to. The review reported that whilst the military culture was changing in order to respond to new family forms and gender roles, policies still relied on a patriarchal family form and a financially dependent spouse/partner.

These findings resonate with those from our study. One spouse similarly told us that the military are 'quite archaic' and she does not like the 'stereotype of the stay-at-home wife'. The military refers to the wife/partner as the 'dependent' – 'speaks volumes'. Spouses/partners are required to give up a huge sense of self and lose their identities, for instance: 'Mr so-and-so's wife and that's it'. She added:

*'In terms of hierarchy, there is also an expectation that I refer to senior army officers by their rank. In a social situation I find this absurd. They are not my superiors and I personally have no involvement in the military. It seems that my husband's employment somehow extends to me too.'*

Another spouse spoke of the disparity between a military spouse/partner being employed by the MOD and military personnel: 'When employed by the army they are hot on regulation, but as a dependent you are not afforded the same rights.' Another spouse added that if her husband was in the police, by comparison, she would be able to choose to live near her family so she could receive help with childcare. It was pointed out that police shifts are also known in advance which is not the case in the military. It was quite common for her husband to telephone to say he would not be coming home: 'And this happens all the time'. She added:

*'If the military wants to retain modern families, they need to recognise that the wife wants to work and men have also changed, otherwise it's going to be a problem. If the wife has spent 4 years at uni training to be a nurse or a midwife, she isn't going to be giving up her job, and that is going to affect the soldiers' retention.'*

## 5.12. Case Study 2: Emma and Lucy

The following case draws together two stories of military spouses/partners who are self-employed, highlighting the barriers and challenges that they have faced. The case study includes individualised recommendations to support their engagement and participation with the labour market.

EMMA	LUCY
<b>Emma and Lucy are both qualified to degree level and are currently self-employed.</b>	
<i>Location and family background</i>	
Emma's husband has been serving as an Officer in the Army for 15 years. Emma and her husband are currently living in Cyprus in a married quarter.	Lucy's husband is a Corporal in the RAF. They are currently living together off camp in accommodation provided by the RAF. They tried living apart when her husband moved from another part of the UK but the military would not allow her to keep the military accommodation she was living in. Altogether they have lived in six homes across five locations since they got married.
<i>Education/qualifications</i>	
Emma has an MSc in a health-related discipline which she completed in 2013. Eight months ago she started to run her own private practice from home.	Lucy has two degrees and a childminding qualification obtained in 2017. Lucy started working as a childminder in December. She also has a weekend job as a support worker.

<i>Reasons for working</i>	
Emma works to maintain her professional licence, for her own 'sanity' (to have something else apart from being a full-time mother to two young children) and also for financial reasons. She does not like working from home and does not enjoy running her own business; she does it out of necessity. Obtaining a business licence took months and cost her in the region of 130 euros, which she found frustrating.	Lucy works mainly because she needs the money (particularly her weekend job) but she also works because she wants to use her qualifications.
<i>Employment status and aspirations</i>	
Emma works part-time a couple of mornings a week, fitting this around childcare. She also works evenings and the occasional weekend if her husband is around. Her clients are from the military and their dependents, plus civilian contractors, including teachers. If she was UK-based she would be able to work more hours because the nursery hours would allow it (the nursery is only open in the mornings). Ideally Emma would like to be doing the same job, just longer hours and not from home. Instead, Emma has decided to take a full-time job with the NHS and will move back to the UK in May with her children (but not her husband) and live close to her in-laws. This is to provide stability for her children and to allow her to continue with her career.	Lucy currently works three days a week as a childminder. It is still very new to her so she is enjoying it but she does not think she wants to do it long term as it is exhausting and low paid. She has to be careful because childminding is also physically demanding and she had an accident in 2014. Her weekend job is either a half or full day on a Sunday. Lucy is content to be working part-time. She has considered going back into social work full-time but thinks it would be too stressful at the moment and childcare costs would be too high to make it worthwhile (living in the south of England with 2 young children). She is unsure about her longer-term career plans. She anticipates being back in another part of the UK in four years' time where there are fewer job opportunities for her.
<i>Impact on career, family life and wellbeing</i>	
After graduating in 2004 Emma worked for the NHS for two years. After this she worked as a Civil Servant for two years before she met and married her husband. Together they have lived in Cyprus twice (she took extended unpaid leave from the MOD the first time), another EU country (where she was able to work for the MOD) and the UK. Altogether, she worked as a Civil Servant for three years, the rest was unpaid leave. Emma felt her only choice was to work for the MOD; it was not the career choice she would have made. Although Emma perceives herself as 'fortunate' to have always been able to find work, she also believes that constant relocations have been a barrier to maintaining her employment (her husband is in the Infantry and they are deployed more frequently). She also found completing the paperwork to obtain permission to work from home a challenge. Her plans to move back to the UK have caused some friction with her husband who is unhappy about being separated from his children.	Lucy has had a number of different social work related jobs. She had a period of unemployment from February 2016 until December 2017 due to relocating for her husband's job. She has now lost her social work licence because some of the roles she has taken have not 'strictly speaking' been social work so she has not been able to maintain her qualification. Lucy has never found it particularly difficult to get work although she anticipates that having a lot of jobs on her CV will not be beneficial in the future.
<i>Support</i>	
Emma is not aware of the support that is available for military spouses in finding employment. All her achievements have been of her own doing. Emma is aware that there is an education centre on camp but it does not provide anything for her as her needs are too specialised.	Lucy received some financial support from SSAFA when unable to work. No support in relation to employment, though she is aware of organisations that can help. Some help with set-up costs for new businesses would have been the most help for her.

Summary and recommendations for Emma	Summary and recommendations for Lucy
<p>Although Emma has found constant relocations to be a challenge, she has been fortunate not to struggle to obtain employment and has managed to maintain her professional qualification. Based on Emma's experiences she would benefit from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support from the MOD with childcare, providing Emma with the ability to work longer hours, particularly living overseas. It would also provide much needed stability for the children and potentially avoid separation from her husband.</li> <li>• Making it easier to apply for a business licence, allowing her to work from home when working overseas in Cyprus.</li> <li>• Greater understanding and acknowledgment from the MOD that Emma is a person in her own right who has her own career that she would like to progress.</li> </ul>	<p>Although Lucy has not found it particularly difficult to find work, she has been unable to maintain her professional qualification because of the types of roles she has taken. Based on Lucy's experiences she would benefit from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More support from the MOD to enable her to maintain her professional qualifications.</li> <li>• Access to career guidance to explore her skills, qualifications and experience in order to understand the range of employment opportunities available.</li> <li>• Greater support (especially financial) from the MOD with regards to childcare.</li> <li>• More understanding from the MOD in relocations and changes to accommodation.</li> <li>• More acknowledgement and recognition from the MOD of the support provided by spouses/partners to serving personnel.</li> </ul>

Summing up the main identified barriers and challenges to military spousal employment, these centre around: a) Childcare; b) Location – postings and deployment; c) Ability to keep up with training and professional development; d) Lack of (re)training opportunities; e) Having to change career path; and f) MOD reluctance to support military spouses and general military culture. Commonwealth spouses and those with young children appear to face more difficulties and challenges in gaining and maintaining employment; spouses with higher qualifications face more barriers in maintaining a career. In all, 70% of spouses/partners had changed career path; 63% said this was because of the military lifestyle and only 7% said that they had wanted to change career. There were some differences by rank of the serving person, with spouses/partners of lower ranks more likely to report that they had to change career because of the military lifestyle. The military maintains traditional views of spouses/partners as dependents: a lack of planning and organisation, alongside an assumption that military spouses are always available for childcare responsibilities, act as further barriers to spousal employment.



# 6. Employer perceptions and practices towards military spouses/partners

## 6.1. Summary of findings

- Negative employer perceptions and practices were acknowledged by study participants as a major barrier to spousal employment.
- Many spouses/partners recorded perceived employer discrimination in applying for jobs, with the main reasons being: The possibility of postings and deployment in the future (35%); Employment history (such as changing jobs frequently) (24%); and Employer perceptions that spouses/partners are not committed (20%).
- Many spouses/partners stated that employers are aware of their military connections if they apply locally and include their addresses; as a result they felt that some employers would not invite them for interview if they had negative perceptions.
- Many spouses/partners and some stakeholders believe that it is better not to disclose their partner's military background when applying for jobs.
- Employers had similar perceptions about the challenges of hiring spouses/partners, including a lack of support with childcare, a likelihood that the spouse/partner will move, and 'patchwork CVs'.
- There was the view by some that employers offer military spouses/partners less than the standard pay rate.
- Some employers were more positive about hiring military spouses/partners, recognising their resilience and other transferable skills.

## 6.2. Introduction

In addition to the barriers and challenges highlighted in Section 5, one of the greatest barriers identified by spouses/partners and stakeholders in our study is the negative perceptions and practices of employers. This section explores these perceptions and practices in more detail, drawing upon the online survey undertaken with UK employers, as well as the survey and interviews with spouses/partners and stakeholders. The key themes emerging from the data centre around perceived discrimination, hiring practices, promotion and on-the-job training opportunities, as well as pay. Employer challenges are also highlighted in this section.

Previous studies from the US have noted employer bias and employers' negative views of military spouses/partners as affecting employment opportunities (see for example Castaneda and Harrell, 2008; Dernberger, 2017). Dernberger (2017) found that military spouses/partners are rated lower than civilian counterparts on anticipated tenure in role, regardless of the number of relocations experienced. Military spouses/partners with less frequent moves were, however, rated higher than civilians. No differences were found in starting salaries of military or civilian spouses/partners. This suggests that employers may be critical of those who frequently move and/or have work histories with gaps; this is often inevitable for a military spouse/partner who moves with the serving person. However, evidence on spouses/partners' perceptions and experiences of discrimination are missing from the debates in the literature. Our study draws out this evidence.

## 6.3. Perceived discrimination

Within the survey of military spouses/partners, respondents were asked 'have you ever felt discriminated against by an employer in looking for or keeping a job because you are a military spouse/partner'; 45% of respondents answered yes. The most common reasons given (out of 1,344 responses) were:

1. The possibility of spouse or partner posting and deployment in the future (35%);
2. Employment history (such as changing jobs frequently) (24%);
3. Employer perceptions that you are not committed (20%).

Survey respondents could add their own reasons for why employers discriminated against military spouses/partners; many mentioned how their CVs clearly identified their military connections, even when they did not highlight this:

*'Even if I don't mention my military connection my CV shouts army! With part-time in Germany, having lived in Andover, etc.'*

*'I do not declare I'm a military spouse but your home address often gives this away to local employers who know the military housing patches. I've had more success when using a civilian address in our last posting.'*

*'My address alone put employers off. As soon as I took my address off my CV and reapplied for jobs suddenly there were lots of responses and offers for the same jobs I'd previously applied for.'*

Spouses/partners spoke of specific examples where they had been discriminated against by an employer due to their husband/wife's military job:

*'I was explicitly not given at least one job solely because my husband was in the military. Before they found that out they were going to give me the job.'*

*'I have been told in interviews that I won't be employed because I am a military wife as I can't guarantee I will remain in the job.'*

Evidence from the spouse/partner interviews allowed us to look at the question of employer discrimination in more detail. Discrimination/employer bias was mentioned in the following areas of paid work: hiring, promotion, on the job training and pay. Some interviewees also mentioned discrimination against English spouses/partners in Northern Ireland.

## 6.4. Hiring

The word 'discrimination' sounded too harsh to most of our interviewees, who tended to accept the reality of employers looking for 'reliable' candidates and choosing those who can commit to the job in the long term. Several interviewees mentioned that prospective employers asked them how long they would stay: *'How long will you be around? They do ask'*.

In other words, the spouses/partners viewed their decision not to hire 'transitory' military spouses as rational behaviour, rather than discrimination that should and could be challenged. Many of the spouses talked about the frequent relocations and their patchwork CVs as barriers to their employment, especially when it came to more responsible, higher level jobs:

*'Employers know that you'll be moving on after 2 years – it's not going to be a high level position you're going to be recruited into. Your employer wants your expertise - I'm not sure that the 2 year pay-back is enough for a high level job.'*

Some interviewed spouses felt that large, public sector employers such as the NHS or local councils were less likely to discriminate against spouses in their hiring practices. However, one spouse said:

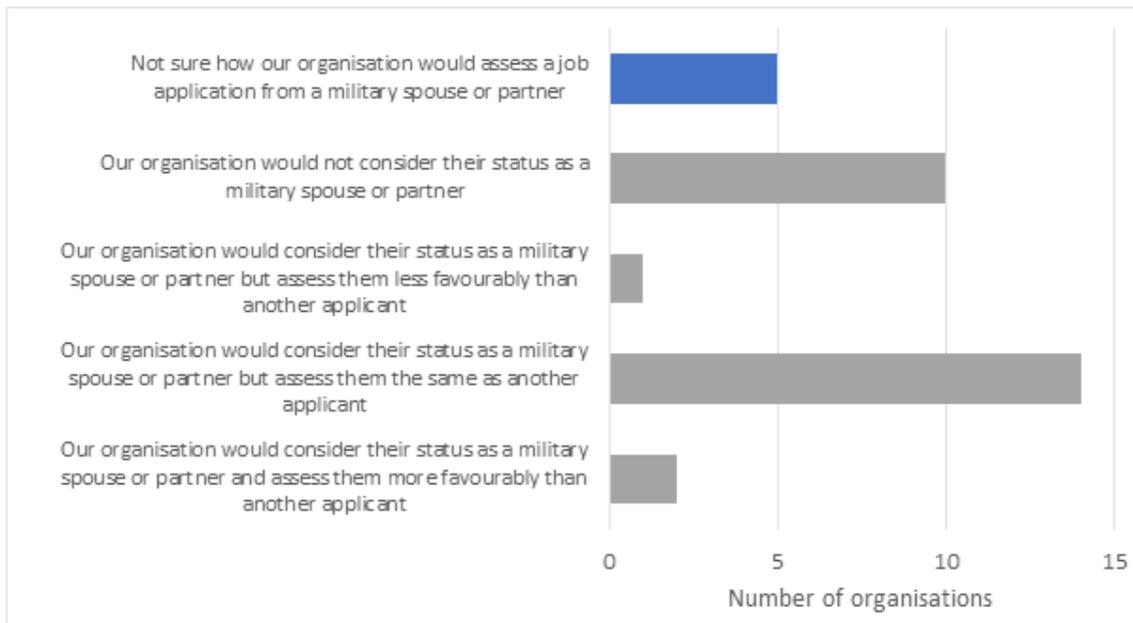
*'My boss told me that they wouldn't have employed me had they known that my husband was in the military. They thought I'd go with him. I was a bit upset, I could well have mentioned it in the interview.'*

Discrimination against hiring military spouses may be based on their care responsibilities. One male interviewee said that a number of potential employers had decided against employing him when they found out that he was the primary carer of their children. He felt that employers wanted people who can commit to the long hours of work and travelling. A female spouse also told us:

*'I don't feel it's the forces as much as the childcare. I'm discriminated against because I have a family, I can't do much about it because I move house every few years and childcare is difficult to maintain. The two together make it exceptionally hard.'*

Organisational representatives in the employer survey were also asked how their organisation might assess a job application from a military spouse or partner (see Figure 21). The majority of respondents stated that their organisation would consider the status of a military spouse or partner, but would assess the applicant the same as any another (n=14). In contrast, ten reported that they would not consider the status of a military spouse or partner when assessing a job application (n=10).

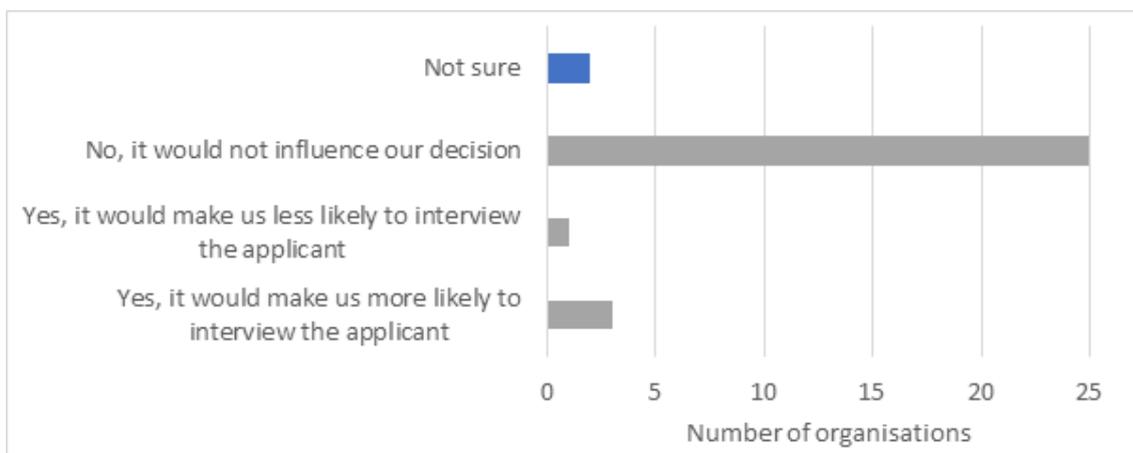
**Figure 21: How do employers assess a job application from a military spouse/partner?**



Based on 32 responses.

Organisational representatives were asked that if they recognised from an applicant's address that they were a military spouse/partner, would this influence their organisation's decision to interview or not (see Figure 22). The majority of respondents stated that the applicant's address would not influence the decision to interview (n=25).

**Figure 22: Does spouse/partner's address influence an employer's decision to interview an applicant?**



Based on 31 responses.

Organisational representatives in the employer survey were also asked if they would want to know if the applicant was a military spouse/partner before making a decision on whether to appoint or not. Twenty-five of the 31 responses reported that their organisation would not want to know, and five were unsure. Only one respondent who said that they would want to know explained that they would ask an applicant to consider their back-up for their family caring duties, as the applicant would be employed to look after vulnerable people and they can only employ 'reliable staff'.

Employers were also asked whether their decision to appoint would be influenced by an applicant stating that they were a military spouse/partner. Of the 30 responses, 25 said that this statement would not influence their decision and three stated that it would make the organisation less likely to appoint the applicant. Only one organisational representative stated that it would be more likely to appoint an applicant if they stated they were a military spouse or partner. One respondent was unsure.

Sixteen organisations (out of 30 responses) were aware that they had employed a military spouse or partner, 10 were unsure and four had not employed a military spouse/partner. Organisations variously reported employing from 1 to over 50 military spouses/partners.

Organisational representatives were asked, if they wanted to recruit from the Armed Forces Community, how they would go about it. Of those responding to the question (n=20), the majority reported that they would attend job fairs (n=14), with two reporting that they would work with Defence Relationship Management (DRM). Others said that they would network with the Families Federations (e.g. AFF), contact specialist recruiters, use multiple channels, plus take advantage of their own networks of former serving members, through relationships with the Career Transition Partnership (CTP). Only one respondent said they did not know how to recruit from the Armed Forces Community.

#### 6.4.1. How do military spouses cope with barriers in hiring?

In order to avoid negative responses, some interviewees decided to consciously withhold their military connections, especially in job interviews:

*'I hadn't really told them at the interview stage that I was a military wife. It was a conscious decision. I said that I'd been abroad with my husband, but I didn't say in what capacity and I didn't mention that we'd be no doubt moving again. Which I think was part of the reason why I got the job – had I said we'd be moving or my husband was in the military, I don't think I'd have got the job. I didn't lie but I didn't tell the full truth and they couldn't ask me what my husband did.'*

*'Now I'm much more guarded. Usually people don't mention anything, do they? On the CV I just put 'career break, travelling for a year.'*

Those stakeholders who provided employment support and advice also warned spouses not to 'shoot themselves in the foot' by drawing attention to the fact that they tend to move often.

### 6.5. Promotion and on-the-job training opportunities

Nineteen organisations reported that if they employed a military spouse/partner they would consider offering them training. These respondents reported that opportunities for learning and development would be the same as all employees. Spouse/partner survey respondents and interviewees had different stories to tell, however. One interviewee reported that she did not get a promotion within a large public sector organisation because her employer expected her to relocate with her husband:

*'They didn't say anything at the time but later they said that I didn't get the job because they assumed I'd be moving around [with my husband]. As it happened, I resigned because I wanted to have a better job, not because of my husband's career.'*

Others talked about a lack of training received within their role. One interviewee who was employed by a UK bank said that she did not receive training because she worked in a part-time role. She was grateful for this job, however, and was aware of the 'low pay and no training' trade-off.

### 6.6. Pay

There were several accounts of poor pay received as a consequence of being a military spouse/partner. According to one interviewee, some employers in Portsmouth pay a military spouse (or a veteran) less than another employee - the perception is that it's 'just a second income' or topping up the pension so they 'low-ball their salary'. Another interviewee reported that the MOD as an employer also pays low wages. For instance, when working in a childcare centre on a military base overseas, an interviewee asked for a pay rise, but was told that her husband earned enough, therefore her pay was sufficient.

### 6.7. Employer challenges

As highlighted earlier, many spouses/partners appeared to accept that employers would discriminate against them due to their military connections and the likelihood of leaving. Employers themselves were also asked what challenges they faced in employing a military spouse/partner. The most common responses are shown below (employers could choose more than one option):

- Military spouses and partners move around a lot: 23%.
- Military spouses and partners often have gaps on their CV: 19%.
- Military personnel are unable to assist their spouses and partners with caring responsibilities if deployed or on training: 17%.
- No, no particular challenges: 14%.
- Military spouses and partners' skills and experience are often out of date: 11%.
- Military spouses and partners are expensive to train if they don't stay for long: 6%.

Clearly, employers' responses about the challenges they faced tally with what spouses/partners told us about their own experiences of negative perceptions and, in some cases, discrimination based on their military connections.

Not all employers' views were negative and, in some cases, employers saw the benefits of hiring military spouses/partners. Employer representatives were asked 'does your organisation have an internal company policy in place around employing military spouses or partners?' (this was in addition to any Covenant-related policies). Of those who responded (n=36), 25% said they did and 50% said that they didn't (with a high proportion of 'Not sure' responses at 25%). When asked to describe the internal policy in more detail, one participant said the following: *'We guarantee all ex-forces personnel and spouses of serving personnel an interview where they hold the required skillset and/or experience.'*

In response to a particular question asking whether there were any benefits for employers in employing a military spouse/partner, the employers said:

- Military spouses and partners show resilience and determination: 30%;
- Military spouses and partners are willing to go the extra mile in their work: 22%.

Participants were also able to add their own response to this question and these included:

*'To recruit the best and diverse talent - another untapped talent pool.'*

*'Military spouses are, in my opinion, an undervalued group, often sidelined in comparison to veterans and service leavers. Supporting military spouses comes under widening participation, whereby we provide opportunities to marginalised and underrepresented groups in the community for employment. The workforce should represent the community it serves, and thus there should be military spouses in the workforce.'*

*'With a business that also engages with the defence community, a spouse/partner knows how to 'talk the language' to support any engagement/activity.'*

Only two respondents believed there were no particular benefits and three did not know if there were any benefits.

Organisational representatives who knew that their organisation had employed a military spouse/partner (n=16) were also asked would they consider any of the following if the spouse/partner had to move because of a military posting:

- Provide the opportunity to continue working for the organisation, but at another location (where possible) (n=10);
- Provide the opportunity to work remotely or more flexibly (n=14);
- Consider them favourably if they applied for a job in the future (n=10);
- Leave the position open if you knew they were going to return (n=1).

It should be noted that the employer sample included a high proportion of those who had signed up to the Armed Forces Covenant or who had affiliations with Defence. As such, it is unlikely that their responses are representative of all employers in the UK.

## 6.8. Case Study 3: Maria and Cynthia

The following case draws together two stories of military spouses/partners who are well-qualified and includes examples of their experiences with employers which are both positive and negative. The case study includes individualised recommendations to support their engagement and participation with the labour market.

MARIA	CYNTHIA
<b>Maria and Cynthia are both qualified to degree level and have no children.</b>	
<i>Location and family background</i>	
Maria is originally from another EU country. She has been married to her husband for 10 years. He is a Warrant Officer Class 2 and has served in the Army for over 20 years. They live in service-provided accommodation in London. Maria is unhappy with her accommodation and would prefer to have more choice over where she lives.	Cynthia is not originally from the UK and her husband is currently serving in the Royal Navy. They have their own home in Portsmouth (close to the military base), although Cynthia's husband is away most of the time with work. Cynthia has an ongoing medical condition which involves her attending weekly medical appointments.
<i>Education/qualifications</i>	
Maria has two degrees; one in business and finance (and accounting) and a second in transportation and logistics. She completed half a degree in social work through the Open University but was unable to complete it because she could not undertake a work placement at a local authority because she was living outside the UK at the time.	Cynthia has a Master's degree in HR which she obtained in the UK at her own expense.
<i>Reasons for working</i>	
Maria has always worked and could not imagine herself sitting at home doing nothing. She also needs to work so she can contribute financially to the household income.	Cynthia works because she wants to 'use her brain'. She also wants to contribute financially.
<i>Employment status and aspirations</i>	
Maria is a full-time Civil Servant. She is at a 'reasonably high level' within the organisation and is responsible for Service complaints and discipline. Since getting married Maria feels that her career has declined. Living overseas with her husband for a number of years meant that Maria was unable to retain her accountancy qualification and instead ended up working in a variety of unqualified roles on the different garrisons. She made a conscious effort to join the MOD as this would allow her to transfer jobs more easily when her husband was posted. Although she is not using her qualifications she likes her job and has received training to undertake it so feels invested in. Ideally she would like to go back into finance, but it would involve her re-training whereas if she got a finance role within the MOD they would sponsor her to train. Maria is unsure about her career plans for the future; it depends on whether her husband stays in or leaves the Army.	Cynthia does some freelance work, government think-tank projects and voluntary work. She spends about 10 hours per week on her freelance work and 15-20 on her voluntary work. She is also active in HR professional groups. A lot of her work is undertaken remotely. Most of her freelance work has come via word-of-mouth. Cynthia started freelance work 1.5 years ago because there was nothing available in the Portsmouth area that was suitable for her. Jobs at her level in HR were limited, whilst lower-level jobs paid substantially less, particularly in relation to the salary she was earning when she lived in London. Although location has impacted on her job opportunities she does recognise that her health has impacted on what she is able to do. Ideally, Cynthia would like to be more active professionally; she would like to work full-time. Moving forward she would like to continue what she is doing but doing so more profitably.

<i>Impact on career, family life and wellbeing</i>	
In terms of the challenges she faces maintaining employment as a military spouse Maria considers herself to be 'lucky' to be working for the MOD and believes that because of this she has not found it difficult to obtain work. She views them as a flexible employer who makes allowances for last minute leave requests and her husband's postings. She has found other employers to have little understanding of her needs as a military spouse and she has experience of being told she could not take leave when needed. When living in other countries she said that jobs were allocated to spouses on the basis of their husband's rank with the better jobs going to higher ranking Officers' wives.	Cynthia believes that because Portsmouth is a military town, spouses are not discriminated against. However, she also believes that a lot of employers in the area will offer a military spouse a lower income because their salary is viewed as a 'top up' to their husband's income. Cynthia also found it hard to get a job when she was in London, but this was not linked to the military.
<i>Support</i>	
Maria has not been involved in an employment support programme for military spouses and has no awareness of what support is available for spouses in finding paid employment. Maria felt that welfare support provided by the MOD varies according to location.	Cynthia is aware of the employment support offered by Recruit for Spouses. She felt that whilst the service they provided was okay they would benefit from face-to-face workshops to get people out of their homes. Overall, she perceives MOD welfare support to be poor.
<b>Summary and recommendations for Maria</b>	<b>Summary and recommendations for Cynthia</b>
<p>Maria took the decision to work for the MOD to enable her to follow her husband's career. Although this provided her with benefits, it did mean she was unable to retain her accountancy qualification. Based on Maria's experiences she would benefit from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greater awareness of the employment support available to military spouses. These support programmes should be accessible to spouses who work (i.e. they are available during non-work hours or are available online).</li> <li>• The education of employers to help them understand what military spouses can bring to an organisation.</li> <li>• Support from the MOD to have enabled Maria to maintain her professional qualification.</li> <li>• Greater targeted support from the MOD for spouses living overseas (e.g. pre-posting packs with information on the local job market, job sites and any restrictions, etc.; language/ other courses during the posting; upskilling or retraining opportunities before returning).</li> </ul>	<p>Cynthia works in a number of different capacities (paid and voluntary) to suit her circumstances. She has an awareness of the support available to military spouses. Based on Cynthia's experiences she would benefit from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More support from the MOD in enabling her to work (taking into consideration her health concerns) and to receive a decent salary, including a cultural shift in attitudes, e.g. not making assumptions about her husband's pay and her reasons for working.</li> <li>• Regular support and contact from the MOD whilst her husband is away.</li> </ul>

To sum up this section, employer perceptions and practices were acknowledged to be a major barrier to spousal employment. Many spouses/partners recorded employer discrimination in applying for jobs, with the main reasons being: The possibility of postings and deployment in the future; Employment history (such as changing jobs frequently); and Employer perceptions that spouses/partners are not committed. Employers are often aware of military connections if spouses apply locally and include their addresses; spouses/partners report that they may not invite them for interview if they hold negative perceptions. There was also some evidence that employers offer military spouses/partners less pay than the standard rate. As a result of bad experiences, many spouses - and some stakeholders - believe that it is better not to disclose their partner's military background when applying for jobs. Employers themselves reported similar perceptions about the challenges of hiring military spouses/partners, including a lack of support with childcare, a likelihood that the spouse/partner will move, and 'patchwork CVs'. On the other hand, some employers were more positive about hiring military spouses/partners, recognising their skills and resilience.

# 7. Support for military spouse/partner employment

## 7.1. Summary of findings

- The majority of spouses surveyed (54%) were unaware of any support programmes for spousal employment.
- Knowledge of support programmes varied by rank of the serving person: spouses of JNCOs and ORs were least likely to be aware of support (20%), followed by spouses/partners of Warrant Officers and SNCOs (34%); 44% of Commissioned Officers (44%) and Senior Commissioned Officers (62%).
- Only 10% of spouses/partners had attended a spousal support programme (less than a third of those who were aware of them).
- Attendance at programmes also varied by rank of the serving person: 17% of Senior Commissioned Officer spouses/partners had attended a programme, compared with only 7% of the spouses/partners of Junior NCOs and ORs.
- Perceptions of the support programmes varied: some felt that they were 'pitched' too low, others that they were not held at the right time or that the length of the programme precluded them from attending.
- Satisfaction was higher with softer outcomes of support, such as writing a CV, increasing confidence, writing job applications, exploring options for work and gaining interview skills.
- Satisfaction was lower with outcomes such as finding and maintaining work, a work placement or training course, or getting back to work after a career break.
- There was some support for Recruit for Spouses, but others suggested possible changes to the way this service was delivered.

## 7.2. Introduction

The following section outlines responses given about the various support programmes available for spousal/partner employment: what programmes were available, whether or not spouses/partners were aware of these programmes, any barriers to attending such programmes and, for those who attended, satisfaction with the programmes and initiatives.

Extant evidence was found on various support programmes for military spouses/partners and the positive impact they can have on employment experiences and outcomes, as well as the family as a whole. For instance, Burke and Miller (2016, 2018) in the US found that employment support programmes helped job transition costs for those spouses/partners moving and positively impacted on the well-being of the military family. A study of male military spouses in the US proposed that support programmes should be aimed at men to reduce possible marital conflict and provide opportunities for them to be part of the local military community (Lufkin, 2017). As part of the Australian Defence Families survey, spouses/partners indicated why support had been important: access to information; an opportunity to connect with the deployed member; an opportunity to connect with others socially; an opportunity to connect with others with similar experiences; feeling like they were cared for and that their family was important; and respite from the day-to-day pressures (Brown and Wensing, 2016, p.34).

This existing evidence provides an initial understanding of the benefit and impact of targeted employment programmes for military spouses/partners. The following sections highlight our findings, as reported by spouses/partners and by stakeholders, many of whom were involved in running and/or coordinating spousal employment support programmes.

## 7.3. UK support programmes and initiatives

Various initiatives and programmes were highlighted by the stakeholders when asked what was currently available. These included RBL Lifeworks; Recruit for Spouses; Hives; MOD Defence Relationship Management (DRM); Unsung Heroes; the Career Transition Partnership (CTP); the Spouse Employment Support pilot programme; informal vacancy boards on bases; and Civvy Street. Stakeholders were also asked if some support programmes were more popular than others and whether or not there were any barriers or limitations to accessing this support. Positive responses included:

- A paediatric course (via Finchale) was very popular as lots of spouses want to go into this area; courses were run on camp and paid for crèche facilities, allowing spouses to participate;
- Unsung Heroes were flexible in start and finish times to allow for childcare drop-offs and pick-ups.

Others pointed out some of the barriers to access:

- Lifeworks is run over 3 days and geographically restricted<sup>1</sup> (childcare problems were particularly noted);
- Recruit for Spouses is well-known and offers a holistic approach, but charges for their service, so some employers are reluctant to take part or company policy precludes them from doing so;
- Spouses do not always feel they can spend money on themselves (such as getting qualified, doing a course etc.) if they are living on one income;
- If living off base, spouses/partners are harder to reach;
- Lack of confidence for many spouses/partners is a barrier to (re)engaging in learning or work.

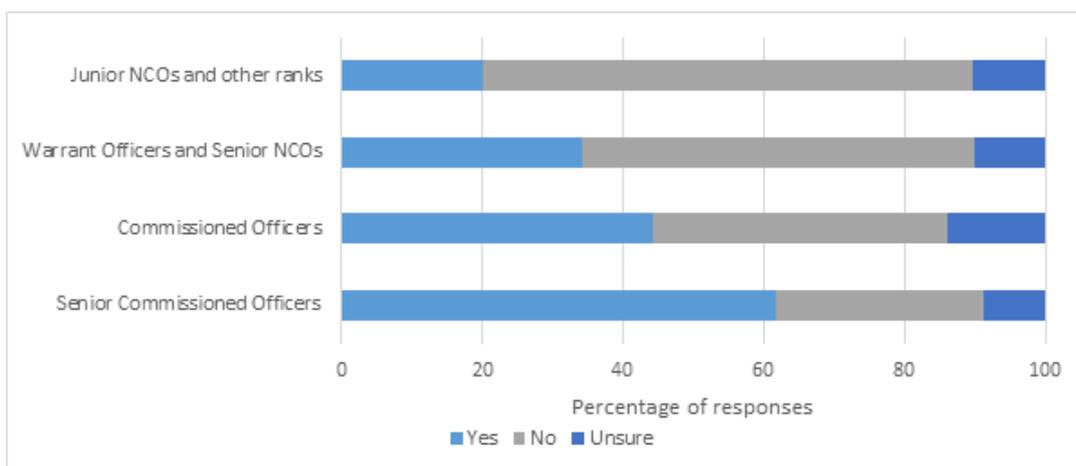
The following focuses on spouses/partners' own awareness and take-up of spousal employment programmes and initiatives, as well as perceptions and satisfaction with these programmes.

## 7.4. Awareness of support programmes

Questions were asked in both the interviews and the online survey on participants' awareness of any support available for military spouses in finding paid employment:

- 54% of all spouses/partners responding to the survey were unaware of support for them to find work, but this varied by rank of the serving person;
- Spouses of JNCOs and ORs were least likely to be aware of support (20%), followed by spouses/partners of Warrant Officers and SNCOs (34%). This compares with 62% of the spouses/partners of Senior Commissioned Officers and 44% of Commissioned Officers (see Figure 23).

**Figure 23: Are spouses/partners aware of employment support? (by Rank of serving person)**



Based on 1,341 responses.

The interviews also demonstrated a general lack of awareness of any specific support programmes. A number of interviewees said they had not heard of any support programmes and did not know they existed. Other spouses had a limited awareness of support services, but they did not know any details and had no experience of using them. Many were unsure of the names of the programmes, but had heard about them from friends or via other avenues.

## 7.5. Uptake of and satisfaction with support programmes

Only 10% (134 out of 1,341) of spouse/partner survey respondents had attended or participated in an employment support programme (less than a third of those who had heard of available support programmes). When comparing rank of the serving person, higher proportions of spouses/partners of those from higher ranks had attended (all groups recorded low attendance, however). For example, 33 (17%) of Senior Commissioned Officer spouses/partners had attended a programme, compared with only 31 (7%) of the spouses/partners of JNCOs and ORs.

Most interviewees also said they had not been aware of, or involved in, any support programme:

*'No, none. All the work I've done has been off my own back – registering with locum agencies, etc. probably b/c my own personality and because there's nothing available.'*

1. It is noted that Lifeworks is expanding its geographical reach in the future, however, including overseas training.

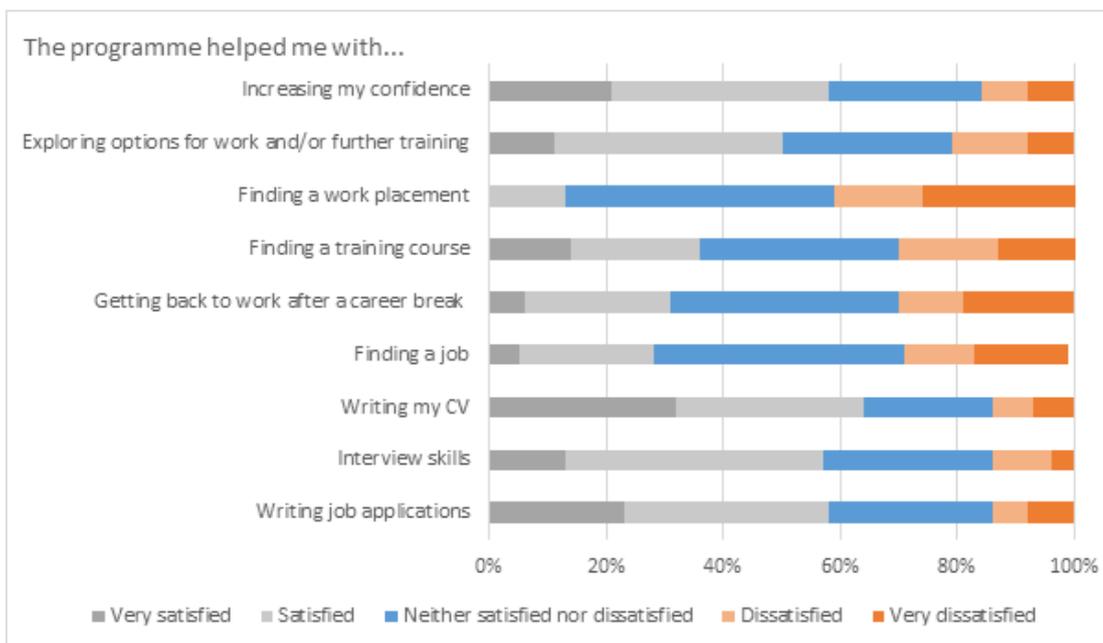
When one spouse moved to Cambridgeshire she was signposted to an organisation to help military spouses with employment (she did not know the name). She did not use the service because (she believed) it was run by Officers who she did not trust and she had no confidence in their ability to help her. She said if it had been an external company she would have been *'more comfortable seeking their support'*. Another spouse had seen courses to re-do Maths, but they were always at times when she had her children with her. She had not seen anything like that for a while, but would like to do a key skills qualifications so she is *'not just sat around'* in her spare time. Most of the programmes she had seen were face to face at the community centre with nothing online.

Those survey respondents who had attended a support programme were asked about their satisfaction with certain aspects of the programme(s) they had attended (see Figure 24). Due to the low numbers of spouses/partners aware of the programmes and the very low number attending any of these programmes, the following provides general comments on support programmes, rather than course-specific comments. It is noted, however, that there may have been differences between programmes and initiatives in awareness, take-up and satisfaction.

Spouses/partners were:

- **More satisfied** with aspects associated with softer outcomes of support, such as writing a CV, increasing confidence, writing job applications, exploring options for work and gaining interview skills;
- **Least satisfied** with aspects directly associated with finding and maintaining work, such as finding a job, work placement or training course or getting back to work after a career break.

**Figure 24: How satisfied were spouses/partners with aspects of the support programme?**



Based on 86 responses.

Many interview participants commented on problems with accessing the courses offered or with the level at which the course/programme was pitched. Typical comments included:

- Too low-level (e.g. basic CV writing, interview skills);
- Not pitched towards them (e.g. pitched at stay-at-home wives, Officers' wives);
- Not specific enough for their skills/qualifications so they refer more to general websites (e.g. NHS, Civil Service);
- Not the right kind of delivery (e.g. location-specific, run by wrong people, online v face-to-face, need to pay).

When survey respondents were asked if they had any comments on the support received, there were numerous comments about the support not being helpful. For example, there were a number of spouses/partners commenting that the support on offer was not appropriate for their level of qualification, experience or skills:

*'Not at all helpful. Did not understand my work or my qualifications.'*

*'Course not suitable for my level of experience, skills and aspiration.'*

*'These schemes do not help you if you if have a fairly high level of professional experience.'*

*'All jobs offered were jobs service jobs beneath my skill levels. Shop work, cleaning, care work etc. When I worked hard to achieve the level of a HLTA to work within an education environment. I feel spouses are seen as having very limited skills and only seek minimum wage opportunities. The staff themselves had limited qualifications and struggled to provide any insight or support beyond very basic advice or CV input.'*

One interviewee similarly reported that she did a course, but *'it was pitched very low'*. There had only been two people on the course and both had higher degrees and so they *'raised the pitch a bit'*. She added that some courses spend *'one and a half days to write your name'* or get a decent email address.

## 7.6. Job sites for military spouses/partners

Many interviewees answered that they did not know any specialised job websites, although some knew of Recruit for Spouses (RFS). There were mostly positive responses about RFS, with spouses/partners valuing the efforts they made in reaching employers. Others made suggestions that RFS could expand their remit, e.g. *'could do workshops in the community, not just via the internet'*. People *'need face-to-face, not just clicking a button...people need to get out of their comfy pants'*. Some commented that RFS was less useful for those with a specific profession, whereas one male spouse had watched the seminars (via the RFS website) but felt that many were focused around women. He added that this was understandable as the majority of military spouses are female and that some (seminars) had been helpful. *'It's a good service, run by people who know the issues'*. However, he added that for him it was not necessarily better than checking jobs via *'Indeed'* or *'Jobsite'*.

In summary, most spouses/partners spouses did not know of any support programmes for spousal employment; however, knowledge varied by rank of the serving person with spouses of JNCOs and ORs least likely to be aware of support. Only 10% of spouses/partners had attended a spousal support programme and again, spouses/partners of Junior NCOs and ORs were least likely to have done so. Of those who did attend, some felt that they were pitched too low, others that they were not held at the right time or that the length of the programme precluded them from attending. Satisfaction was higher with softer outcomes of support, and lower with outcomes such as finding and maintaining work.



# 8. Ways forward for supporting spousal/partner employment

## 8.1. Summary of findings

- Suggestions for support in finding and maintaining employment centred around: training; better information provision; better employer engagement; challenging the military culture; help with childcare; and specific support for overseas spouses.
- Participants highlighted that there were some similarities and differences in the kinds of support they would benefit from, highlighting the need for varied support provision.
- A large proportion of all spouses/partners reported that they would like support with training and/or qualifications and with the cost of childcare.
- Spouses/partners with professional qualifications or a higher degree were more likely than other spouses/partners to say that they would like support with future options planning.
- Those with a degree or higher degree were more likely than other spouses/partners to say that they would like mentoring or coaching.
- Those with lower qualifications (no qualification or GCSEs only; those with A-levels) were more likely than other spouses/partners to want support in returning to work.

## 8.2. Introduction

The previous sections of this report have focused upon the barriers and challenges to military spousal employment. In this final section, we report on responses from spouses/partners and stakeholders about ways forward and any suggestions for future support required for military spouses/partners in gaining and maintaining employment.

The first part of this section focuses on stakeholders' views on the impact of the Future Accommodation Model, particularly around its impact on spousal employment. The Future Accommodation Model (FAM) is an important change to the way that housing will be offered and subsidised by the MOD and may mean that more spouses/partners will need to find work to contribute to the household income. FAM is due to begin a three-year pilot at the end of 2018 around the UK and aims to provide more accommodation choices to serving personnel and their families, giving them the option to rent or buy private accommodation. Eligibility will also be widened, with married and partnered couples – as well as single serving personnel and reserves – being able to take advantage of the opportunity to move into private accommodation. While some argue that this could increase stability for families, there are also concerns that serving personnel and their families will have to pay more for their accommodation under the new scheme. There are also some concerns about a breakdown of the informal support system within the Armed Forces Community, particularly when partners are abroad.

After the section on FAM, we then focus upon stakeholder views on any changes required in the future provision of support services, before moving on to spouses/partners' comments on the type of support they would like. The main themes emerging from this data focused upon: Training; Better information provision; Better employer engagement; Challenging the military culture; Help with childcare; and Specific support for overseas spouses. These will be covered in more detail below.

## 8.3. Views on the Future Accommodation Model

Responses from stakeholders were grouped into negative views and more positive views on the impact of the FAM.

### 8.3.1. Negative views

- More spouses will want to/need to work due to the changes, e.g. when partners' careers end, their salaries are often not as good as in the Services and they are often still young (both partners are more likely to need to work); spouses having to go out to work, plus the 'privations of military life,' is 'storing up problems for the future';
- FAM is 'assumed' to provide a fairer chance of stable employment for the spouse, but there is more likely to be a need for a second car, etc.;
- Deployment: an entire unit goes overseas (all soldiers are gone and so the sense of community is then very strong). With FAM, people will be scattered in communities with neighbours who do not understand them; this will be very bad for retention.

### 8.3.2. Positive views

- If this is an allowance rather than accommodation, then spouse/partner more likely to be settled and more likely to buy a house. Can only be positive as they can look for more permanent work but too early to tell;
- It will help with integration and when it is better understood, people will see it is there to help the Armed Forces Community;
- It will help people with employability;
- Choice is good; service people should be supported in getting on the housing ladder.

## 8.4. Suggested changes in support for spouses/partners

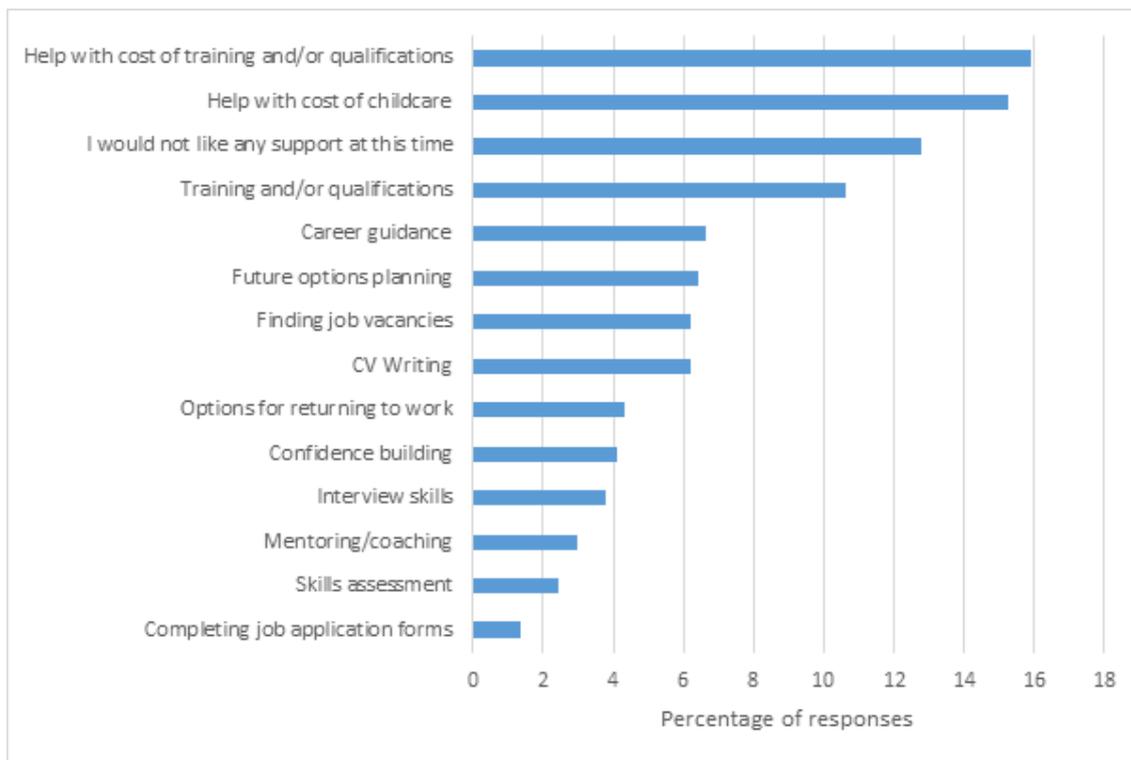
Stakeholders were also asked whether there should be any change in terms of provision of employment support to military spouses/partners. Responses centred around:

- **Social media and online engagement:** All spouses should have access to email and the internet; employment counselling for spouses online could buffer in-person counselling;
- **Employer engagement:** Keep working with employers to provide a more level playing field for spouses; priority hiring in the public service is not the answer – it can put military spouses at a disadvantage, e.g. employers feel they have to hire that individual because they are a spouse, rather than because of what they can bring to that role; need to raise employers' awareness of spouses' transferable skills, to 'bust the myth' that spouses/partners only want part-time work or that they do not want to work; Employers need to be encouraged to offer 'try out sessions' for spouses/partners - focus on flexible working and job shares.
- **Employer accountability:** The Armed Forces Covenant Employer Recognition Scheme needs to be "pushed" (not effective for spouses yet); delivery and accountability of the AF Covenant: organisations should not be getting Gold/Silver awards unless they are supportive of the whole military family;
- **No 'one-size-fits-all' approach:** Need to maintain variety of what's available, a need for tailored and individual programmes which are popular; ensure programmes support people at the more senior level; think about male spouses; more free courses; offer more local level rather than national support; community support for all stages of life; case studies shared with other spouses and with the Military; spouses/partners should act as mentors to others in the AF community;
- **More cohesion in support:** Single Services should work together to provide support for spouses/partners. Best approach to maintain and develop support would be to create a collaborative approach between single Services, charities and social enterprises; need for a working group of key stakeholders, held somewhere neutral (not the MOD): 'all need to be in that room...shoulder to shoulder', working together;
- **Training provision,** e.g. Level 2 and 3 qualifications in Maths and English where childcare is made available so that spouses can complete the courses 'from start to finish'. This could make 'such a difference' to spouses' lives.

Spouses/partners were also asked what employment support, if any, they would like in the future (Figure 25). Spouses/partners reported that they wanted help with the cost of training and/or qualifications (16%), and 15% said help with childcare costs. Eleven per cent wanted help with training and qualifications. Spouses/partners also wanted help with a range of employment support which would help them transition into the labour market, such as: career guidance (7%); future options planning (7%); finding job vacancies (6%); and CV writing (6%). Of those surveyed, only 13% did not want any help at the time of the survey.

Some similarities and differences in response by qualification level of the spouse/partner were noted. Spouses/partners with professional qualifications (17%) or a higher degree (18%) were more likely than other spouses/partners to say that they did not require any support, while also more likely to say that they would like support with future options planning (8% of both). Those with a degree (5%) or higher degree (7%) were more likely than other spouses/partners to say that they would like mentoring or coaching. Those with lower qualifications (no qualification or GCSEs only, 5%; those with A levels, 6%) were more likely than other spouses/partners to want support in returning to work. These findings support the stakeholders' views that one size does not fit all when it comes to employment support provision.

**Figure 25: Would you like any support at this time? (ranked from highest to lowest)**



Based on 2,843 responses. Please note respondents could choose more than one option.

Write-in survey and interview responses pointed to the need for particular support clustered around the following main themes (these are not in priority order as these themes tended to vary by spouses' status and individual circumstances, e.g. young/older children or no children, age and qualifications/experience):

- Training;
- Better information provision;
- Better employer engagement;
- Challenging the military culture;
- Help with childcare; and
- Specific support for overseas spouses.

## 8.5. Training

Many survey and interview participants reported on the need for more training, either in relation to their own needs or their perceptions of the needs of military spouses more broadly. One interviewee did voluntary work on the patch (in the UK) and reported that the general education level of spouses/partners is 'GCSEs or less'. In her experience, when these women make an effort to get A-levels they are told to go into hairdressing (low aspirations, no encouragement). She suggested that the military could spend more on encouraging spouses to pursue education, e.g. offering more customised training and education courses, e.g. via a local university.

Others suggested that paid internships could be offered at local companies, allowing spouses to '*get their foot in the door*' and giving them an opportunity to gain valuable experience and contacts. This would have the added advantage of demonstrating to employers the abilities and skills of spouses and would perhaps challenge existing stereotypes.

Others described different delivery of training: for example, one said that online learning might be helpful (she knew that it is currently offered but at a very low level). Another said that more higher level education courses should be available to spouses. The current provision leaves spouses with the Open University as their only option.

Some spouses commented on the need for more training for those living overseas. One spouse living in Oman with her husband said that if the military provided funding for language courses [for spouses overseas], this would be helpful (she studied Arabic but had to pay for this herself); she felt that this would be something to put on her CV when she returned to the UK.

Other comments related to specific military support. A survey respondent wrote in to suggest:

*'Improved access to funding for qualifications. Equal share of ELCs and SLCs, especially for long-term partners.'*

Survey write-in responses also commented on the need for further training and support: more online courses; courses need to be tailored to individuals at different stages of their careers; courses that lead to careers; networking opportunities; CPD courses; support to recognise skills of being a military spouse/partner to sell to employers.

## 8.6. Better information provision

Suggestions from spouses/partners included better information provision: some commented that the serving person is well looked after but that the spouse's needs are often overlooked, e.g. on receiving posting information or pre-retirement of the serving person:

*'When my husband moves for a job, everything is provided for him. When the family is moving, information about jobs could be in that moving pack. That needs to happen earlier – you often don't get a welcome pack until you get a house. So the moving pack should go to families earlier and include information on jobs - that would be useful.'*

*'It would be useful for spouses to have access to the same information and help that service personnel get when they are leaving the service. I suppose like the sites where the companies sign up to take on veterans – something like that for spouses. A networking site would also be good.'*

Some of the recommendations were addressed to local welfare/liaison officers:

*'In [city] they don't have a list of current jobs available, but it would be great to have a "JobCentre wall", somewhere you could look initially and it shouldn't be too costly. If the liaison officers were aware and kept a list of jobs for people to look at, that would be very useful – that could include information about the local job centre.'*

Survey write-in responses included comments on career advice and guidance: support with understanding qualifications when overseas, help with transferable careers and skills, opportunities for work experience, careers events and job fairs, provision of information on local jobs markets.

## 8.7. Better employer engagement

Many of the interviewees and survey respondents also focused on the need for better employer engagement:

*'It should be possible for large employers to be able to move people [in the UK] – it's common knowledge where big employers are and where military bases are – it should be easier for people to move in the country and stay within a large organisation, say in NHS or John Lewis. There should be incentives for employers to take military spouses.'*

*'If the AFF wanted to help, the best course would be liaising with industry to provide more remote working, long-distance opportunities, so that spouses can keep jobs for longer.'*

Another spouse suggested 'awareness-raising' among employers because they need to know that military spouses are 'a missed resource' (resilient, adaptable, get on with things). Yet another spouse said that there is a need to 'get civilian companies onside'. She added that it would be good if there was the same flexibility in UK jobs as there is in other European countries. However, she did acknowledge that this would not be possible for all types of role.

Some argued for more direct help and support from the MOD as a major employer and that they could do more to provide jobs to spouses, e.g. civilian roles in the military could be contracted out to spouses, 'could look closer to home'. Another added that more job roles need to be made available to spouses in military establishments - typically it is bar work or waitressing. Another spouse had been working at the British Embassy in the US while on a posting with her husband: here there was a 'spousal job pool' which gives spouses a 3-month job which is a good way into a permanent role which could be something that the MOD or other UK employers could do for spouses/partners.

Survey write-in respondents commented on the 'military-employer relationship' and a Memorandum of Understanding between military and employers (i.e. such as NHS); need to create a better understanding of the military lifestyle amongst employers; encourage and support local employers to (create and) offer more jobs, internal transfers.

## 8.8. A different jobs platform?

Several participants commented on Recruit for Spouses – most comments were positive but there was also some suggestions for additional job information. Some spouses said that it would be good if there was a specialised website on part-time or remote work/ a portal with more virtual/working from home jobs. Another suggested a specific spouse website with a job board. Stakeholders also reported:

- Very helpful if there was a free tri-service jobs board online (many employers are keen to support spouses so happy to put jobs on a board, providing a 'one-stop-shop');
- Either employers need to go to the spouses (not ideal) or make contact with welfare officers and organisations and get the information out in newsletters, etc. The welfare officers are the best people to approach and get involved;
- Radical change needed, e.g. if the Government offered an incentive to businesses to move into a location where there is a military base (in the 'back of beyond') so spouses have 'actual' jobs;
- Jobs appear on a number of vacancy websites. However, those living overseas need more targeted support.

## 8.9. Challenging the military culture

Throughout the previous sections, there was a general acknowledgement that the military could do more to support spouses/partners.

Some interviewees suggested that the serving partner's work-life balance should be better addressed (e.g. by having a more regular routine and/or working fewer hours) – this in turn would have a major positive impact on spouses/partners' employment opportunities, although the following interviewee was pessimistic about the likelihood of any change:

*'His work-life balance, that's a massive stumbling block, because – you're left behind with the kids all the time, so if the service people had better WLB, they could be around and that would be great. He's been away for 6 weeks now – and it's never what it is, it's never 100%, it's always last minute change, so more stability for them would be nice, just a bit more continuity. It's never going to happen, I know.'*

*'The military should allow the [service person] to have relief [time off] as well granted to them. I think they should be allowed to stay home as well for the child, to share the responsibility. I normally bear the full brunt of him not being here. If something is wrong with my daughter, I need to rush from work and pick her up. I can't get him to go pick her up because he's not allowed, he needs to be on camp 24/7, which I find is a bit unfair for me as a working spouse, because I need to come back into work and work those hours up and then find childcare for her if he's not here.'*

Another interviewee also said that Service personnel should get notice before they were sent on trips. Many of these trips did not seem to be of high importance, while she struggled to keep her job without her husband's support with childcare. For example: *'it always seems like it's not relevant stuff. It's not even important. I want to go to work and they're going skiing'*. She felt this was unfair as she was finding it difficult to manage her work hours around their children - this made her *'so angry'*. One added:

*'Time and time again, we have fast-balls from the Army just taking my husband away, really due to their own shocking administration.'*

In spite of these criticisms, it should be noted that the MOD has recently introduced the Armed Forces Flexible Working Act (March 2018) which will take time to filter through and instil a greater acceptance of flexible working among military personnel. Not only do new policies need to be introduced, but flexible working practices need to become more accepted, e.g. by 'leading from the top'. This may eventually challenge the culture of long hours and unpredictability within the military.

Many interviewee spouses/partners focused on the financial implications of a lack of support for spousal employment: for example, a spouse told us that her husband's imminent posting could impact upon her ability to complete her Master's degree. Her husband may leave the Army in 5 years' time and if she does not have her career in place this could be detrimental to their future. Another similarly pointed out the implications of lost earnings: she had lost her entire salary and *'it's not just about now'*, it's about her future earnings potential as well. There is *'a huge knock-on effect'* for the rest of her life. The military do not compensate for that at all.

Others focused on the cost to relationships and on wellbeing within the Armed Forces community:

*'It would be great if the military gave priority and consideration to the wife and the family when they post a military person – it [the current practice] puts quite a lot of pressure on families, the divorce rate is very high.'*

*'We're quite resilient people, we can look it [local employment opportunities] up for ourselves, but if it's given to you it makes you feel more cared for. The emotional element is very important. I'm quite a strong person and I often think what happens to people who're not. There are so many people who are isolated – in the military it is seen as a weakness to need support.'*

Survey write-in responses focused on deployment: more choice or control over deployment, more notice for deployment, and longer deployments; spousal/partner support with deployment: more support for spouses/partner when posted at new location, allocation of jobs fairly at overseas locations (regardless of Rank of serving person).

## 8.10. Help with childcare

Of those with care commitments, 80% of survey respondents had children under 16, and a further 10% had children over 16. Many survey respondents and interviewees said that they needed more help with childcare, whether in the UK or overseas. Although the cost of childcare in the UK is very high for all parents, military spouses are generally unable to call upon extended family to provide informal support.

There was a feeling that the military could do more to help spouses/partners by either providing childcare on patch (in the UK or overseas) or subsidising nursery fees. One spouse suggested more childcare settings on patch or agreements with nurseries to make it more affordable. Overseas childcare appeared intermittent and hard to work around, e.g. if they were only open during particular hours. For example, one survey respondent wrote in:

*'I am currently living in Cyprus...The childcare facilities are inadequate, the building is brand new and lovely however the hours it is open are inconvenient, me and my partner work until 5pm every day and the creche/schools close at 2pm. I am not eligible to use the creche during school holidays because my child is of school age. The school/youth centres offer no holiday play-schemes/care. So, it does impact my work.'*

Survey write-in responses also focused on support with childcare: the provision of flexible and affordable childcare, extra childcare benefits for the Armed Forces community, military recognition that childcare is a joint responsibility for parents, and wraparound childcare (so earlier start times, weekend childcare facilities).

## 8.11. Specific support for overseas spouses

Throughout the sections of this report, living overseas has been demonstrated to present particular problems for military spouses/partners, both during the time overseas and also on their return to the UK. One spouse said that if she was working in the UK she would be able to claim benefits – overseas this is not the case. There seems to be no consideration for the fact that the spouse has to give up their paid employment to follow their military partner overseas (she gave up a £25,000 job to go with her husband to Cyprus).

Survey respondents similarly suggested:

*'More information on UK Job market, especially for those returning to the UK after a significant time overseas.'*

In summing up, this section highlights some of the suggestions given for ways forward in supporting spouses/partners to find and maintain employment. Suggestions centred around training; better information provision; better employer engagement; challenging the military culture; help with childcare; and specific support for overseas spouses/partners. Participants also highlighted that there were differences in the kinds of support they would benefit from, highlighting the need for varied provision: although similar proportions of all spouses/partners reported that they would like support with training and/or qualifications, and with the cost of childcare, those with professional qualifications or a higher degree were more likely to say that they would like support with future options planning; those with a degree or higher degree were more likely to say that they would like mentoring or coaching; and those with lower qualifications were more likely to want support in returning to work.

# 9. Conclusions

The research findings described in this report highlight the many barriers and challenges faced by military spouses/partners in finding and maintaining employment. Many of these have been outlined in previous research, particularly in the US, but little research has identified the support required by military spouses/partners in their efforts to find and keep jobs. This research incorporated a review of the previous literature, stakeholder interviews, a spouse/partner survey and telephone interviews, and a survey with employers to try and fill this gap.

Headline employment statistics, comparing civilian and military spouses/partners demonstrate that around 78% of each group are in employment. What these figures do not tell us is whether or not spouses/partners are in work commensurate with their skills and qualifications; whether or not military spouses/partners are satisfied with their work and their opportunities for progression; whether or not they have had to change career because of the military lifestyle; and how they feel their career has progressed, in comparison with their civilian counterparts.

The vast majority of spouses/partners want to work: 84% of our survey sample want to work and a further 9% said they would consider work in the future. The majority of working military spouses/partners are employed in administrative roles, as well as health and education (similar to female civilian spouses/partners). However, military spouses/partners were also likely to choose 'portable' jobs such as nursing, teaching and childminding, some of which include locum opportunities or agency work, allowing spouses/partners to transfer more easily if posted elsewhere. However, the reality of such 'portable' jobs was not always as expected. Self-employment amongst military spouses/partners was also a popular employment choice.

Our findings showed that the majority of military spouses/partners have three major decisions to make when considering their options: childcare, relationship with the serving person and employment (employment often comes last in the decision-making process and involves a high degree of sacrifice and compromise for many spouses/partners).

Few military spouses/partners planned to stay in their current job and a high proportion planned to do some training and/or update their skills; very few planned not to work at all. However, 68% of spouses/partners reported that they were 'very satisfied' or 'satisfied' with their job overall. Many spouses were dissatisfied that their current jobs matched their level of qualification and/or skills: they were most dissatisfied with the opportunities to progress in their job and with their pay, in terms of it being commensurate with their skills and experience, demonstrating a high degree of occupational downgrading and under-employment among military spouses/partners.

The main identified barriers and challenges to military spousal employment centre around Childcare; Location – postings and deployment; Ability to keep up with training and professional development; Lack of (re)training opportunities; Having to change career path; and MOD reluctance to support military spouses and general military culture. Commonwealth spouses, those with young children and spouses with higher qualifications faced more barriers in getting a job or maintaining a career. A very high proportion (70%) of spouses/partners had changed career path and 63% said that this was because of the military lifestyle. Spouses/partners of lower ranks were more likely to report that they had to change career because of the military lifestyle. As spouses/partners of lower ranks are generally also those with lower qualifications, this suggests that higher-qualified spouses/partners are more likely to choose to stay in the UK rather than accompanying the serving person overseas, perhaps as a result of the higher cost to their lifetime earnings and the negative impact on their career if they left their current job. Employers are also perhaps more willing to provide support to retain more highly-qualified women as valued employees.

The military continues to hold traditional views of spouses/partners as dependents and prioritises the careers of its personnel; a lack of planning and organisation, alongside an assumption that military spouses are always available for childcare responsibilities, act as severe barriers to spousal employment.

Negative perceptions and practices by employers served as an additional and crucial barrier to military spouse/partner employment. Many spouses/partners recorded examples of explicit employer discrimination in applying for jobs, and many actively avoided disclosing their military connections in order to secure employment. However, some commented that local employers are aware of these connections if spouses/partners include their addresses and may not invite military spouses/partners for interview if they have negative perceptions. Employers themselves had similar perceptions about the challenges of hiring spouses/partners, including a lack of support with childcare, a likelihood that the spouse/partner will move, and 'patchwork CVs'. Some employers were more positive about hiring military spouses/partners, recognising their resilience and other transferable skills.

The majority of spouses/partners (54%) were unaware of any support programmes for spousal employment; this varied by rank, with spouses/partners of lower ranking serving personnel less likely to be aware. Only 10% of spouses/partners had attended a spousal support programme (less than a third of those who were aware of them); attendance

also varied by rank, with 17% of Senior Commissioned Officer spouses/partners having attended a programme, compared with only 7% of the spouses/partners of Junior NCOs and ORs. Some who attended felt that they were pitched too low, others that they were not held at the right time or that the length of the programme precluded them from attending; satisfaction was higher with softer outcomes of support (e.g. writing a CV, increasing confidence, writing job applications, exploring options for work and gaining interview skills) whereas satisfaction was lower with outcomes related to finding a job or training course.

The final section of the report focused on suggestions for ways forward in supporting spouses/partners to find and maintain employment. Suggestions centred around training; better information provision; better employer engagement; challenging the military culture; help with childcare; and specific support for overseas spouses. Participants varied in the kinds of support they would benefit from, highlighting the need for varied provision, e.g. those with lower qualifications were more likely than other spouses/partners to want support in returning to work, whereas those with higher qualifications or professional qualifications wanted support in planning their futures and/or mentoring or coaching.



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# Appendix 1: Detailed methodology

## The literature review methodology

The review used an established methodology that provided a robust framework within which to conduct a transparent and comprehensive review. A wide range of evidence sources via the University of Warwick Library, as well as a range of other sources not widely available were searched. To focus the review the following review question was set:

- What UK and international evidence is there on the employment experiences of military spouses/partners?

In addition, the review sought to ascertain what support is currently available for all three Services in the UK. The evidence identified helped to inform other stages of the research, but also provided evidence, where available, to understand what support and conditions (such as targeted support, policy, training, etc.) military spouses/partners need to improve their employment outcomes. This evidence provided a foundation for recommendations to inform policy, guidance and support for military spouses. A selected review of evidence on civilian spousal/partner employment was included to determine whether the experiences of military spouses/partners is comparable or different.

The review included studies with an explicit and documented evidence base, grey literature, and evidence that provided useful insights or furthered our understanding, but with a note of caution added. This ensured that the resulting review was sufficiently robust to inform recommendations. The review methodology comprised five phases:

- Setting review parameters: refining review question, defining keywords and developing search strategy;
- Searching: systematic identification of potentially relevant evidence using a keyword strategy;
- Screening: application of pre-determined criteria to report titles, abstracts and full texts derived from the review question and any sub-questions;
- Data extraction: in-depth examination, quality assessment and extraction of evidence;
- Synthesis and reporting: development of a framework for analysis and identification of key themes; presentation of review findings.

A search strategy was developed using keywords and phrases, including: spouse, partner, wife, husband; military, armed forces, services; airforce, RAF, Navy, Royal marine, army; officer, ranks; and employment, work, job, career, decision making. This strategy was applied to five databases (Emerald, PsycINFO/PsycARTICLE, Sage, Science Direct, Wiley,) and two platforms EBSCO, Proquest ABI), which enabled access to a further 12 databases. Evidence from previous reviews in the military field were also searched. A selected number of journals were specifically search, plus 24 UK websites and seven international websites. Due to low return rates in the database searches, all returned evidence was screened online with potentially relevant evidence downloaded and managed in a bibliographic software programme. Table 3 provides an overview of search results and evidence excluded from the review. In total, 81 texts were reviewed in full of which 42 were included in the study.

**Table 3: Overview of literature review search results**

<b>Search results screened by title and abstract</b>	<b>3263</b>
Evidence from database searches	50
Evidence from previous reviews	15
Evidence from other sources screened (websites, specific journals)	27
Duplicates deleted from database	11
Search results screened by full text	81
<b>Exclusions</b>	
Uses pre-2000 data in the analysis	8
Not based on empirical research or focused on single person opinion	7
Focuses on impact of military lifestyle on spouse/partner but not on their employment status	6
Does not consider spousal/partner employment	14
Not on the military	4
Total excluded	39
Unobtainable	0
<b>Inclusions</b>	<b>42</b>

Data available in the public domain on military spouses/partners' rates of employment and economic inactivity (UK and overseas) was assessed to determine employment outcomes and trends, and comparisons made with similar civilian cohorts, where possible. The major data source used was the Office for National Statistics' Annual Population Survey (Spouses of UK Armed Forces residing in Great Britain). These sources provide figures on employment outcomes (employed, unemployed, economically inactive) for the Armed Forces community as a whole, and by sex, as well as data comparing these employment outcomes to that of the general population. The Tri-Service Families Continuous Attitudes Surveys (FAMCAS) was also examined for relevant data and trends over time.

The data provided a basis from which to understand and interpret the findings of the literature review and the extent of any differences between male and female military spouses, as well as between military spouses and similar civilian spouses. However, there were some difficulties in making direct comparisons between the employment outcomes of spouses from the military and civilian cohorts: numbers are small (for military spouses) and additional comparative information which may have a bearing on spousal employment is not available (e.g., number of (re)locations, number and ages of children, qualification levels, etc.). The survey and the qualitative interviews provide more detailed information on the impact of these factors on spousal employment.

## The online survey methodology

An online survey was undertaken to understand more about military spouses' and partners' experiences, expectations, barriers and enablers to employment, with the aim of finding out what can be done to support military spouses in employment. This approach enabled those cohorts, who may be considered difficult to reach (such as those outside of the labour market or living overseas), to be participate in the research. The Qualtrics platforms was used to create the online survey and manage the survey data. The survey comprised 33 questions and included a mixture of closed and open questions allowing respondents to explain their experiences in more detail. An initial question was used to determine eligibility to complete the survey to ensure the survey was targeted at the right people. Questions focused on: employment status; reasons for working or not; work satisfaction; career decisions and pathways; impact of being a member of the armed forces community, support with and challenges to finding, gaining and maintaining work; plus, whether and what support was needed or useful. Demographic information was also collected. The survey was made available for five weeks in March and April 2018.

Various methods were used to promote the survey and dissemination the link, including posting on various websites, social media, digital newsletters, word of mouth and a radio interview. By using online and digital advertising geographically dispersed participants were reached. This reduced oversampling in one locale or area. The online survey link directed potential participants to a University of Warwick dedicated webpage, which explained the purpose of the survey and that is had been commissioned by AFF. This page also included the online consent form and link to the survey.

There were 1,515 responses, but 24 responses were from those who were not a spouse or partner of a UK serving person so were excluded from the analysis.

The survey was hosted on a secure server meeting EU regulations regarding data protection and preservation of the confidentiality of personal data. The IER downloaded data from this server to undertake statistical analyses. Data sets were stored securely on password-protected computers to comply with University of Warwick regulations on information security. Personal identifiers were separated from the data used for statistical analysis, which only contained a sequence number for the response. These anonymised data sets were preserved securely in encrypted form in order to permit re-analysis of the data at a future date.

## The spouse/partner interview methodology

Participants were asked to provide biographical data, through completion of a demographic questionnaire (emailed to participants prior to the interview), to define the sample and aid data analysis (e.g. age, parental status, employment history, highest level of qualification and ethnicity). The research questions were informed by the output of the literature review and stakeholder interviews: participants were asked about their experiences of seeking employment and being employed and the challenges and barriers they face(d), as well as the factors that have helped in finding employment. The interviews also explored longer-term factors which impact upon spouses/partners' ability to maintain employment. For those participants who are (or have been) outside the labour market, questions explored reasons driving this to better understand the factors influencing military spouses' decision-making and the constraints they experience. Future employment expectations/ plans (if any) were also explored and the support and strategies needed to help them find employment. Data was analysed using thematic analysis.

# Appendix 2: Definition of Rank by Service

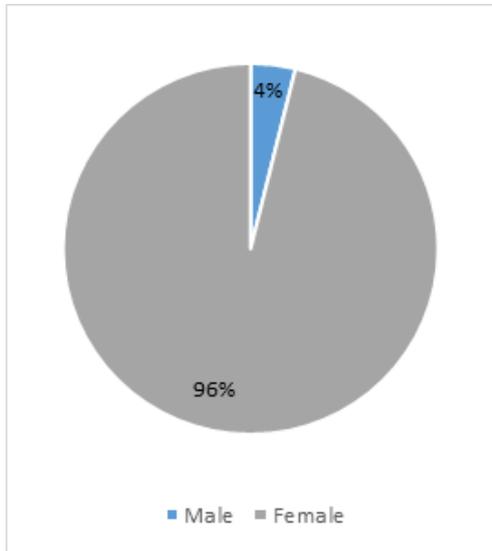
The following was provided by AFF and was used within the survey.

	Royal Navy	Royal Marines	Army	Royal Air Force
<b>Senior Commissioned Officer</b>	Admiral	General	General	Air Chief Marshal
	Vice Admiral	Lieutenant General	Lieutenant General	Air Marshal
	Rear Admiral	Major General	Major General	Air Vice-Marshal
	Commodore	Brigadier	Brigadier	Air Commodore
<b>Commissioned Officers</b>	Captain	Colonel	Colonel	Group Captain
	Commander	Lt Colonel	Lt Colonel	Wing Commander
	Lt Commander	Major	Major	Squadron Leader
	Lieutenant	Captain	Captain	Flight Lieutenant
	Sub Lieutenant	Lieutenant	Lieutenant	Flying Officer
	Midshipman	Second Lieutenant	Second Lieutenant	Pilot Officer
<b>Warrant Officers and Senior Non-Commissioned officers</b>	Warrant Officer 1	Warrant Officer C1	Warrant Officer C1	Warrant Officer
	Warrant Officer 2	Warrant Officer C2	Warrant Officer C2	
	Chief Petty Officer	Colour Sergeant	Staff Sergeant	Flight Sergeant
	Petty Officer	Sergeant	Sergeant	Sergeant
<b>Junior Non- Commissioned Officers and Other Ranks</b>	Leading Hand	Corporal	Corporal	Corporal
		Lance Corporal	Lance Corporal	Senior Aircraftman
	Able Rate	Marine	Private	Aircraftman

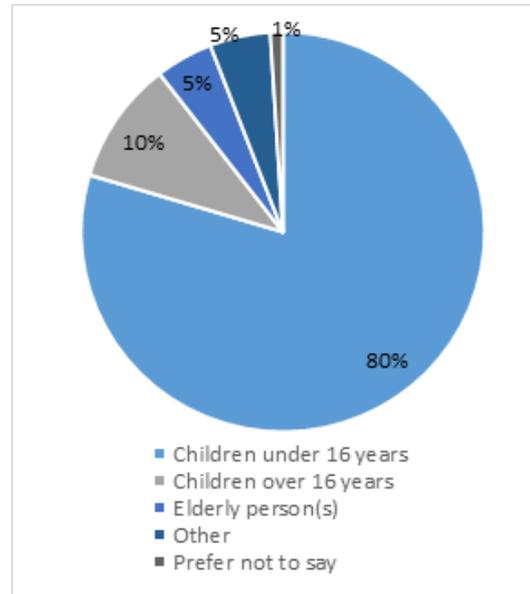
# Appendix 3: Demographic profile of spouses and partners surveyed

The following provides a detailed overview of the spouses and partners who completed the survey.

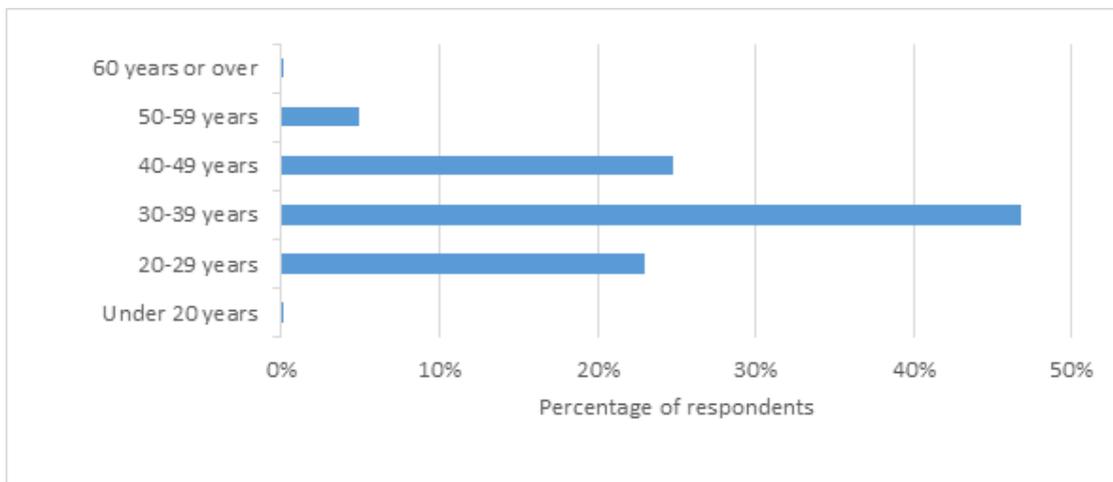
**Figure 26: Gender profile of spouses and partners**



**Figure 27: Caring commitments of spouses and partners**

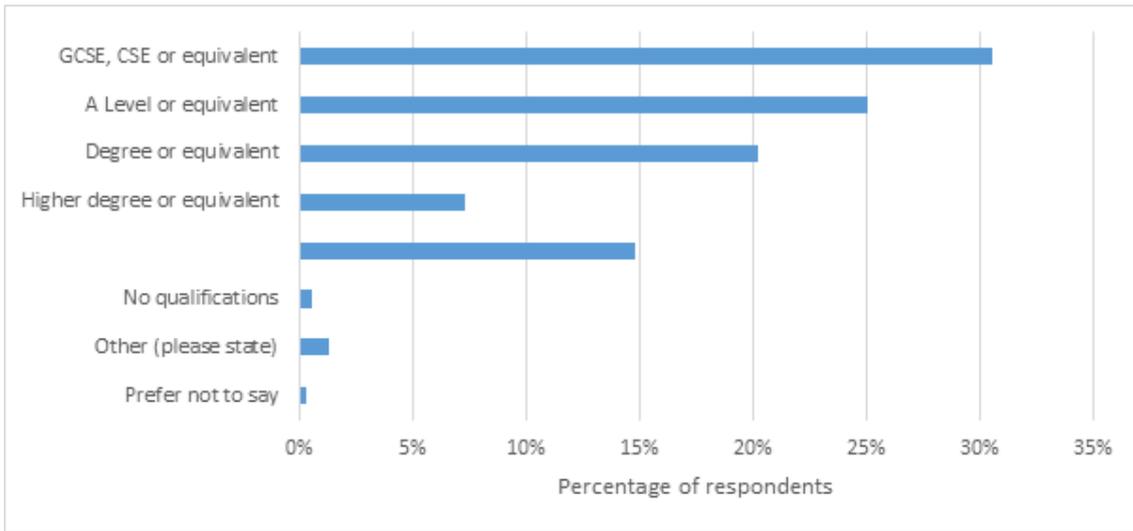


**Figure 28: Age profile of spouses and partners**



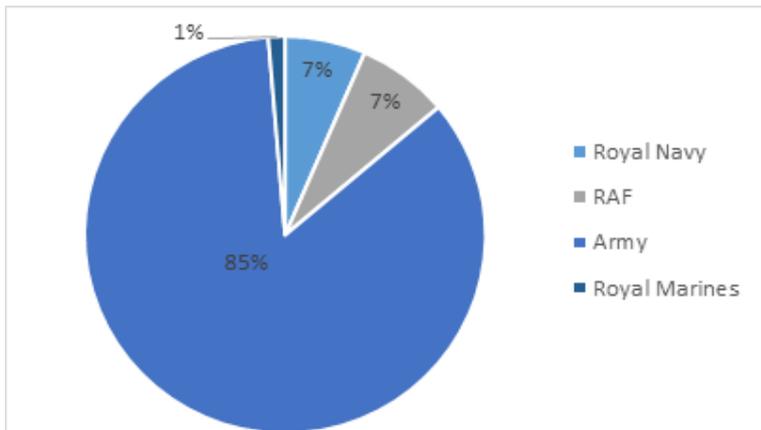
Based on 1,459 responses.

**Figure 29: Types of qualifications achieved by spouses and partners**



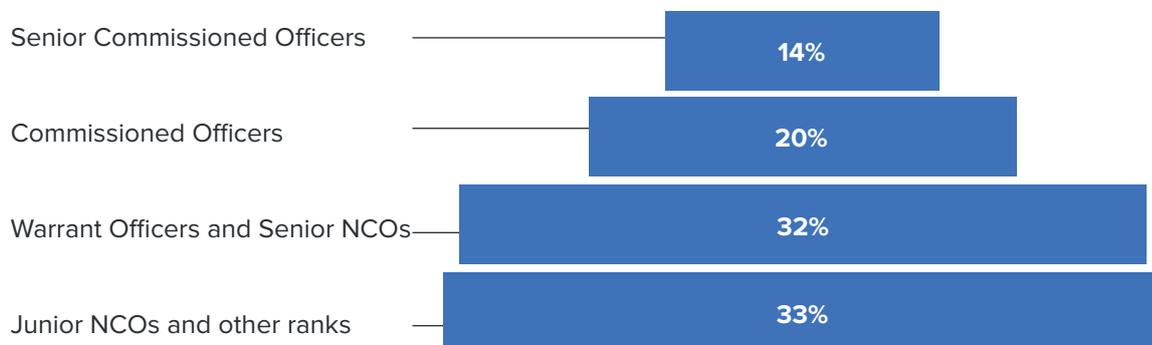
Based on 2,926 responses.

**Figure 30: Military person's Service**



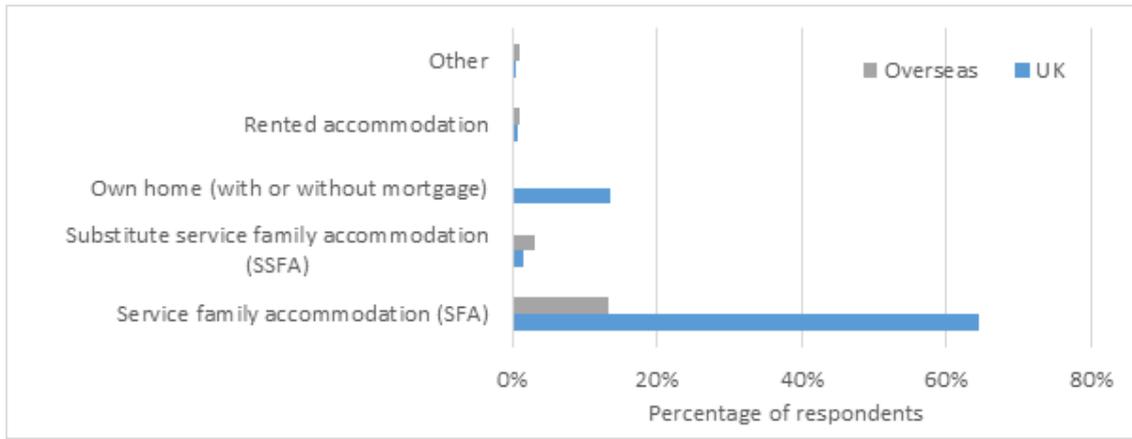
Based on 1,491 responses.

**Figure 31: Rank of Service person**



Based on 1,450 responses.

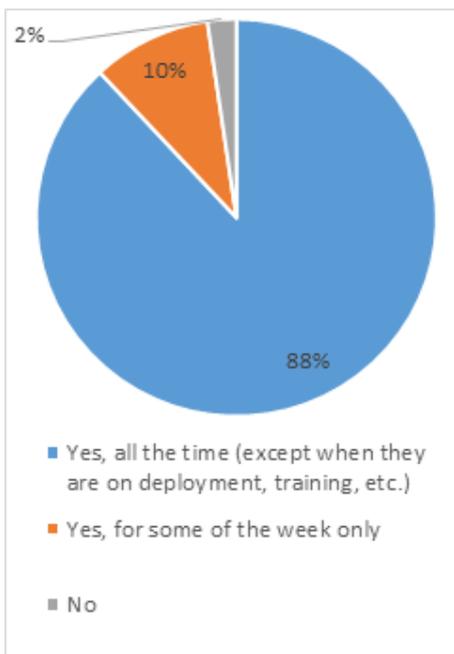
**Figure 32: Location and living accommodation of spouses and partners**



Based on 1,292 responses.

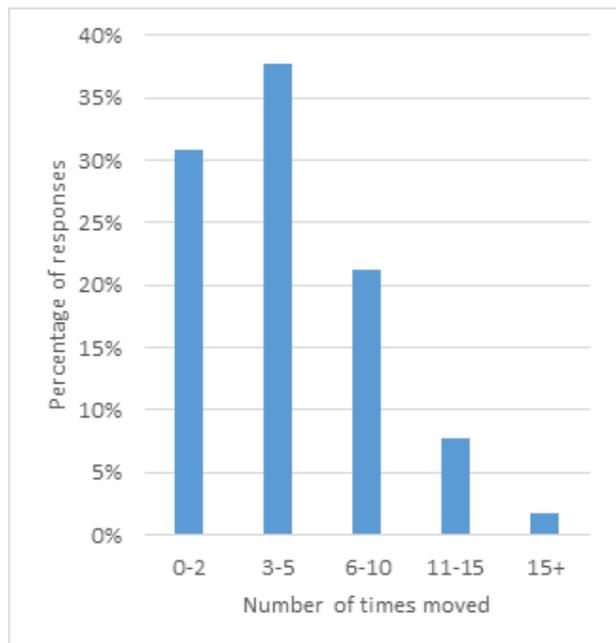
Respondents reported living in: Africa; Argentina; Belgium; Brunei; Canada; China; Cyprus; Czech Republic; England; Falkland Islands; France; Germany; Gibraltar; Italy; Jordan; Kenya; Kuwait; Nepal; Netherlands; Northern Ireland; Norway; Oman; Poland; St Vincent; Scotland; South Africa; South Korea; Turkey; UAE; and USA.

**Figure 33: Living arrangements of spouse or partner**



Based on 1,292 responses.

**Figure 34: Number of times military spouse or partner has moved**



Based on 1,292 responses.



Army Families Federation is a charitable incorporated organisation registered in England and Wales with registered charity number 1176393 and a charity registered in Scotland with registered charity number SC048282 having its principal office at IDL 414, Floor 1, Zone 6, Ramillies Building, Marlborough Lines, Monxton Road, Andover SP11 8HJ